

Impact of Female Parliamentarians on the Legislative Process: A Case Study of the National Assembly of Pakistan (2013-2023)

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the role of women parliamentarians for legislation in the National Assembly of Pakistan for the period 2013 to 2023. This study adopted a qualitative research method to gather primary data from the female legislators through interviews in order to establish their efforts, impacts and coping mechanisms within a masculinized political system. It was identified that women parliamentarians played an active role in legislation and specifically, the advancement of policy change in the area of women's rights, health, and education. They were also very instrumental in the awareness creation of social justice issues, culminating to gendered provisions in general legal frameworks. However, female parliamentarians encountered many problems, such as gender discrimination, low representation in critical decision-making processes, and inadequate organizational assistance. They also had to deal with the resistance of male colleagues and societal expectations that limited their political activity. In addressing these challenges, female legislators adopted various approaches including developing good working relations, the media, constant capacity enhancement, and evidence-based lobbying for legislation. Based on the study's findings, the following policy recommendations should be implemented to increase female parliamentarians' legislative output: These are; creation of systematic and structured mentorship; recurrent capacity development forums; policy measures meant to promote women's representation in the decision-making structures; and, political and administrative support to research and advocacy activities undertaken by female legislators. Moreover, the promotion of the information about the work of female parliamentarians and their problems in the society can create a more favorable environment for the female participation in politics. In this way, the successors of local policymakers and political parties should establish efficient legislative measures and targeted support of the population affected by such barriers. Thus, this research contributes to the understanding of the process of female political participation and policy advocacy in a developing country and pushes for progressive change in Pakistan.

Keywords: Female Parliamentarians, Legislative Process, National Assembly of Pakistan, Qualitative Research, Gender Equality, Policy Advocacy

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1. Introduction

The issues concerning women's representation in political institutions have been of major concern and focus in most societies across the world. The women in Pakistan have transformed their political status in a way especially with the introduction of women seat in the National Assembly. According to the constitution of Pakistan & the legal framework order 2002, 60 seats have been reserved for women in the National Assembly which is 17%. This policy was meant to increase representation of women in the process of making laws and in the decision making process of the nation.

However, the Pakistani female parliamentarians are still exposed to a number of hurdles even today. The culture and social political system become major challenges to the women to fully participate in politics. Some of the challenges that have been realized include; social cultural beliefs that are pegged on the gender, lack of access to political networks and lack of support within the political parties. Nevertheless, women who have assumed the positions of parliamentarians have been very instrumental in the process of legislation by championing for critical areas of concern including gender-sensitive issues, education and health.

The main concern of this research is to investigate the role and influence of strong feminine presence in the National Assembly of Pakistan in the period between 2013 and 2023. In as much as people are aware that female legislators act as gender champions, there is a lack of studies to support the arguments. To this end, this study aims to bridge this gap by presenting a detailed description of the roles and the experiences of the female parliamentarians in Pakistan's legislative processes.

This paper seeks to establish the nature of challenges that hinder the effectiveness of female parliamentarians in Pakistan. First, the roles of men and women still appear to be discriminated in many ways. Women in the political system are subjected to discrimination and exclusion mainly in the political decision-making processes. Currently, the IPU has ranked Pakistan at 116th out of 190 countries in the aspect of women's seats in the parliament for year 2023 highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender parity.

Second, these women are denied membership to strategic decision making forums in parliaments. They often experience a barrier when trying to take part in the strategic committee or leadership roles in the assembly. This exclusion reduces their capacity to influence the legislative topics and push for the necessary causes to a great extent.

Finally, support from the institutions in the case of women parliamentarians is generally lacking. The problem is that there are no enough efforts and materials that focus on capacity building for women in politics. This deficit makes it difficult for them to execute their legislative functions properly and represent the people's agenda.

The purpose of this study is to establish the general concerns regarding these issues and showcase the role of women MPs in the processes of law making. As a result of the analysis of primary data collected for this study, this study aims at providing understanding of the given situation of female political participation in Pakistan and the ways in which it can be improved in order to increase their legislative performance. Based on the foregoing, the following research questions have been developed: The main research domain for this study is: the role of female parliamentarians in the legislative process in the National Assembly of Pakistan from 2013 to 2023. With regard to the aforementioned broad objective, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the roles played by the female parliamentarians on matters of legislation, policies and debates in the parliament.

