Electoral participation and development in the states of Mexico, 2000-2012[1]

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Abstract

Voter turnout in Mexico has had an irregular behaviour in time. Occasionally, as happened in the 1994 election, the voter turnout reached the 77%, and in a northern state it reached the 83.7%, meanwhile in the elections of 2003, it barely reached the 41.7%. Some hypotheses try to explain such diversity, but a conjuncture of factors (Zapatistas-1994, the electoral reform-1996 and 1997-, economic crisis-1998 and 2009-, organized crime-2006 through 2012), might have had an influence in such turnouts. This article establishes a relationship between the development of each state and its voter turnout, in order to identify if the electoral trend in each state during federal deputy elections, shows any association with the evolution of social development. We will use the Human Development Index and will study the voter turnout of each state 2000-2012.

Keywords: Voter tournout, state, federal deputy, Mexico.

Resumen

La participación electoral en México ha tenido un comportamiento irregular en el tiempo. Ocasionalmente, como sucedió en las elecciones de 1994, la participación de los votantes alcanzó el 77%, y en un estado del norte alcanzó el 83.7%, mientras que, en las elecciones de 2003, apenas alcanzó el 41.7%. Algunas hipótesis intentan explicar tal diversidad, pero una coyuntura de factores (zapatistas-1994, la reforma electoral -1996 y 1997-, crisis económica -1998 y 2009-, crimen organizado -2006 hasta 2012-), podría haber tenido influencia en tales participaciones. Este artículo establece una relación entre el desarrollo de cada entidad y la participación de los votantes, a fin de identificar si la tendencia electoral en cada estado durante las elecciones de diputados federales, muestra alguna asociación con la evolución del desarrollo social. Utilizaremos el Índice de Desarrollo Humano y estudiaremos la participación de los votantes en cada estado 2000-2012.

Palabras clave: participación electoral, estados, diputados federales, México.

[1] The first results of this Research were presented in the Conference: Democracy and voter turnout in Latin America held in the University of Sussex, United Kingdom on March 2015. Nowadays discussion is also held with colleagues in several countries.

Introduction

Electoral participation in Mexico has had an irregular behaviour in recent times. Occasionally, as in the presidential election of 1994, during full political crisis in the country,[2] voter turnout reached 75.8%, and in one state (Jalisco), it reached 82.97%, meanwhile during congressional elections of 2003, voter turnout barely reached 41.2% (IFE). Some hypotheses try to explain such diversity, but a conjuncture of factors (Zapatista uprising -1994- the electoral reform -1996 and 1997- economic crisis -1998 and 2009-, organized crime -2006 through 2012- general and middle elections), might have had an influence in such turnouts. Besides the conjuncture of those factors, we believe there is a central question: Are better conditions of the economy and life quality, having a more permanent influence over electoral behaviour? How can we find out if the variable "development", has an influence or even determines the decision of the voters, over their attitude about voting and over their decision about the candidate? This paper explores the relationship between development and voter turnout[3] within each State,[4] in order to identify if the State trend in voting in federal elections has any association with the development progress of each State. We use as an indicator of development, the Human Development Index, and we will study the progress of electoral participation in each State using the turnout of the elections of federal deputies starting from 2000 general elections, because that was the first election in Mexican history which showed alternation in power at federal level, and ending with the 2012 turnout, which were the last federal elections for president.[5]

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[2] During that year, PRI's presidential candidate and one important member of that party were murdered, in addition to the armed uprising in Chiapas.

[3] We are not interested in analyse the option for which people vote, but only if they choose to vote or not.

[4] Mexico has 32 states. There were 31 states and one federal district, until 2016 when the federal district became a state and was renamed as Mexico City.

[5] In 2015 federal elections took place within new electoral legislation, with important modifications in matters such as reelection, independent candidacies, etc., which makes us study these elections (2018 and 2021) under a different focus. This is why the 2012 election is the last included in our research.. Furthermore, in that same year, the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI) modified the data collection strategy from the Module of Socioeconomic Conditions (MCS) which is used to estimate the changes in poverty in Mexico. This modification generated a deep discussion because the new data was not comparable with the previous ones.

