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Article

Integrated Assessment of Small Business Economic Potential and Quartile-Based Regional Development Strategies: Evidence from Namangan Region, Uzbekistan

Asqaraliyev Saidali Raxmonaliyevich*

1. Independent Researcher at Namangan State University, Uzbekistan

*Corresponding: saidali.asqaraliyev1990@gmail.com

Abstract: This study develops and applies an integrated diagnostic approach to assess the economic potential of small businesses across the twelve administrative territories of Namangan Region, Uzbekistan. The assessment combines five dimensions—entrepreneurial activity, production capacity and intensity, investment, domestic-market and export performance, and activity efficiency—using min–max normalization and equal-weight aggregation on a 0–100 scale. The empirical framework relies primarily on comparable territorial indicators for 2024, supplemented by the 2024–2025 dynamics of newly established small enterprises and microfirms. An empirical quartile segmentation identifies three relative leaders (Namangan city, Yangiqo'rg'on and Uychi), three stable-middle territories (Norin, Namangan district and To'raqo'rg'on), three developing territories (Uchqo'rg'on, Pop and Kosonsoy), and three relatively constrained territories (Chortoq, Mingbuloq and Chust). The group thresholds are Q1 = 25.72, Q2 = 30.44 and Q3 = 34.18 points, calculated from the reported two-decimal index series. The leader group averages 48.30 points, compared with 23.27 in the constrained group. A sensitivity check using alternative weights yields Spearman's rank correlation of 0.993, indicating high stability of the ordering under the tested perturbation. The contribution is a two-stage decision framework linking a territory's relative quartile position to its weakest subindex and thus to differentiated policy instruments rather than uniform support. The index is a comparative diagnostic, not a causal estimate or a direct measure of labour productivity.

Keywords: small business, economic potential, regional differentiation, composite index, min–max normalization, quartile segmentation, Namangan Region, place-based development, sensitivity analysis

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1. Introduction

Small enterprises occupy a central position in regional production networks, local employment, household income generation and access to markets. Yet the territorial distribution of entrepreneurship is uneven: some localities concentrate investment, export infrastructure and consumer demand, while others exhibit substantial business formation without a proportionate conversion of activity into output or investment [1]. This distinction matters for economic policy, because the number of registered or operating firms alone cannot capture the conditions under which their potential becomes productive economic capacity. Recent international analyses emphasize the interaction of

firm capabilities, market connections, skills and territorial institutions in shaping small-business performance [2].

In Namangan Region, differences between an urban centre, agrarian districts and mixed production–service territories make one-dimensional comparisons especially problematic. Aggregate production values favour economically larger territories; ratios per active business may, by contrast, highlight smaller territories that employ their existing enterprise base intensively [3]. Investment captures future expansion opportunities, while trade and export indicators capture access to demand. An integrated measure should therefore combine the size of economic activity and its intensity, without equating either to the whole concept of economic potential [4].

The purpose of this paper is to substantiate and apply an integrated method for comparing small-business economic potential across twelve territories of Namangan Region and to transform the resulting assessment into differentiated development priorities. Three research questions are addressed: (i) how can heterogeneous indicators be combined transparently into a territorial index; (ii) what patterns of relative leadership, intermediate position and constraint appear in the index distribution; and (iii) how can a general score be supplemented by subindex diagnostics to guide policy responses?

The central proposition is that a territory's overall position and its internal structural constraint should be interpreted jointly. The quartile position indicates the relative level of support and strategic ambition, while the weakest subindex identifies the content of the intervention. The article reports an empirical ranking, descriptive sensitivity analysis and corresponding place-based recommendations; it does not claim that the proposed interventions have already produced causal improvements [5].

A substantial literature associates entrepreneurship with regional economic dynamism. Audretsch and Keilbach conceptualize entrepreneurship capital as an element of the local economic environment that contributes to regional performance. Fritsch stresses that the benefits of new firm formation can emerge with long delays and can operate through competition, productivity and structural adjustment. This evidence discourages interpreting start-up counts as an immediate or sufficient proxy for economic results **[6]**.

Regional development research likewise highlights the importance of connections and local capabilities. Huggins and Thompson examine how networks mediate entrepreneurship, innovation and regional growth, while the OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook discusses the integration of SMEs into production chains, innovation systems and skills ecosystems. These insights support a multidimensional measure that goes beyond firm numbers to encompass production, investment and market integration.