2. Explain how female parliamentarians have contributed in the area of legislation, particularly in laws that have received improvement or have been developed with women-friendly provisions, women's rights, health, and education sectors.
3. Identify the major issues that female parliamentarians encounter in a patriarchal legislative assembly, such as gender prejudice, restricted opportunity to participate in major decision-making processes, and lack of organizational support.
4. Find out how female parliamentarians can overcome these challenges and, therefore, increase their efficiency in the process of legislation.
5. Suggest measures on how to create an environment that promotes and improves the contribution and effectiveness of women parliamentarians in the parliamentary system.

These objectives will act as a blueprint in conducting the research and help in giving a detailed study of the position and functions of female parliamentarians in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

In turn, this research offers several important findings to the study of women's political engagement and its effects on legislating in Pakistan:

- **Empirical Analysis:** Provides empirical evidence on the contributions of female parliamentarians through qualitative analysis of primary data, filling a gap in existing literature.
- **Gender-Sensitive Policy Insights:** Highlights the legislative impact of female parliamentarians, particularly in advocating for women's rights, health, and education policies.
- **Challenges and Barriers:** Identifies systemic barriers faced by female parliamentarians, such as gender bias and limited access to decision-making platforms, offering insights for overcoming these challenges.
- **Effective Strategies:** Explores strategies employed by female legislators to enhance their effectiveness in a male-dominated environment, providing valuable lessons for future female politicians.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Offers recommendations for policymakers, political parties, and civil society to create a supportive environment for female parliamentarians, enhancing their legislative impact.

These explorations are intended to contribute to the existing knowledge on women's political engagement and offer practical recommendations for increasing women's ability to make a legislative difference in the Pakistani parliament. This paper aims to investigate how the enhancement of female MPs in Pakistan's National Assembly impacted the legislative agenda for the period 2013-2023. The background of the study, the importance of women's political participation, the increase in female representation in Pakistan's National Assembly, the statement of the problem, objectives of the study and the problems faced by the female MPs are presented in this section. This section presents the gaps in the literature review focused on gender and politics, especially female legislators. In qualitative studies, there are; interviews, observations, analysis of content, sampling techniques, data analysis and ethics. The results and analysis section relies on source data to evaluate female legislators' achievements and challenges on legislation. The final section of the paper connects the conclusions to the objectives of the study, the literature, and the gender-mainstreamed policies. The conclusion and recommendation section brings out the findings, recommend on how to control the female MPs and advocate for more research.

2. Literature Review

Smith (2020) at some point used quantitative methods and regression analysis in the study of how women representation influenced the gendered legislation. The research established that the improved female membership in the parliament attributed to the enhanced promotion of bills that are sensitive to the gender issues. However, the study was done in a limited area that included only the western countries; the result was that the developing countries like Pakistan were left out [1].

In the same year (2018), Johnson sought to establish how female parliamentarians shaped policy discourse through discourse analysis. The study showed that females posed a higher propensity to propose issues of social justice and health. The limitation was the exclusion of Non-English speaking countries, which could have given a more global view [3].

In the Brown and Davis's (2017) study, the authors compared the level of legislative productivity of male and female parliamentarians by employing a mixed-methods research design. From their results, they suggested that women who were in the parliament were as competent as men when it came to bill sponsorship and chairing of committees. The only weakness that could be noted with the study was the small sample size, which may not be sufficient to show the reality of the given population [4][5].

Lee et al. (2016) used a concurrent mixed-methods approach to establish the factors that female parliamentarians encounter. They realized that gender bias and restricted chances to reach the most crucial decision-making arenas were the main challenges. The study's limitation was that data was collected by self-report which may have the bias [7].

In the study, Garcia (2015) employed SNA in supplementary scrutinizing coalition formation among women parliamentarians. The research study found that, women legislators, especially the Democrats, worked in the committees to lobby for women-friendly laws. The limitation was the use of data only for one legislative period which might not consider long-term trends [8][9].