1. Democracy, participation and voter turnout

The discussion over considering or not, electoral democracy as the centre of democratic life in a country is still on the spotlight. Without any doubt, countries that joined the electoral regime in the framework of the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1994), abandoning dictatorial forms of government, consider electoral democracy as a clear and sufficient representation of the democratic life of their countries. Definitely more than one Central and South American country could accept this statement. But countries that already had developed an electoral democracy, and hence didn't transit from dictatorships or military regimes, don't compulsory consider democracy as the principal expression of electoral life, which seems to be the case of Mexico.

Also, if we consider the concept of Democracy as a regime; then the concept increases even more, and the de definition of democracy as mere electoral democracy remains pretty limited, and puts aside among other topics: union's democracy, political democracy, social democracy, economic democracy, etc., which are expressions that at various moments of Mexican history have been very significant.

For example, the topic of union democracy was seen in Mexico in the railroad strikes of 1958-1959 and in the struggles of independent unions during the decade of 1970; political democracy has been seen in the attempts of organization by social, indigenous settlers, etc., groups, without being allowed to freely organize themselves, and being sometimes repressed and prevented to behave and conform freely. Such is the case of some political parties towards political reforms instrumented by current governments (1977, 1986, 1990) or attempts to amend laws in Congress, where despite huge popular protests, they don't consult the population or ask for their approval, (referendum, plebiscite, etc.); or the lack of ways of expression for social groups and civil society, or the pressures over independent media (Canal 40, and anchormen that are critical of the government), etc.

So reducing democracy to its solely electoral expression limits the concept, besides, such statement answers exclusively to a dominant view of democracy, restricted only to electoral matters.

Certainly, we have to refer the position of Dahl (1989) which states that no country in our time, reaches the ideal of democracy, which includes many aspects that are virtually

impossible to combine, and the reason of that, is not political capacity but the enlargement of agendas and actors that claim and develop in limited spaces.

As a consequence, in the framework of global society and Information and communications technology, the key for democratic life development, rests on citizen participation, which results almost impossible if society is not properly informed. *An informed citizenry is a crucial component of a healthy and resilient democracy* (IFES, p. 2015).

As a consequence, access to information could be a key element for citizen participation, and democratic practices, but is not by definition an affordable good to everyone, because at some point it stratifies and excludes important sectors of population.

Up to 2012, Mexico had 45.5% of its population in poverty, and almost 10% in extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2013). We could consider "access to information", the factor which influences the shaping of society, as not available for most of those citizens, which even have food shortages. Hence the limited access to information and democratic development.

Mexico didn't have a dictatorship regime like most of Latin-American countries, but had an almost hegemonic party system during big part of the XX century, which derived in a pretty limited electoral democracy, in which until 1996, the government itself had interference over electoral bodies.

Over the topic of participation, as we stated at the beginning of the paper, the concept could be very wide, but at first moment, and just for analysis purposes, we could divide the concept in two: *citizen participation and political participation*.

On citizen participation, we must state that the alternation in federal government in 2000, initiated a new stage in Mexican political life, not only because of the displacement of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from the presidency, but because of the depoliticization process driven by the neoliberal trend which was in full swing, and citizen participation appeared as a pure option in social life, away from political parties. President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) was an example of it. His profile more like a citizen than a politician, promoted citizen participation.

The first decade of the XXI century in Mexico, was an age of increasing citizen participation, both formal and informal. Citizen participation requires accepting the rules of the democratic game, and not only that, but also the acceptance of the individual's free will which participate on it. The intention to participate only appears with the distribution of individual's contributions, in other words, everyone participates according to their own

means, interests, and possibilities. We then have in citizen participation the individual or group of individuals that without belonging to any political association, gather to solve problems which affect their community. Being their solely motivation the solution of problems and public and private benefit.

In Mexico there were approved many laws about citizen participation in the States, even though it didn't happen the same at federal level; It was about four years ago when   there were approved the concept of citizen initiative, independent candidates, and popular consultation. Those amends were made after almost a hundred initiatives about the same topic that were not discussed.

