

Criminal Justice in the Perception of the Albanian Public: An Analysis of Attitudes toward Punishment, Rehabilitation, and Social Security

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of a criminal justice system depends not only on the existence of legal rules and institutional structures, but also on the way citizens understand and evaluate punishment, security measures, and the treatment of persons who have committed criminal offences. Public perception represents an important dimension of criminal justice because it influences the legitimacy of institutions and the level of social acceptance of judicial decisions. This study examines the attitudes of Albanian citizens regarding criminal sanctions, security measures, the effectiveness of punishment, and the role of rehabilitation within the criminal justice system.

The research was conducted through a quantitative empirical approach based on a structured questionnaire completed by 270 Albanian citizens. The questionnaire explored several aspects related to criminal justice perceptions, including attitudes toward the use of security chains, the need for harsher punishments, confidence in the preventive effect of criminal sanctions, and support for rehabilitation programmes and alternatives to imprisonment.

The results indicate that Albanian citizens do not generally support the routine use of security chains, with 91.1% of respondents considering this practice inappropriate unless justified by specific circumstances. At the same time, the findings show a relatively low level of confidence in the ability of criminal punishment alone to prevent crime, while a considerable number of participants expressed support for rehabilitation programmes and alternative sanctions. The small group supporting the use of security chains was mainly composed of respondents with higher education and professional connections to the justice system, suggesting differences between institutional perspectives and general social perceptions.

The findings indicate that public opinion in Albania is moving toward a more balanced understanding of criminal justice, where public security is considered important but should be combined with proportionality, human dignity, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. The study contributes to the discussion on criminal policy development in Albania by highlighting the relationship between citizens' perceptions, human rights standards, and contemporary approaches to sentence execution.

Keywords: criminal justice; public perception; Albania; punishment; rehabilitation; sentence execution; security measures; human rights.

I. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of a criminal justice system cannot be evaluated only through the existence of legislation and responsible institutions. It is also influenced by the way society perceives criminal sanctions, security measures, and the general response of the state toward crime. Public attitudes toward criminal justice are important because they affect the legitimacy of institutions, citizens' confidence in judicial decisions, and the willingness of society to accept criminal policies (Tyler, 2006).

Historically, punishment has mainly been understood as a mechanism for imposing

consequences on individuals who violate criminal law and as an expression of society's condemnation of criminal behaviour. However, contemporary theories of criminal justice have expanded this perspective by emphasizing that punishment should also serve preventive, rehabilitative, and reintegrative purposes. Modern sentencing approaches recognize that an effective criminal justice system should not focus only on imposing penalties but also on reducing future criminal behaviour and supporting the return of offenders to society (Ashworth, 2021; McNeill, 2019).

Within this context, the execution of criminal judgments represents one of the most important

stages of the criminal justice process because it transforms a judicial decision into a practical reality. The legitimacy of criminal justice does not depend only on the decision-making process of courts, but also on the way sentences are implemented. According to European prison law principles, the execution of criminal sanctions must maintain a balance between protecting society and respecting the fundamental rights and dignity of people deprived of liberty (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009).

One of the continuing debates in criminal policy concerns the relationship between punishment and rehabilitation. Societies often demand stronger responses toward criminal offences, especially in cases involving serious crimes, because citizens expect the state to provide effective protection. However, research in criminology and penology indicates that harsher punishments alone do not necessarily lead to long-term reductions in crime. Sustainable crime prevention requires a broader approach that includes rehabilitation programmes, education, social support, and reintegration opportunities (Bottoms et al., 2019; McNeill, 2019).

Public opinion regarding criminal justice is therefore not always limited to demands for stronger punishment. Previous research has shown that citizens' attitudes toward crime and punishment are influenced by multiple factors, including personal experiences, trust in institutions, knowledge of the justice system, and perceptions of social security (Garland, 2001; Tyler, 2006). Understanding these attitudes is particularly important in countries undergoing legal and institutional reforms, where differences may exist between formal legal standards and public expectations.