The design of an integrated score also entails methodological choices. The OECD–European Commission Joint Research Centre handbook provides a framework for indicator selection, normalization, weighting, aggregation and sensitivity analysis. Its central implication is that a composite index is an analytical construction whose interpretation depends on transparent choices and robustness checks. Linear aggregation increases interpretability but also permits compensation between stronger and weaker dimensions; the separate identification of the lowest-scoring dimension partially addresses this limitation in policy interpretation [7].

Place-based development approaches argue against the automatic replication of one policy package across territories. The OECD Regional Outlook and the OECD Recommendation on Regional Development Policy favour territorial evidence, coordination and targeted instruments adapted to local characteristics. Isenberg similarly emphasizes ecosystem-specific approaches to entrepreneurship rather than copying a

single model. These ideas provide a conceptual rationale for combining quartile segmentation with an individual territory's specific growth constraint.

The gap addressed by the present study is therefore methodological and applied: it operationalizes an integrated small-business diagnostic at district level and translates it into an explicit two-stage policy rule. The analysis remains distinct from causal studies of entrepreneurship and growth, since its objective is relative comparative assessment and intervention prioritization rather than estimation of treatment effects [8].

2. Materials and Methods

Territorial coverage and observation period. The empirical unit is the administrative territory: Namangan city and eleven districts of Namangan Region (n = 12). The primary economic-volume and territorial comparability baseline is 2024; the entrepreneurship-activity dimension also incorporates the change in newly established small firms and microfirms between 2024 and 2025. The original statistical series were compiled from the Namangan Regional Statistics Department's annual releases with calculations assembled in the dissertation's supporting dataset. Accordingly, the resulting index should not be described as an index calculated exclusively from 2025 year-end observations.

Because consistently matched district-level value-added, small-business employment and profitability measures were not available for all territories, an output-per-active-business proxy is used within the efficiency dimension. This is a relative economic-intensity indicator and must not be identified with labour productivity or value added per employee. Nominal production measures and potential differences in statistical coverage further limit comparisons outside the specified territorial sample.

Selection and conceptual structure of indicators

Table 1. Dimensions of the territorial composite index

Dimension	Underlying indicators	Economic interpretation	Weight
Entrepreneurial activity (EA)	Active small enterprises per 1,000 residents; change in new enterprise formation, 2024–2025	Density and renewal of the business base	0.20
Production (PR)	Industrial and agricultural output; corresponding output per active business	Scale and intensity of productive activity	0.20
Investment (IN)	Investment by small businesses; investment per active business	Capital accumulation and expansion capacity	0.20
Market and exports (ME)	Retail trade, services and exports: overall volumes and per-business measures	Domestic demand access and external-market integration	0.20
Activity efficiency (EF)	Combined sectoral result per active business (proxy measure)	Relative economic outcome per business, not labour productivity	0.20

Normalization and integration. The initial indicators are measured in distinct units (businesses, monetary values, ratios and growth rates). Every selected indicator is treated as a positive-direction measure in the baseline specification. For territory i and indicator j, min–max standardization is performed across the same twelve territorial units:

$$z_{ij} = 100 \times (x_{ij} - min_i\, x_{ij}) / (max_i\, x_{ij} - min_i\, x_{ij}), \qquad (1)$$

where x_{ij} is the observed indicator and z_{ij} is its normalized score. A zero denominator would require special treatment, because an indicator that is constant across all territories contains no cross-sectional discrimination. A normalized score of zero means the lowest observed relative position, not the absence of economic activity. Likewise, 100 indicates the sample maximum, not attainment of an external benchmark.

For dimension k, the subindex S_{ik} is the arithmetic mean of its m_k normalized constituent indicators. In production and investment, overall scale and per-business intensity are given equal weight within their respective subindices. The five subindices are combined by an equally weighted arithmetic mean:

$$S_{ik} = (1/m_k) \times \Sigma_j z_{ij} ; \qquad I_i = 0.20 \times (EA_i + PR_i + IN_i + ME_i + EF_i). \qquad (2)$$

Equal weights avoid imposing a subjective hierarchy in the absence of validated expert weights; they do not imply that all dimensions are economically interchangeable. To mitigate that interpretive risk, the composite score is always examined together with the underlying subindex profile. The method measures relative economic potential utilization under the selected observed indicators, rather than an absolute level of development.