There was another story at local level. In 1995 congress approved the law of Citizen Participation for Mexico City. In 1998 in the state of Jalisco, was also approved a Law of Citizen Participation, which added to the Law on Access to Public Information of that state, which was a pioneering law in the country, and was approved even before the federal one. Since then began a curious process of legal imitation, which extended over the country. By 2001 there were 13 states with laws of citizen participation (Alarcón, 2002; in Olvera, 2009, p. 7). By 2006 there were 28 States with laws of Citizen Participation, excluding only Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Nuevo León and Campeche.

> Of existing laws, the referendum was included in 27 states (not applicable in Baja California Sur); the plebiscite in 26 (it doesn't exist in the States of Mexico and Queretaro); popular initiatives in 19 states (not included in Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, Chiapas, Chihuahua, State of Mexico, Guerrero, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala and Yucatan) (Olvera, 2009, p. 8).

Summarizing, the citizen participation laws in Mexico have moved in two ways. For one, the federal level, which lags behind the local level, since took it too long to issue a Citizen Participation Act that could legally ensure many forms of participation. On the other hand, local areas that have advanced in the laws of citizen participation, but differ in their implementation mechanisms making them often impossible to use.

On the other hand, *political participation*, refers to the formation of political institutions, such as political parties which compete for power through elections and various groups involved in the political arena. It can also be called political participation to the fact that an individual participates in favour of any political party, either as a candidate or as an

active supporter. The motivation for this type of participation, will always be to favour the political institution, and for the benefit of that group of individuals.

There is no political participation without any citizen participation, in other words: we have the time of formation of political institutions and, on the other, the moment when the citizens bound to join them through their individual participation or by group. The junction of these two aspects of participation is: *electoral participation*.

Thus, electoral participation is undoubtedly a form of citizen participation that involves, usually, the fulfilment of some proper demographic and administrative requirements of an electoral system.

The study and reflection over electoral participation is important because around it were built assumptions that have advanced in its explanation, and have allowed us to understand more widely aspects such as competitiveness and recently alternation in government. "The electoral participation is understood as the behaviour that links people with power, in other words, society with the state, supported by one single act given in a specific time and place: voting" (Rivera, 2004, p. 339).

From about four decades, the vote, has confirmed to be the most widespread expression of political participation. Jaqueline Peschard said that voter turnout is defined in time and place for a number of established and standardized rules. So we have that: "Voting is the most widely extended and equitably distributed political right, all citizens possess it, and it always has the same weight, regardless of social or economic position of the individual who issued" (Peschard, 2000, p. 68). Hence the principle: one man, one vote.

The term *electoral participation* is exhausted with the act of casting the vote on the polls, once after elections it could exist political participation or citizen participation, but never electoral participation, not until next renew of electoral positions.

In the Mexican election law, voting is a right and an obligation of the citizen. Constitutes one of the fundamental political rights in shaping public power, and is also an obligation, because voting is a civic duty. Our Constitution considers voting as universal, free, secret and direct, and now, by common law, has also been considered personal and not transferable.

2. Explanations of electoral participation

The search for explanations about variables that determine or influence voter turnout compels us to refer to interpretations involved directly with Electoral Sociology, to explore this field we must start by referring to the French Electoral Sociology, on this topic highlights the work of André Siegfried with his work Tableau de la France de l'Ouest. "He observed that the opinions and consequently political participation, are subject to geographical distribution and the existence of political climates just like natural climates. Thus he began to compare maps of voter turnouts with geographical, human and economic maps" (Cot and Mounier, 1978, p. 151).

Following this author, there are three factors that explain electoral behaviour: the regime on land property, religion, and history. With regard to land property regime, the author believes that it is not decisive, but it is important and serves to define social class; about religion, Siegfried establishes a relationship between religious loyalty and political orientation. With respect to history, Paul Bois (referring critically to Siegfried) states that social homogeneity, ideology and the origin of community thought can only be understood through history (Valdiviezo, 1998, p. 19).

Another classic author about Electoral Sociology is Paul Lazarsfeld, who conducted studies to correlate social and psychological factors with preferences and electoral behaviour in the United States. No doubt he set the first hypotheses about the correlation of factors such as religion, race, occupation, with voter behaviour and the intention of vote.