In Albania, significant reforms have been introduced in recent years to modernize the criminal justice system and align it with European standards. The adoption of Law No. 79/2020 "On the Execution of Criminal Judgments" and Law No. 81/2020 "On the Rights and Treatment of Prisoners and Pre-Trial Detainees" represented important steps toward strengthening legal guarantees, improving detention conditions, and promoting a more rights-based approach to sentence execution (Republic of Albania, 2020a; Republic of Albania, 2020b).

Despite these developments, several challenges remain in practice, including conditions within correctional institutions, institutional coordination, rehabilitation capacity, and the implementation of alternative sanctions. Reports from European monitoring mechanisms have highlighted that effective sentence execution requires not only appropriate legal frameworks but also sufficient

institutional capacity and consistent application of standards (Council of Europe CPT, 2022).

In this regard, analyzing public perceptions becomes essential. Citizens' views can provide valuable information regarding how criminal policies are understood by society and whether there is a balance between the demand for security and the protection of fundamental rights. The perception of measures such as security restraints, imprisonment, and rehabilitation programmes reflects broader social attitudes toward the purpose of criminal justice.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the attitudes of Albanian citizens toward criminal sanctions, security measures, and the execution of criminal judgments. The study focuses particularly on perceptions regarding the use of security chains, the effectiveness of criminal punishment, support for rehabilitation programs, and the acceptance of alternative approaches to imprisonment. Through an empirical survey, the research seeks to determine whether Albanian public opinion is mainly oriented toward a punitive model or toward a more balanced model combining public security, proportionality, and social reintegration.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a quantitative empirical research design aimed at examining the perceptions and attitudes of Albanian citizens regarding criminal punishment, the execution of criminal judgments, security measures, and the role of rehabilitation within the criminal justice system. The methodological approach was selected because public perceptions represent an important component in understanding the social legitimacy of criminal policies and the extent to which citizens accept or question existing practices within the justice system.

Unlike purely doctrinal legal studies, which primarily analyze legislation, judicial decisions, and institutional frameworks, this research focuses on the social dimension of criminal justice by exploring how citizens evaluate the purposes of punishment, the effectiveness of criminal sanctions, and the balance between public security and individual rights. The study seeks to identify whether public attitudes in Albania are primarily oriented toward a punitive approach or whether they reflect acceptance of modern criminal justice principles based on proportionality, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

The target population consisted of Albanian citizens aged 18 years and above. Data were collected from a total sample of 270 respondents who participated voluntarily in the research. A non-probability sampling method was applied, with the aim of including participants from different

demographic categories, including various age groups, educational levels, and professional backgrounds. The sample included both individuals without professional involvement in the justice sector and respondents with professional connections to criminal justice institutions. The inclusion of participants with legal or institutional experience was considered relevant because their professional background may influence their perception of security measures, sentence execution, and criminal policy implementation.

Although the sample does not represent the entire Albanian population statistically, it provides valuable empirical information regarding current social attitudes toward important issues of criminal justice. The study was designed primarily to identify general tendencies and differences in perceptions rather than to produce national prevalence estimates.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed specifically for the objectives of this research. The questionnaire included questions related to several dimensions of criminal justice perception: attitudes toward the use of security chains and physical restraint measures; opinions regarding the severity of criminal sanctions; perceptions of whether punishment effectively prevents crime; levels of trust in the criminal justice system; attitudes toward rehabilitation programs; acceptance of alternatives to imprisonment; perceptions regarding the reintegration of convicted persons into society.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and statements measured through a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to express different levels of agreement or disagreement. Socio-demographic questions were also included in order to examine whether attitudes varied according to gender, age, educational level, and professional relationship with the justice system.