Quartile classification and the diagnostic rule. The reported two-decimal integral scores are sorted and grouped by the 25th, 50th and 75th percentiles, calculated using linear interpolation. The resulting thresholds are Q1 = 25.72, Q2 = 30.44 and Q3 = 34.18. The following classification is adopted:

Constrained: $I_i \le Q1$; Developing: $Q1 < I_i \le Q2$; Stable middle: $Q2 < I_i \le Q3$; Relative leader: $I_i > Q3$. (3)

The labels denote positions within the Namangan sample, not universal standards of success or failure. Moreover, the classification is recomputed when data change. Let K_i denote a territory's quartile group and let $L_i = \text{argmin}_k(S_{ik})$ denote the limiting dimension. We formalize the intended diagnostic-to-policy sequence as:

$$\text{Policy priority}_i = F(K_i, L_i, A_i), \quad \text{with } A_i = \text{argmax}_k(S_{ik}). \qquad (4)$$

Here F is an explicitly described decision rule rather than an estimated econometric function: the group determines the broad intensity of support, the weakest dimension defines the immediate bottleneck, and the strongest dimension identifies the capability on which interventions may build. In cases of equal scores, joint weaknesses should be assessed rather than imposing an arbitrary tie-breaker.

Sensitivity and descriptive comparisons. The baseline equal-weight vector (0.20, 0.20, 0.20, 0.20, 0.20) is compared with the alternative vector (0.15, 0.25, 0.20, 0.25, 0.15) for entrepreneurial activity, production, investment, market–exports and efficiency, respectively. Spearman's rank coefficient between the two complete territorial rankings is 0.993, indicating that the overall ordering is highly stable for this particular reweighting. This is a limited perturbation check, not a comprehensive uncertainty analysis across all admissible weights, indicator subsets or datasets.

3. Results

3.1 Territorial index scores and quartile segmentation

Table 2. Ranking of small-business economic potential in Namangan Region

Rank	Territory	Index	Quartile-based group
1	Namangan city	53.72	Relative leader
2	Yangiqo'rg'on	51.93	Relative leader
3	Uychi	39.26	Relative leader
4	Norin	32.48	Stable middle
5	Namangan district	31.62	Stable middle

6	To‘raqo‘rg‘on	31.11	Stable middle
7	Uchqo‘rg‘on	29.77	Developing
8	Pop	28.58	Developing
9	Kosonsoy	26.00	Developing
10	Chortoq	24.89	Constrained
11	Mingbuloq	24.75	Constrained
12	Chust	20.17	Constrained

Namangan city ranks first (53.72 points), followed by Yangiqo‘rg‘on (51.93) and Uychi (39.26). The stable-middle group comprises Norin (32.48), Namangan district (31.62) and To‘raqo‘rg‘on (31.11). Uchqo‘rg‘on (29.77), Pop (28.58) and Kosonsoy (26.00) occupy the developing segment. Chortoq (24.89), Mingbuloq (24.75) and Chust (20.17) form the constrained segment. The quartile partition includes three territories in each group because the distribution contains twelve observations with no ties at the published cutoffs [9].

The average score across the twelve territories is 32.86 points. The group means are 48.30 (relative leaders), 31.74 (stable middle), 28.12 (developing) and 23.27 (constrained). Thus the gap between the mean of the leader group and that of the constrained group equals 25.03 points; the former is approximately 2.08 times the latter. The cross-territorial range, from 20.17 to 53.72, is 33.55 points. These descriptive differences indicate meaningful heterogeneity in relative composite positions; they must not be interpreted as percentage differences in output or welfare [10].