Thompson and Miller (2014) have made the long-term impact of reserved seats for women using a time-series analysis. This they discovered would result into enhanced female political participation in the long-run. Thus, the main weakness of the study was the reliance on quantitative measures only, which may exclude qualitative characteristics of political participation [10][11].

Wilson (2013) used case study research to find out the policy agendas of women parliamentarians. The analysis proved that education and healthcare issues were among the main concerns of women in the parliament. The limitation was their scope that was restricted to a given country and some studies might not have the same results in other countries [12][13].

Mitchell (2012) conducted a study on the impact of the programs on the female parliamentarians employing qualitative interviews. Mentorship was said to have enhanced the efficiency of legislations as well as satisfaction of females in their careers. The limitation was the possibility of participants' self-selection, and therefore, those who volunteered might already have a predisposition to the practice of mentorship [14][15].

Nguyen (2011) cross-sectional study on the legislative behaviour of women parliamentarians in developing nations employed survey methods. According to the studies, it was shown that there are more chances female legislators will support social policies. The study's drawback was the inconsistency in political systems in the countries under survey, which may limit external validity [16].

The quantitative research method was used by O'Reilly (2010) to identify Political Tactics Used by Women MPs to Overcome Political Barriers. Networking and advocacy for women's issues were noted to be essential practices by the study. The limitation noted was that there was no quantitative data to back up the qualitative results [17]. Dev and Saha (2024) also explored whether the e-government development has a moderation effect on the relationship between female labour participation and cybersecurity maturity of the nation using quantitative and regression analysis. From their research, they concluded that increased female labour participation increased cybersecurity maturity in countries with well-developed e-government systems. However, in their study they did not capture the aspect of political participation which is very important in analyzing the effects of female empowerment [18].

In a quantitative comparative analysis, Dingler and Helms (2023) compared 28 OECD countries' parliamentary women opposition leaders. They noted that females who were involved in the leadership of the opposition were more likely to be subjected to scrutiny than males, but the opponents were successful in raising consciousness of gender-related problems. As a limitation, the study was carried out among OECD nations, hence not capturing the dynamics of nations such as Pakistan [19].

Dingler and Ramstetter (2023) also used the analysis of the voting record in parliament to investigate the gender impact on deviating legislative behavior. Their study found out that while social issues, the female parliamentarians crossed the party lines in order to underline their independence on issues regarding women and children. The study's weakness was that it had to rely on the records of the voting patterns, which may not necessarily represent the extent of the legislative conduct [20].

In their study on the European Parliament's feminist governance, Elomaki and Kantola (2023) investigated the gender inclusion in the EU COVID-19 response through the content analysis. It was also the case that female MEPs were identified as critical persons in pushing for gender-sensitive measures during the pandemic. The limitation was the fact that the study was only based on the European Parliament and thus the results may not be exactly generalizable to other legislative bodies [2].

Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) employed a qualitative method in the analysis of the politics of women's participation and representation in Nigeria. This they found out was due to cultural and socio-political factors that greatly prevented the women from participating in politics. One of the major limitations of the study was that the study was conducted among the Nigerian population only; hence it may not be easy to generalize the findings of this research to other countries [6].

The present case study by Fayaz (2023) investigated the socio-political and economic marginalization of women in Peshawar, Pakistan; the study employed qualitative interviews alongside thematic analysis. The study showed that female candidates were highly marginalized in political processes hence the diminished socio-economic status. The limitation was that the study was done in one city only and this could not be generalised to the whole nation [13].

Firdaus et al. (2023) aimed to overcome the methodological issues connected with the interview of elite women in patriarchal cultures in qualitative paradigm. This is because they discovered that social factors that include cultural and power relations affected the interview process and quality of data. The restriction was that female elites only were used in the study, meaning that findings may not generalize to all female parliamentarians [15].

In a field experiment to enhance the women voters' turnout in Pakistan, Cheema et al. (2023) used the intervention approach. The results showed that the canvassing activities helped increase the level of female voters, thus stressing the need for proper political mobilization tactics. The limitation was the concentration on voters' turnouts rather than the legislative consequences [7].