The data collection process was conducted in accordance with basic principles of social research ethics. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the academic nature of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could refuse participation or withdraw their responses. To ensure confidentiality, no personally identifiable information was collected. The responses were analyzed only in aggregated form, and the collected data were used exclusively for academic research purposes. The study respected principles of anonymity, privacy protection, and informed participation.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages

were calculated to identify the main patterns in respondents' opinions and attitudes. The analysis focused on identifying relationships between public perceptions and key aspects of criminal justice, particularly the relationship between demands for stronger security measures and acceptance of rehabilitation-oriented approaches. Additional comparative analysis was conducted regarding respondents who supported the routine use of security chains. Their educational background and professional connection with the justice system were examined in order to understand whether professional experience influenced attitudes toward restrictive security measures. The interpretation of findings was conducted in relation to contemporary theories of punishment and international standards on the treatment of persons deprived of liberty. In particular, the analysis considered the principles of proportionality, human dignity, rehabilitation, and social reintegration emphasized in European criminal justice approaches (Ashworth, 2021; Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the use of non-probability sampling means that the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Albanian population with complete statistical certainty. Second, attitudes toward criminal justice may be influenced by social experiences, media coverage of crime, and individual perceptions of security. Finally, because the study is based on self-reported opinions, respondents' answers may reflect personal values or social expectations rather than direct experience with the criminal justice system. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful empirical evidence regarding public perceptions of criminal punishment and sentence execution in Albania. It contributes to the broader discussion on criminal justice reform by highlighting the relationship between citizens' expectations, institutional practices, and the development of human rights-based approaches to punishment.

III. RESULTS

A total of 270 Albanian citizens participated in this study. The respondents were included in the analysis in order to evaluate their perceptions regarding the execution of criminal judgments, the use of security measures, attitudes toward criminal sanctions, and the role of rehabilitation within the criminal justice system.

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants according to their main demographic characteristics.

Variable	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	147	54.4%
	Male	123	45.6%
Age	18–25 years	77	28.5%
	26–40 years	114	42.2%
	41–60 years	62	23.0%
	Above 60 years	17	6.3%
Education	Secondary education	86	31.9%
	Bachelor/Master degree	160	59.3%
	Postgraduate studies	24	8.8%
Connection with the justice system	Yes	85	31.5%
	No	185	68.5%

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N=270)

The data show that the sample included participants with different social and educational backgrounds. The largest group belonged to the active age category of 26–40 years, while almost two-thirds of respondents had completed university-level education. An important aspect for interpreting the results is the participation of respondents with professional connections to the justice system, as

this group may have a more technical understanding of issues related to criminal judgment, execution and security measures.

One of the main objectives of the study was to analyse citizens' attitudes toward the use of security chains during the transportation or transfer of convicted persons.

Question	Response	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Do you consider the routine use of security chains acceptable in the Albanian criminal justice system?	Yes	24	8.9%
	No	246	91.1%

Table 2. Citizens' attitudes toward the routine use of security chains (N=270)

The results indicate a very high level of disagreement among citizens regarding the routine use of security chains. More than 91% of respondents did not consider this practice appropriate within the Albanian criminal justice system. This finding suggests that, despite concerns about public safety, citizens also associate criminal

justice with respect for human dignity and proportionality of restrictive measures.

To better understand the characteristics of the small group that supported the use of security chains, additional analysis was conducted according to educational level and professional connection with the justice system.

Characteristic	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
University or postgraduate education	21	87.5%
Member of the justice system	18	75.0%
Citizens without a professional connection to justice	6	25.0%

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents supporting the use of security chains (n=24)

The analysis of respondents who supported the use of security chains shows that this position was mainly associated with individuals with higher education and professional experience in the legal field. Approximately three-quarters of this group were connected with the justice system. This may

be explained by the fact that legal professionals often evaluate such measures from the perspective of risk management, institutional security, and procedural requirements rather than only from a social or humanitarian perspective.

Attitude	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Criminal punishments should be more severe	104	38.5%
Increasing punishment severity is not the main solution	121	44.8%
No clear opinion	45	16.7%

Table 4. Attitudes toward increasing the severity of criminal punishments

The results indicate that Albanian citizens do not have a completely unified position regarding the need for harsher criminal sanctions. Although a considerable part of respondents support stronger punishment, the largest group believes that increasing the severity of sentences alone is not

enough to prevent crime. This suggests a gradual movement toward a more complex understanding of criminal justice, where punishment is only one element among several factors influencing crime prevention.