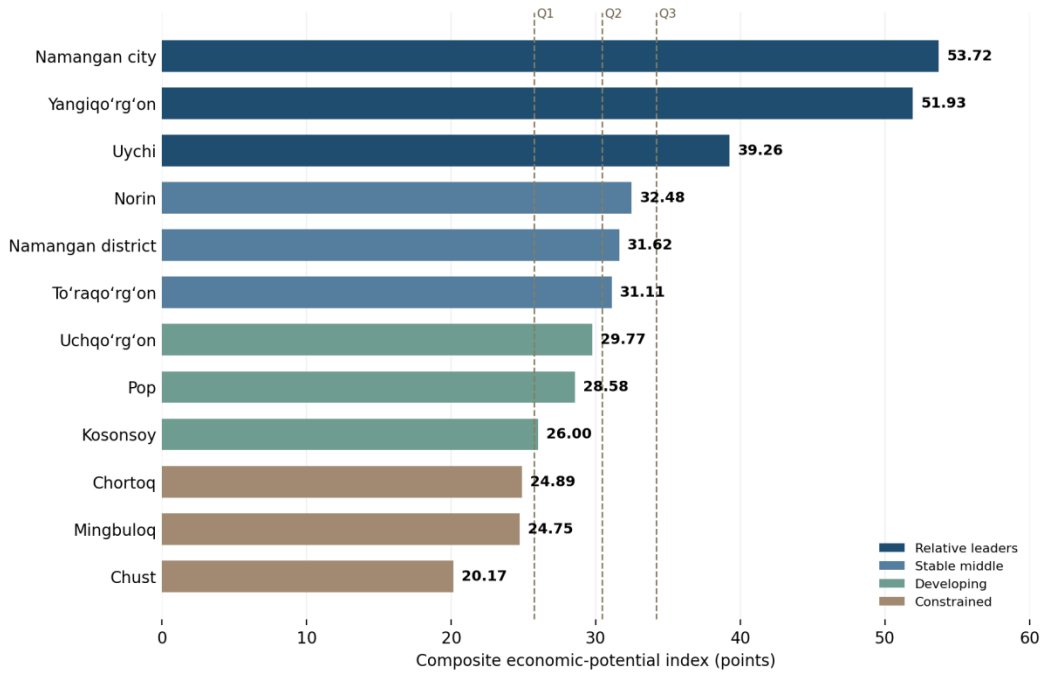


Figure 1. Quartile segmentation of the small-business economic-potential index (baseline equal-weight model)

Why similarly ranked territories require different strategies. Composite rankings can obscure substantial structural variation. Namangan city scores 87.2 in investment and 80.4 in market–exports, yet its normalized efficiency subindex is 0.0, the lowest relative intensity within the sample. The zero does not mean that firms in the city produce nothing; it means their recorded output per active business is the sample minimum after normalization. For the regional centre, the strategic issue is therefore the

conversion of market and investment advantages into more intensive activity per enterprise, with careful attention to sector mix and data comparability.

Yangiqo‘rg‘on attains 86.1 in production and 100.0 in the efficiency proxy, but only 18.6 in entrepreneurial activity and 19.7 in investment. This profile suggests an opportunity to preserve high-performing production chains by improving firm renewal and financing, especially in processing, packaging and downstream market logistics. Uychi displays a more balanced profile: activity 42.7, market–exports 49.1 and efficiency 51.9. Its low investment score of 16.2 suggests that capital deepening and technical modernization may be more relevant than an indiscriminate rise in registrations [11].

Norin demonstrates a markedly different imbalance: entrepreneurial activity reaches 59.8, while investment is only 8.6. This points to a possible mismatch between business formation and access to productive capital. Namangan district combines production (42.0) and efficiency (41.5) with much weaker investment (12.5) and market–exports (17.3). To‘raqo‘rg‘on records 47.1 in activity compared with 22.0 in investment. For these stable-middle territories, the evidence favours targeted business cooperation, shared infrastructure and access to equipment financing over uniform grants.

Among developing districts, Uchqo‘rg‘on has an activity score of 45.4 but an investment score of 15.8; its market–export score is 16.7. Pop’s investment score is relatively high (64.4) while efficiency reaches only 14.7 and entrepreneurial activity 20.6, warranting attention to investment conversion, utilization and supply-chain integration. Kosonsoy is notably stronger in market–exports (53.4) than in investment (14.0) or production (15.0), suggesting scope to connect commercial networks with local manufacturing and processing. These are diagnostic interpretations, not identified causal explanations [12].