Although these two authors refer to electoral preferences, as an expression of some factors, electoral preferences implied per se a first expression of electoral behaviour, which is to cast a vote, that is, to participate in elections. But our interest lies in establishing what are the variables that influence electoral participation and Dowse and Hughes (369), provide the following statements:

- *Level of education*. Participation of people with higher level of education is more likely.
- *Urban-Rural*. Political participation is less likely in rural than among urban citizens.
- *Social participation*. It is more likely that union workers would be more interested in political participation, and take a firmer stance on political issues and voting, than non-union workers.

- *Residence*. The longer a person lives in a community, the greater the possibility of participating in politics.
- *Life cycle*. Participation gradually increases with age, but after 50 or 60 years it begins to decline.
- *Gender*. Political participation is more likely among men than among women.
- *Religion, race, ethnicity*. People with African heritage participate more than whites. Jews participate more than Catholics, which are more active than Protestants.

It is clear that these explanatory factors refer primarily to the United States, but these authors also studied the Mexican case and pointed out that only the educational factor was relevant for our country.

According to the literature, in this paper we consider the implications of the above-mentioned variables of education and urban-rural, but also according to Diwakar (2008), we included an analysis of how the convergence of federal deputies elections with presidential elections affect voter turnout. The paper seeks to understand the not so studied relationship between human development, specifically in its form of human development index, and voter turnout.

> The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the 3 dimensions (UNDP, 2016).

We use this index because combines several aspects we consider fundamental for the condition of life and hence, its influence on voting behaviour, so that we could assume a relationship between development and electoral participation, based on the fact that HDI expresses better conditions and quality of life in the population.

3. The Mexican case seen from the States point of view

In Mexico, the HDI has increased steadily in the last 12 years (See Figure 1). The 32 states have an upward trend in the 12 years studied.

Figure 1. Mexico: HDI mean of the state
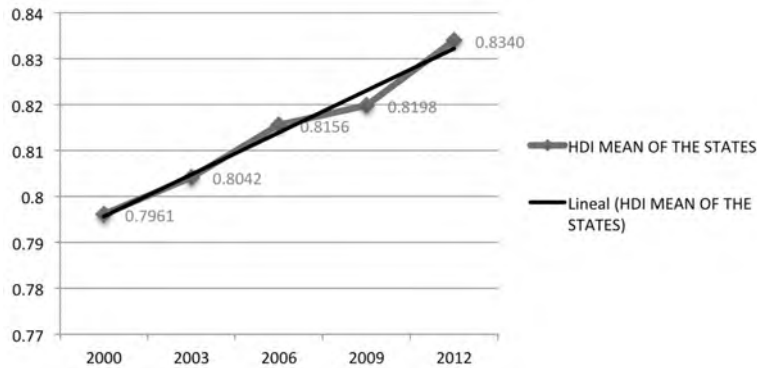
Source: PNUD. HDI data for 2012 were obtained based in the 2010 HDI data; we calculate the HDI increases from 2010 to 2012, and we used them to calculate the standardized HDI, in order to make both data comparable.

As a consequence, the simple measure of the evolution of the variable over time shows constant growth with no substantial variations. Even if we look in some detail, we could find that growth in 10 States lies on the average national growth, which was of 0.04 points. Nine states show growth above the national average growth and 13 states show growth below the national average growth. (See Map 1).

Map 1. Estados Mexicanos

Source: PNDU, 2015.

Regarding to electoral participation, we find that trend in the 12 studied years remains generally stable, even though it shows some variations by each election (see Figure 2). During elections in which President is also elected, voter turnout increases, unlike the elections in which only federal deputies are elected.