Response	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, effectively	58	21.5%
Partially	69	25.6%
No, they are not effective	143	52.9%

Table 5. Do citizens believe that criminal punishments prevent crime?

One of the most important findings of the study is the relatively low level of public confidence in the preventive effect of criminal punishments. More than half of respondents believe that the current punishment system does not sufficiently reduce

criminal behaviour. This result indicates that citizens do not perceive imprisonment and punishment alone as the only mechanisms capable of guaranteeing public security.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Rehabilitation programs help reduce repeated criminal behaviour	194 (71.9%)	39 (14.4%)	37 (13.7%)
Alternatives to imprisonment should be used more frequently	169 (62.6%)	54 (20.0%)	47 (17.4%)
Rehabilitated offenders should have opportunities for social reintegration	179 (66.3%)	48 (17.8%)	43 (15.9%)

Table 6. Support for rehabilitation programs and alternatives to imprisonment

The findings demonstrate significant public support for rehabilitation-oriented approaches. Most respondents recognize that reducing crime cannot be achieved only through punishment but also requires programs that support behavioural change and social reintegration. This result corresponds with contemporary European approaches, where sentence execution is understood as a process that combines public security objectives with respect for human rights and the reintegration of offenders into society.

The results indicate that Albanian public opinion is relatively balanced toward criminal justice. Citizens express the need for public security and accountability of individuals who commit criminal offences; however, at the same time, they do not support measures that are perceived as affecting human dignity and basic rights. The strong opposition toward the routine use of security chains, together with the considerable support for rehabilitation programs, suggests a gradual shift from a purely punitive perspective toward a more balanced model based on proportionality, social reintegration, and respect for fundamental human values.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into how Albanian citizens perceive criminal punishment, the execution of criminal

judgments, security measures, and rehabilitation within the criminal justice system. The results indicate that public attitudes are not characterized by a simple demand for harsher punishment; rather, respondents appear to support a more balanced model in which public security is combined with proportionality, human dignity, and opportunities for rehabilitation.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the strong opposition toward the routine use of security chains. More than 91% of respondents rejected the idea that security chains should be applied as a general practice in the Albanian criminal justice system. This result is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that concerns about crime and public safety do not automatically translate into acceptance of restrictive measures that may affect human dignity.

This finding is consistent with the principles developed within European human rights law, according to which restrictions imposed on persons deprived of liberty must be based on necessity, proportionality, and an individual assessment of risk. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly emphasized that imprisonment itself does not justify unlimited restrictions on fundamental rights. In *Kudła v. Poland*, the Court highlighted the obligation of states to ensure conditions compatible with human dignity, while in *Vinter and Others v. United Kingdom*, it reinforced

the importance of maintaining respect for human values even in cases involving serious criminal offences (European Court of Human Rights, 2000, 2013).

The high level of opposition toward routine security restraints may therefore reflect an increasing acceptance of European standards regarding the treatment of convicted people. Although citizens expect the state to maintain security during the execution of sentences, they appear to differentiate between legitimate security requirements and practices that may be perceived as excessive or unnecessary. Similar concerns have been raised by European monitoring institutions, which emphasize that security measures within penitentiary systems should always respect the principles of necessity and proportionality (Council of Europe CPT, 2022).

An interesting aspect of the findings concerns the small group of respondents who supported the routine use of security chains. Although this group represented only 8.9% of the total sample, most of these respondents had higher education backgrounds and professional connections with the justice system. This difference suggests that professional experience may influence perceptions of security measures.

Individuals working within the criminal justice system may evaluate restrictive measures from an operational perspective, considering issues such as institutional safety, escape risks, and procedural requirements. In contrast, citizens without professional involvement in justice institutions may approach the same issue primarily through the perspective of human rights and dignity. This distinction reflects the broader debate regarding the different ways in which criminal justice professionals and the public understand security and punishment.

The findings also contribute to the discussion on penal populism, a concept developed in criminological literature to describe situations where criminal policies become strongly influenced by public fears, demands for greater control, and expectations for harsher punishment (Garland, 2001). Previous research has shown that societies experiencing concerns about crime often support stronger punitive responses, especially after serious criminal events.