The most constrained group also contains different types of weaknesses. Chortoq and Mingbuloq show high entrepreneurial activity scores of 69.4 and 92.8, respectively, but very low market/investment or efficiency scores. Hence a policy that merely increases the count of new businesses might fail to improve the economically productive scale of the enterprise base. Chust has particularly weak efficiency (6.5) and market–export performance (12.4); support for cost discipline, product quality, market connections and the durability of operating firms should precede assumptions about high-growth expansion.

3.2 Subindex-based diagnostic evidence

Table 3. Subindex profiles of the twelve territories (0–100 normalized points)

Territory	EA	PR	IN	ME	EF	Weakest dimension
Namangan city	51.0	50.0	87.2	80.4	0.0	Efficiency
Yangiqo‘rg‘on	18.6	86.1	19.7	35.2	100.0	Activity
Uychi	42.7	36.4	16.2	49.1	51.9	Investment
Norin	59.8	18.6	8.6	38.8	36.5	Investment
Namangan district	44.8	42.0	12.5	17.3	41.5	Investment
To‘raqo‘rg‘on	47.1	27.2	22.0	28.1	31.2	Investment
Uchqo‘rg‘on	45.4	30.5	15.8	16.7	40.4	Investment
Pop	20.6	21.7	64.4	21.5	14.7	Efficiency
Kosonsoy	17.8	15.0	14.0	53.4	29.7	Investment
Chortoq	69.4	16.0	13.9	8.5	16.7	Market–export

Territory	EA	PR	IN	ME	EF	Weakest dimension
Mingbuloq	92.8	12.1	0.0	7.7	11.1	Investment
Chust	38.4	18.5	24.9	12.4	6.5	Efficiency

EA = entrepreneurship activity; PR = production; IN = investment; ME = market–exports; EF = relative per-enterprise activity-efficiency proxy. Source: the dissertation's underlying district-level index calculations.

The subindex table clarifies an important policy distinction: a territory can exhibit considerable entrepreneurship activity and yet remain constrained in the integrated classification. Mingbuloq is the strongest illustration: its entrepreneurial activity score (92.8) coexists with an investment score of 0.0, which denotes the sample minimum and not zero nominal investment. Similar gaps occur in Chortoq, Norin and Uchqoʻrgʻon. Therefore the policy objective should be improved enterprise survival, capitalization and economic conversion, rather than growth in registrations alone [13]. This interpretation is consistent with the observation that regional entrepreneurial effects depend on lagged performance and local complementary conditions.

3.3 Strategic differentiation derived from quartile position and bottlenecks

Table 4. Differentiated development strategies by territorial segment

Segment and index rule	Territories	Development priority	Recommended policy instruments
Relative leaders (I > 34.18)	Namangan city; Yangiqoʻrgʻon; Uychi	Quality of growth and conversion of existing strengths	Innovation support, export standards, productivity programmes, targeted technology investment
Stable middle (30.44 < I ≤ 34.18)	Norin; Namangan district; Toʻraqoʻrgʻon	Structural balance and investment deepening	Equipment leasing, business cooperation, shared infrastructure, market-access services
Developing (25.72 < I ≤ 30.44)	Uchqoʻrgʻon; Pop; Kosonsoy	Convert particular strengths into broader economic results	Project monitoring, supply-chain matching, processing facilities, export linkages
Constrained (I ≤ 25.72)	Chortoq; Mingbuloq; Chust	Enterprise survival and strengthening the minimum productive base	Working-capital instruments, incubators, cost reduction, basic market access and technical advice

Source: author's two-stage diagnostic framework. Recommendations are prospective and subject to feasibility, additional assessment and programme eligibility.

In implementation, the group assignment should guide the broad level and objective of support, whereas the bottleneck should dictate the operational instrument. For instance, within the leader group, Namangan city needs attention to

intensity/efficiency, Yangiqo'rg'on to business renewal and financing, and Uychi to investment. Equally, within the constrained group, Mingbuloq's immediate constraint is capital, Chortoq's is market access, and Chust's is activity efficiency. A differentiated instrument is therefore more coherent than allocating equal support packages to all districts [14].