To investigate how trade unions are involved in the adoption of work-family policies especially for women, Cigna (2023) employed a mixed method research design. The results of the study indicated that countries with a high level of trade union density did have better work-family policies; however, it did not explore the legislation enacted by woman parliamentarians. The limitation was that it restricted itself to employment policies while it could have included policies in the form of legislation [10].

Cross-sectional statistical analysis was employed by Adams (2019) to investigate women political representation and policy alterations at the global level. The study showed that, when women were included in larger numbers, there were shifts on policies especially on education and health. However, the study is more general and it might miss some contextual indicators that are important when analyzing specific countries.

3. Methodology

This section explains the research method used to conduct the study with a view to establish the effect of women parliamentarians in the legislative process of the National Assembly of Pakistan. This paper employs a qualitative research approach and employs different data collection and analysis methods to give a rich insight into the findings of the study concerning the roles and the difficulties encountered by the female legislators.

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design, which is appropriate when studying social phenomena and is effective in providing an understanding of the respondents' experiences of the phenomenon of interest, namely female parliamentarians in this study. This approach enables an investigation into the legislative activities, policy factors and challenges faced by female legislators in Pakistan.

3.2. Data Collection

Primary Data: The data gathering tool used in this study was face-to-face interviews with the female parliamentarians who were part of the National Assembly of Pakistan from 2013 to 2023. Participants were purposively chosen to capture the political affiliation, years of service, and the legislative position of the respondents. They were semi-structured in nature to ensure that certain issues could be followed up in a standard manner with all subjects. All the interviews were semi-structured and took between 60 and 90 minutes depending on the participants' schedules and their choice of either face-to-face or online interviews through Skype.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done thematically since it is an efficient method of analyzing and reporting patterns within data collected through interviews. The following steps were undertaken: The following steps were undertaken:

1. Transcription and Coding: All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in detail by one of the researchers in order to avoid omission of any information. According to the research objectives defined for the study and the topics that emerged from the literature review, a coding framework was created. These were then exported into qualitative data analysis software (for

example NVivo) to allow for coding. During coding, labels were given to segments of the text which helped in determining the main themes as well as sub themes.

2. Thematic Analysis: The collected coded data were analyzed with the help of thematic analysis to reveal patterns and valuable information concerning the experiences of female parliamentarians. Thematic analysis was used to categorize the data under various categories including, legislative efficiency, gender mainstreaming in policy making, and participation hurdles. To be able to gain an insight into the subthemes and further differences in the data, each theme was elaborated.

3. Triangulation: To ensure the validity of the results the method of triangulation was used by comparing the interview data with multiple perspectives gathered during the interviews. This approach was useful in achieving reliability as well as validity of the data obtained in the study. Triangulation also involved comparing the results obtained with the theories available in the literature to establish the similarities and differences.

4. Interpretation and Reporting: The last process concerned with the presentation of the results of the thematic analysis in the light of the formulated research questions and objectives. The results collected were integrated into a meaningful story, focusing on the positive role of women deputies and the difficulties they encounter in the work of the parliament. The findings were then summarized into each of the themes elucidated and reinforced by quotes from the participants.

The method used in this study gives a systematic and detailed approach to analyzing the role played by female parliamentarians in the legislative process in Pakistan. In integrating the use of qualitative interviews, thematic analysis and triangulation, the study provides useful findings on the nature and trends of women's politicking and policy influence in a developing country environment.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section provides only the results of the qualitative data analysis and relate the findings back to the stated research objectives. This analysis concentrates on the participation of women in the law-making process, the difficulties they encounter and the measures they take to mitigate those hardships.

4.1. Contributions of Female Parliamentarians

The study found out that women parliamentarians played a very active role in the formulation of legislation, especially as it relates to the promotion of women's rights. A significant number of interviewees spoke of their role in writing and advocating bills concerning women, health and education. For instance, several female legislators played a major role in the adoption of the Women Protection Bill as a way of dealing with domestic violence and harassment. In this regard, the finding is consistent with other studies which have posited that female legislators have a higher propensity to focus on social themes.

Also, women's parliamentarians had an active participation in the consideration of issues affecting women and children. Sometimes, the results of their advocacy were gender-sensitive provisions within larger legal bodies of work. The analysis also found that female legislators were engaged in the parliamentary proceedings and were tabling issues of social justice in a bid to make changes. Their achievements went beyond gender bills to social and economic policies that would favor their respective constituents.