However, the present study indicates that the Albanian public does not fully follow a punitive model. Although a considerable number of respondents supported stronger punishments, the largest proportion believed that increasing severity alone is not sufficient to prevent crime. This suggests that public attitudes in Albania are more complex than a simple demand for harsher sanctions. Citizens appear to recognize that

criminal justice effectiveness depends not only on punishment but also on prevention, institutional performance, and rehabilitation.

This result is consistent with contemporary sentencing theories, which argue that punishment cannot be understood only as a mechanism of retaliation. According to Ashworth (2021), modern sentencing systems must balance several objectives, including accountability, deterrence, proportionality, and fairness. Excessive reliance on punishment severity may fail to achieve long-term crime reduction if it is not accompanied by broader social and rehabilitative interventions.

Another important finding of this research is the relatively low level of confidence among respondents regarding the effectiveness of criminal punishment in preventing crime. More than half of participants stated that existing criminal sanctions are not sufficiently effective in reducing criminal behaviour. This perception corresponds with criminological research demonstrating that certainty of punishment and effective implementation often have greater preventive value than punishment severity alone.

McNeill (2019) argues that criminal justice systems should move beyond the idea that punishment alone can transform behaviour. Long-term reduction of offending requires interventions addressing the individual, social environment, education, employment opportunities, and support mechanisms after release. Therefore, the limited public confidence identified in this study may reflect broader concerns regarding the practical effectiveness of the criminal justice system rather than rejection of punishment as such.

The strong support for rehabilitation programs represents another significant finding. More than 70% of respondents agreed that rehabilitation programs contribute to reducing repeated criminal behaviour, while a majority supported alternatives to imprisonment and opportunities for social reintegration. These results demonstrate that Albanian citizens recognize the importance of addressing the causes of criminal behaviour rather than focusing exclusively on isolation.

This finding corresponds with international research on alternatives to imprisonment. Bottoms, Rex, and Robinson (2019) emphasize that properly designed alternatives to incarceration can contribute to reducing prison populations, improving rehabilitation outcomes, and supporting safer communities when they are implemented with appropriate supervision and resources. Similarly, European prison policies increasingly consider rehabilitation and reintegration as essential objectives of sentence execution rather than secondary considerations (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009).

The results of this study also show similarities with European approaches to sentence execution. In several European countries, imprisonment is increasingly understood as a process aimed at preparing individuals for responsible participation in society. The principle of resocialization, particularly developed within the German penitentiary model, reflects the idea that the ultimate purpose of punishment should include the possibility of personal development and reintegration. Comparable approaches can also be identified in countries such as Italy and France, where judicial supervision and alternative sanctions have an important role in sentence execution (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009).

From the Albanian perspective, the findings highlight the relationship between legal reform and social expectations. Albania has undertaken significant reforms aimed at aligning criminal justice legislation with European standards, particularly through Law No. 79/2020 on the Execution of Criminal Judgments and Law No. 81/2020 on the Rights and Treatment of Prisoners and Pre-Trial Detainees. However, legal reform alone cannot guarantee effective criminal justice outcomes. Institutional capacity, implementation practices, rehabilitation infrastructure, and public trust remain essential elements for achieving meaningful change.

The findings of the Council of Europe CPT report regarding Albania underline that improvements in detention conditions and the treatment of persons deprived of liberty require continuous institutional efforts, not only legislative changes (Council of Europe CPT, 2022). The results of this study support this perspective by showing that citizens evaluate criminal justice not only according to the severity of sanctions but also according to whether the system operates fairly and respects fundamental rights.