3.4 Sensitivity analysis and internal consistency

The ranking correlation between the baseline and alternative weighting schemes is $\rho_s = 0.993$. The alternative scheme places more emphasis on production and market–exports (0.25 each) and less on entrepreneurial activity and efficiency (0.15 each), holding investment at 0.20. The result suggests limited rank instability under this single sensitivity scenario; in the source workbook, Uchqo'rg'on and Pop change relative order but remain in the same broad quartile segment. It would be inappropriate to infer comprehensive model robustness without testing larger weight perturbations, data revisions and alternative normalization functions.

A consistency audit of the primary materials also reveals a publication-relevant detail. In the five-dimension baseline data, Chust's unrounded subindexes average to 20.172 (≈20.17); the score 19.473 (≈19.47) is instead generated by the alternative-weight specification. Thus 20.17 is reported throughout this paper for the baseline index, rather than mixing two different weighting models in one chart. The three group thresholds are unchanged to the displayed precision, and the composition of all four groups is identical. This correction makes the tabular, graphic and methodological evidence internally consistent.

4. Discussion

The empirical diagnosis supports three general principles. First, territorial strategies should begin with a multidimensional audit of the small-business base and should not use enterprise counts as a sufficient performance criterion. Second, the interpretation of a high or low index must remain relative to the sample and year: the index gives neither an objective regulatory threshold nor a direct measure of incomes, innovation output or social welfare. Third, the use of a diagnostic minimum can prevent the priority-setting process from overlooking structural constraints that an average composite score masks.

To operationalize the framework, regional authorities could maintain an annual evidence dashboard with the five components and their underlying indicators, record the fiscal and institutional feasibility of proposed interventions, and track post-intervention metrics. Suitable outcomes include operating-firm survival, real output per active enterprise, investment-to-output conversion, new market participation, export continuity and employment/value added when reliable firm-level data become available. The district-specific recommendations should be assessed through pilot programmes before scaling. Such arrangements align with the international preference for granular territorial statistics and evidence-based place-specific policy design.

Limitations merit explicit consideration. The dataset contains twelve cross-sectional territories rather than a causal panel; the mixed 2024 baseline and 2024–2025 business-entry dynamics should not be confused with fully harmonized contemporaneous observations. Some nominal economic series may be affected by prices and statistical coverage. Per-firm economic results are constructed proxies, not true labour productivity or profit. Min–max transformation is sensitive to sample extremes, and arithmetic aggregation allows compensation between dimensions [15]. Finally, quartile membership is mechanically relative: by construction, three territories fall into each group for this sample, even if overall conditions improve simultaneously. Later work should validate

the index with value added per employee, business mortality, real growth and investment effectiveness and examine alternative weighting/aggregation schemes.

5. Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that an integrated territorial assessment combining entrepreneurial activity, production, investment, market–export performance, and an activity-efficiency proxy provides a more comprehensive understanding of small-business economic potential than reliance on individual indicators. The equal-weight composite index classified the twelve territories of Namangan Region into four quartile groups, with threshold values of 25.72, 30.44, and 34.18 points, reflecting relative differences within the region rather than absolute levels of economic development. Namangan city (53.72), Yangiqo‘rg‘on (51.93), and Uychi (39.26) emerged as the relative leaders, whereas Chortoq (24.89), Mingbuloq (24.75), and Chust (20.17) were identified as territories with comparatively constrained economic potential. The 25.03-point difference between the average index scores of the leading and constrained groups highlights substantial territorial disparities and emphasizes the importance of differentiated policy interventions, although this difference should not be interpreted as a corresponding percentage gap in economic output. The analysis further indicates that insufficient investment and limited market integration represent more significant constraints in several intermediate and constrained districts than the number of operating enterprises alone. Accordingly, regional development policies should adopt a two-stage approach that first identifies each territory’s quartile classification and subsequently determines its weakest subindex to develop targeted measures addressing specific structural bottlenecks while strengthening existing competitive advantages. The sensitivity analysis, which produced a Spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.993 under an alternative weighting scenario, suggests that the territorial rankings are highly stable under the tested adjustments, although uncertainties associated with indicator selection, data coverage, and alternative methodological specifications remain. Future research should incorporate additional enterprise-level indicators, including employment, value added, profitability, and business survival rates, alongside annual updates of the composite index. Furthermore, the effectiveness of proposed policy interventions should be evaluated through rigorous before-and-after comparisons or appropriately controlled empirical designs to support evidence-based decision-making and promote more balanced, sustainable small-business development across Namangan Region.

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