Figure 2. Mexico: voter turnout national mean (%) 2000-2012
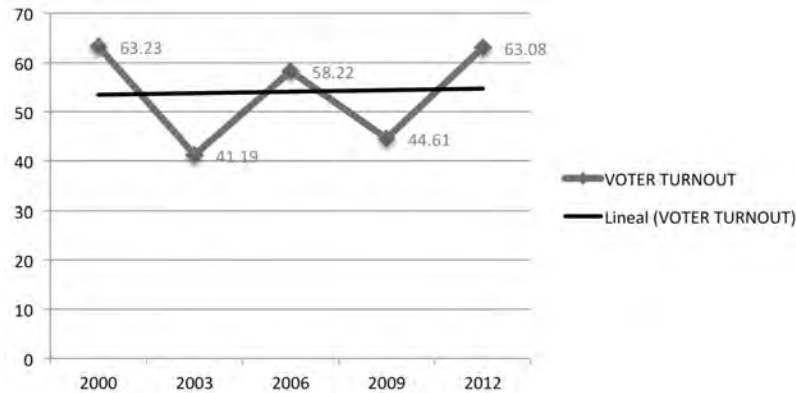
Source: IFE, 2013.

If we analyse only the elections in where also was elected the President, then the trend remains steady, even though during the 2006 general election, voter turnout decreased in comparison to 2000 and 2012 general elections. The evolution of voter turnout remains steady in 23 States, six show an increasing trend and only three show a decreasing trend (see Map 2).

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Map 2. Mexico. Evolution of voter turnout by states 2000-2012

Source: IFE, 2013.

From the voter turnout analysis, we didn't find any highlighted behaviour, as seems clear that trends are distributed without any logic between classifications. According to these behaviours, and a simple association, we found no relationship between the evolution of the Human Development Index, and voter turnout.

Figure 3 plots the behaviour of participation and the HDI throughout the states, there are three lines the dotted line shows a zone-by-zone or local regression, the dashed line is a quadratic fit regression and the normal line is a simple linear fit regression. The three lines seem to show a slight decline through the .75 until the .85 levels of the HDI, which could imply a certain relationship.

Figure 3. Mexico: participation and the HDI throughout the states
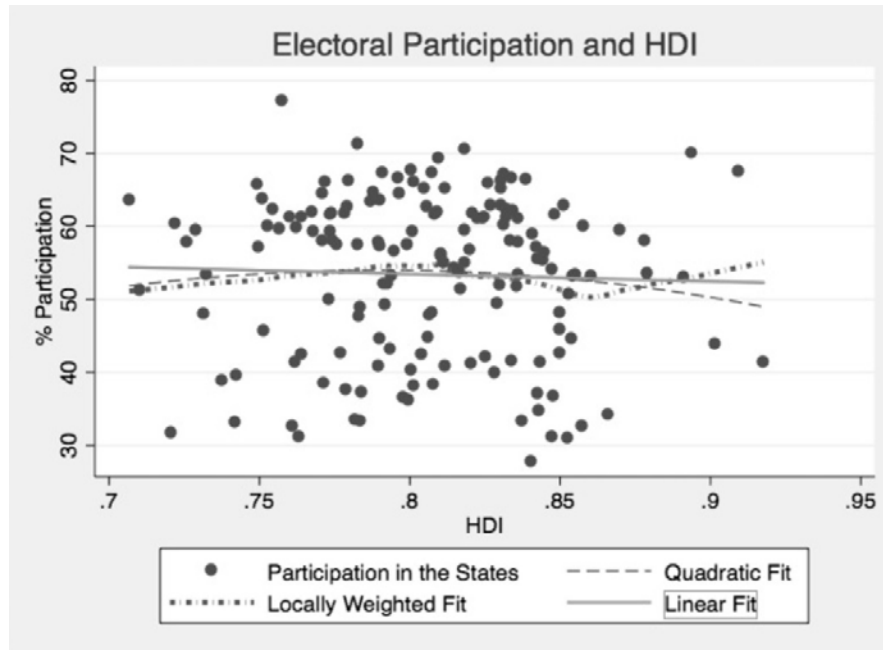
Source: IFE and PNUD.

Because this estimations omit the fact that we are dealing with panel data it is important to analyse the relation through more developed techniques, so our basic equation is:

$$log(Part_{it}) = \alpha_i + \rho President_{it} + log(HDI_{it})\beta_1 + log(educ_{it})\beta_2 + log(urban_{it})\beta_3 + u_{it} \text{ (1)}$$

Where $log(Part_{it})$ is the natural logarithm of participation in state i in year t, we transform the variables to natural logarithm to analyse, rather than the levels, the changes in our variables or its elasticity. $President_{it}$ is a dummy variable that indicates whether the elections concurred with the presidential election. $log(HDI_{it})$ is the natural logarithm of the Human Development Index for each state, $log(educ_{it})$ is the natural logarithm of the average school grade of each state and $log(urban_{it})$ is the natural logarithm of the percentage of urban areas in each state.