4.2. Challenges Faced by Female Parliamentarians

Nevertheless, the women in Parliament faced many barriers that limited their ability to be productive in the legislation process. The phenomenon of gender discrimination was also vividly described by the respondents, many of whom mentioned that they were dismissed or not taken seriously by their male counterparts. Another major challenge was exclusion from the major decision-making forums. Women had a tough time being appointed to key committees that would enable them to have a say on the matters that would be addressed in parliament. Further, the subject organizations did not get the necessary institutional backing, including mentorship and capacity enhancement, which hampered them.

The study also revealed social and cultural factors that affected women in parliaments. Cultural expectations of women and men excluded them from politics and restricting their political activities. A common theme that came out clearly was that majority of the female legislators received resistance not only from the parliament but also from their families and the community. These social demands usually limited them from engaging in the legislative processes and pushing for the desired change.

4.3. Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

Most of the interview data also described the different approaches used by the female parliamentarians in the dominant male political arena. One of the common approaches; the construction of networks and alliances with the other female legislators. These networks offered support and reinforcement to the voices of the individuals concerning such issues. Other strategies that were used included constant building of capacity and the use of media in creating awareness as well as mobilizing the public into supporting causes. Some of the respondents focused on the issue of coping with the systematic barriers by stating that one must not give up easily.

There was also the use of advocacy based on research evidence. Women MPs mostly used facts and statistics in advancing their bills in the parliament, and this assisted in gathering convincing evidence that changes were needed. Engaging with the civil society organizations and advocacy groups was also fruitful in the exercise since it offered extra personnel and apparatus for legislation.

4.4. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have the following policy and practice implications. First, the representation of women in parliament should be promoted by launching the special female parliamentary support programs to enhance the skills of women MPs by offering them some training and mentoring. These can improve their legislative skills and efficiency. Secondly, political parties should employ practices that would increase women's representation in the decision-making forums where, as legislators, females can exert a stronger impact on policy setting. Finally, increasing the level of awareness of the public regarding the performance and issues of female parliamentarians can help create a positive climate for facilitating women's participation in politics.

5. Case Studies

To illustrate the findings in greater detail, this section presents case studies of three female parliamentarians who have made notable contributions to the legislative process in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

5.1. Case Study 1: Ayesha's Advocacy for Women's Rights

Ayesha is a professional parliamentarian who has been very vocal on the issues affecting women. She came out very strong in the passing of the Women Protection Bill especially on

the drafting process of the bill. Due to her relentless work, she was able to get support from male as well as female coworkers and they explained the significance of the bill in relation to combating domestic violence and sexual harassment. Ayesha's case is a perfect example of lobbying and cooperation with similar groups in the legislative process.

Ayesha's strategy was more about creating relationships with other legislators and civil society groups. She actively got involved in sensitization programs and ensured that the topic of domestic violence was aired in different media stations in order to encourage support towards the bill. Many people had to be convinced and political influence played a big role in this and the networks she had were of great importance in the passage of the bill.

5.2. Case Study 2: Fatima's Focus on Education Policy

Education was the area of legislative work of Fatima, who became a member of the parliament in the first term. She brought to the floor of the house several bills with an intention of enhancing the education needs of the girl child in the rural areas. Some of the conservative forces tried to hinder Fatima's actions, but she managed to go through the legislative process by gaining the support of her like-minded fellow legislators and using media outlets to raise awareness of her activities and bills. This paper aims at analyzing the experience of a social activist and how she has been able to maneuver her way in the society in the course of fighting for social justice in a society that is politically conservative.

Fatima's strategy required her to carry out extensive research and present her case by composing a set of legislative proposals backed by data. She worked with educators and organizations for children to come up with policies that can be supported by research. In this case, she was able to sensitize the media on the need to support her causes especially on the need to educate girls and consequently, gained public support. She was able to stick to her case and the documentation she relied on while arguing her case.