Overall, this research demonstrates that Albanian public opinion does not support an exclusively punitive approach to criminal justice. Citizens demand effective responses to crime and recognize the need for accountability; however, they also support proportionality, rehabilitation, and reintegration. This balance suggests that public attitudes are gradually moving toward a more modern understanding of criminal justice, where security and human rights are not viewed as competing objectives but as complementary components of an effective justice system.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions of Albanian citizens regarding the execution of criminal judgments, the use of security measures, the effectiveness of criminal punishment, and the role

of rehabilitation within the criminal justice system. The findings demonstrate that public attitudes toward criminal justice in Albania are characterized by a relatively balanced perspective, combining the demand for public security with the expectation that criminal measures should respect proportionality, human dignity, and fundamental rights.

One of the main conclusions of the study is the strong rejection of the routine use of security chains. More than 91% of respondents expressed disagreement with the general application of such measures, indicating that citizens do not consider restrictive security practices acceptable when they are not justified by specific circumstances. This finding suggests that Albanian society increasingly recognizes the importance of humane treatment within the criminal justice system and supports the principle that security measures must be necessary, individualized, and proportionate.

Although a small group of respondents supported the use of security chains, the analysis showed that this position was mainly associated with individuals who had higher education levels and professional connections with the justice system. This difference highlights the influence of professional experience on perceptions of criminal enforcement. While justice professionals may evaluate security measures primarily from the perspective of institutional safety and risk management, the public appears to place stronger emphasis on dignity, fairness, and human rights considerations.

Another important conclusion concerns citizens' attitudes toward punishment severity. The results indicate that Albanian citizens do not view harsher criminal sanctions as the only or most effective solution for controlling crime. Although some respondents supported stronger punishments, the majority recognized that crime prevention requires broader strategies beyond increasing sentence severity. This perspective is consistent with contemporary criminal justice theories, which emphasize that punishment must serve multiple objectives, including prevention, rehabilitation, and social reintegration (Ashworth, 2021).

The study also identified a relatively low level of confidence in the preventive effectiveness of criminal sanctions. More than half of respondents considered that existing punishments are not sufficiently effective in reducing criminal behaviour. This finding suggests that citizens may perceive limitations not only in the severity of sanctions but also in the practical implementation of criminal policies. Effective criminal justice requires not only appropriate legal provisions but also institutional capacity, consistent enforcement, and programs addressing the causes of offending.

A significant finding of the research is the strong public support for rehabilitation-oriented approaches. The majority of participants agreed that rehabilitation programs can contribute to reducing repeated criminal behaviour and support greater use of alternatives to imprisonment. These attitudes indicate that Albanian citizens increasingly recognize that long-term public safety depends not only on isolating offenders but also on supporting behavioural change and successful reintegration into society. This approach corresponds with international developments in criminal policy, where rehabilitation has become a central objective of modern sentence execution systems (McNeill, 2019; Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009).

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest several important implications for the development of criminal justice in Albania. First, institutions should continue strengthening mechanisms that ensure security measures are applied according to individual risk assessment rather than routine practice. Second, greater attention should be given to rehabilitation programs, educational opportunities, vocational training, and post-release support, as these factors are essential for reducing reoffending. Third, increasing public trust requires not only legal reforms but also visible improvements in the practical functioning of criminal justice institutions.

The study also contributes to the broader discussion on the relationship between public opinion and criminal justice reform. The results demonstrate that citizens' expectations are not limited to demands for punishment and control. Instead, Albanian public opinion appears increasingly compatible with European approaches that seek to combine effective crime prevention with respect for human rights principles. This finding is important in the context of Albania's ongoing efforts to align its criminal justice system with European standards.

However, several limitations should be considered. The study was based on a non-probability sample of 270 respondents; therefore, the results should not be interpreted as a complete representation of the entire Albanian population. Future research could include larger representative samples, comparative studies between different social groups, and qualitative interviews with judges, prosecutors, lawyers, correctional officers, and convicted persons in order to provide a deeper understanding of attitudes toward sentence execution.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of a criminal justice system cannot be measured only by the severity of punishments imposed. A modern system must also demonstrate its ability to protect society,

maintain public confidence, respect fundamental rights, and provide opportunities for rehabilitation. The findings of this study indicate that Albanian citizens support such a balanced approach, where security and justice are achieved not through punishment alone, but through a combination of accountability, proportionality, and social reintegration.

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