Our interest is to see if the value of β_1 associated with the HDI is statistically significant. Although interesting, this paper doesn't aim to model the exact behaviour that the HDI has on voter turnout, it just wants to analyse if there is a relation between the changes through time in the HDI and the changes through time in abstentionism/participation.

After doing the appropriates test (Hausman, 1978), our estimation uses the fixed effects regression and we cluster our standard errors to allow for correlation at a given time and across time within the states, which basically seems logical due to the closeness from some states. Our key assumption is that our error term is conformed by two components i.e. $u_{it} = \alpha_i + v_{it}$ where a component of our error term is correlated with our covariates i.e. where a component of our error term is correlated with our covariates i.e. $E[\alpha_i|X'_i] \neq 0$

In other words we are allowing for unobserved or immeasurable state specific time invariant variables to have a certain amount of determination in our dependant variable through the error term. This basically can be associated with the, previously mentioned, electoral sociological theory (Cot & Mounier, 1978), as every state has its individual characteristics that vary little over time but alter abstentionism through other channels. Furthermore α_i represent this unobserved heterogeneity as an average for every state.

Table 1 shows our estimates results. On column one we observe a simple Ordinary Least Squares regression, which simply correlates the logarithm of the HDI with the logarithm of participation. Colum two is a fixed effects regression with out controlling with our previously discussed variables. And column three shows our baseline model.

Results show us that the HDI it is statistically insignificant, when running an OLS, but it is statistically significant when running fixed effects. A key issue that comes to our concern is the fact that when simply running an OLS we obtain a 1% R-squared. But when running the fixed effects estimation we get a higher R-squared and a substantial .35 R-squared. Contrary to what OLS models can offer a fixed effect models can offer us more specific information around the mean, interestingly we observe a much higher .73 R-squared when looking a the within effects which explains the behaviour of each state through time and that is what we aimed to: to understand each state behaviour.

Table 1. The baseline model with an OLS estimation dependant variable LOG (abstentionism)

	(1) No controls OLS	(2) No controls FE	(3) Controls FE
Log(HDI)	-0.135	-6.544***	-2.609***
	(0.357)	(0.671)	(0.6586)
President	-	-	0.094***
			(0.039)
logurban	-	-	0.6079*
			(0.3480)
logeduc	-	-	1.485***
			(0.225)
_cons	3.924***	2.538***	-2.197***
	(0.079)	(0.145)	(1.114)
N	160	160	160

Note: Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses for columns 2 and 3. The number of states is 32 observed through a period of twelve years. The variable participation is only observed on 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012, which are the electoral periods. Elections in 2000, 2006 and 2012 also elected the President of Mexico.

* $p<0.1$

** $p<0.05$

*** $p<0.01$

Source: Author's calculation.

Conclusions: other explanations

Analysis allows us to conclude that relationship between development, measured by Human Development Index, and Voter Turnout exists and variables are not independent of each other.

Although the relation exists, the modelling of it seems quite unclear, this conclusion compels us to open up other possibilities of explanation, about what could influence Voter Turnout and possibly have a better understanding. We noted them:

1. Strong Electoral Competition. We can assume that participation of actors with strong electoral presence increases voter turnout, the reason for it is that citizens believe that their decision of voting could influence election's result.

2. The presence of alternation of power. If the electoral position in dispute has been occupied by different political actors, we assume that the population recognizes that voter turnout can generate those changes.

3. Trust in electoral authority. If citizens regard electoral authorities as legitimate and trustable institutions, then they can trust in the electoral process, and such trust could increase voter turnout.

4. In the specific case of local and federal deputies, as much as those congressmen show effective political representation, voter turnout could increase.

5. The combination of elections of different political positions increases voter turnout. For example, when the elections of deputies, mayors, governors and President are held at the same time. The intention of voting could come from the citizen's interest for a specific political position in dispute, this interest could invite the citizen to vote on the other political positions.

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