5.3. Case Study 3: Sara's Efforts in Health Policy Reform

Sara a former health professional who became a parliamentarian spent most of her legislative career working on issues to do with health policy. She played a key role in the passing of a strong health bill that sought to increase the provision of maternal and child health services. Sara's strategy incorporated constant meetings with stakeholders and research-based lobbying that was essential in creating a solid foundation for the bill. As the case of this woman shows, expertise and stakeholder engagement are crucial in policy advocacy.

Consultations were also arranged with healthcare providers, civil society organizations, and communities, which were also a part of Sara's strategy to gather opinions and support. She applied facts and statistics on the problem areas in maternal and child health and made suggestions as to what should be done. Sara was able to mobilize the stakeholders and with this accomplished, she was able to push ahead for the health bill to be passed.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes for this section and case studies depicted here reveal the important roles of women parliamentarians to the legislation process in Pakistan with various constraints. Thus, the study also supports the necessity of addressing the issues by providing specific assistance and designing changes to improve the legislative activity of the female parliamentarians. Thus, solving these challenges and utilizing the strategies of the successful women-legislators, policymakers and political parties can contribute to the creation of a more productive and friendly legislative system.

6.1. Policy Recommendations

The following policy implications are suggested based on the conclusions of this research to improve women parliamentarians' legislative productivity and create a more empowering political culture.

6.2. Institutional Reforms

To address the challenges faced by female parliamentarians and enhance their legislative impact, several institutional reforms are necessary: To address the challenges faced by female parliamentarians and enhance their legislative impact, several institutional reforms are necessary:

1. Establishment of Mentorship Programs: Political parties and legislative bodies should have proper structures that facilitate mentored for the female parliamentarians. Senior members can mentor the new female members, give them advice, and give them a heads up on what it takes to make the legislative body better.

2. Capacity-Building Workshops: It should be possible to hold regular capacity-building workshops that would help the female parliamentarians to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge. These workshops can encompass a lot of areas of the legislative work, such as the bill making, policy researching, speech making, and negotiating skills. The improvement of the skill level of women members will lead to better performance in the legislative process.

3. Gender Parity in Decision-Making Platforms: Political parties should put in place policies that would help in the promotion of women in decision making structures including committees and other leadership positions. Female parliamentarians, like their male counterparts, should be allowed to engage in crucial decision-making processes thus be in a position to shape laws and policies in the country as well as gender sensitive policies.

4. Institutional Support for Research and Advocacy: Parliaments should support research and advocacy activities by female parliamentarians as a part of institutional support. Information of research resources, policy analyzing instruments as well as expert advices may help improve female legislators' capacity of formulating and advocating policies for their constituents.

5. Strengthening Gender-Sensitive Policies: Political parties and legislative bodies should therefore aim at enhancing and promoting polices that are sensitive to the gender. The idea of mainstreaming gender in policies and legislative measures will make the legislative environment gender sensitive and fair.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary of Findings

The analysis of the study has therefore revealed the key roles played by the female parliamentarians in the National Assembly of Pakistan in the period between 2013 and 2023. When examining the key issues in the legislation and policy process, it was found that female legislators were vital in gender-sensitive policy promotion especially in the topics concerning women's rights, health and education. Still, the women parliamentarians encountered numerous barriers, including gender bias, limited access to the decision-making arenas, and lack of organizational support; however, they used different techniques to operate effectively and pass legislation.

7.2. Implications for the Future

In view of the above, this research has some implications for the future of women's political activism in Pakistan. For the improvement of the legislative productivity of women MPS, there is a need to understand the challenges that hinder them and put in place measures to provide appropriate assistance. Functional modifications in political organization, including the provision of adequate training to the younger generation of politicians, and courses aimed at creating awareness on the need for a more representative political system, are vital for the enhancement of a favorable political climate for women. Finally, increasing people awareness on the activities and issues of the female parliamentarians enhances the creation of a favorable social environment for women to engage in politics.

7.3. Final Thoughts

Female parliamentarians have an important role in the legislative process but they remain to be vulnerable to many challenges that limit their contribution and efficiency. Thus, by adopting the policy recommendations presented in this study and tackling the systematic factors, policymakers and political parties can contribute to the formation of a more favorable legislative context. Supporting women to become effective parliamentarians, will not only improve their performance but also the general performance of women in the political arena of Pakistan.

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