



BAANI

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY

How Maldivians View Foreign Countries

March 2026



Approval Rating of Foreign Countries

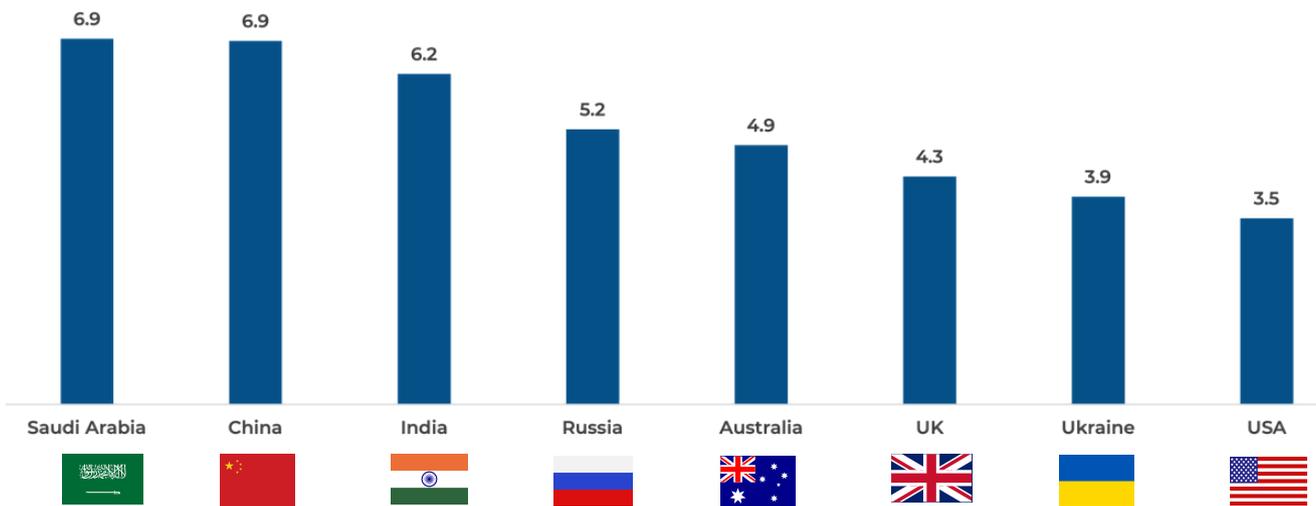
The Bani Centre was keen to understand what Maldivians think of foreign countries, especially those that have a big influence in the Maldives. In order to answer this question, we asked Maldivian voters to tell us what they think of eight foreign countries by rating each one on a scale of 0–10, with a score of 10 being the most positive.

We were intrigued to understand voters' opinion of China and India, two Asian superpowers often considered rivals for influence over Maldives. We also wanted to hear voters' views on Saudi Arabia, which has an outsized influence as the birthplace of Islam and custodian of holy sites, and a generous bilateral funder. We also wanted to hear Maldivian voters' views of Western powers, including the USA, UK and Australia – the three Western powers with embassies in Male'. Lastly, given the ongoing war in Ukraine, we were interested to hear Maldivians' perceptions of Russia and Ukraine, two countries whose people enjoy holidaying in the Maldives.

As Figure 1 shows, Saudi Arabia and China emerged as the most favourably viewed countries, each receiving an average score of 6.9 out of 10. India followed closely with a score of 6.2, while Russia was in the middle of the rankings with an average of 5.2. Australia was also placed in the middle, with a score of 4.9 out of 10.

At the lower end were the UK, Ukraine, and the United States. The UK received a score of 4.3, followed by Ukraine at 3.9, and the United States last at 3.5

Figure 1: Overall Rating of Foreign Countries



Methodology

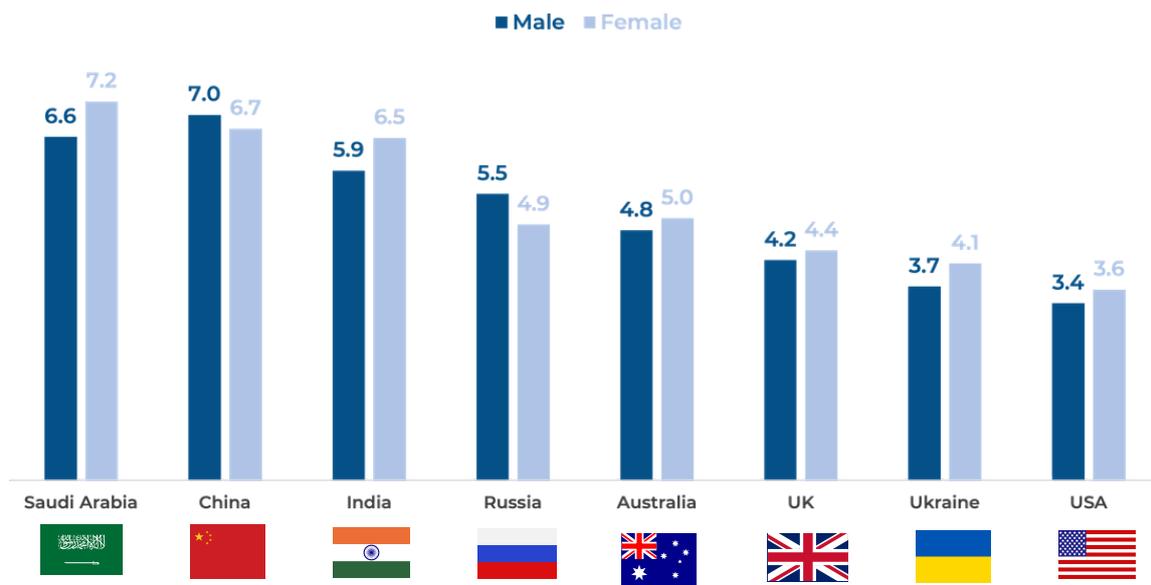
The Bani Centre, an independent think tank based in Male', conducted the opinion poll between 23 November and 1 December 2025, using random telephone interviews. We collected 391 responses and followed international best practice for opinion polling.

For the above results our poll has a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. This means that if the poll was conducted multiple times, 95% of the time the results would fall within a 5% margin of our poll. The results have been weighted to ensure a representative sample of voters.

Foreign Countries' Ratings, Based on Gender, Age, and Island Type

We are able to break down our polling data by gender, age, whether voters come from urban cities or rural islands. It must be noted, however, that as we break down the data, the margin of error increases, meaning that the results are less accurate. With this limitation in mind, here are the results of the poll by gender, age, and location.

Figure 2: Approval of Foreign Countries Across Genders (Weighted)



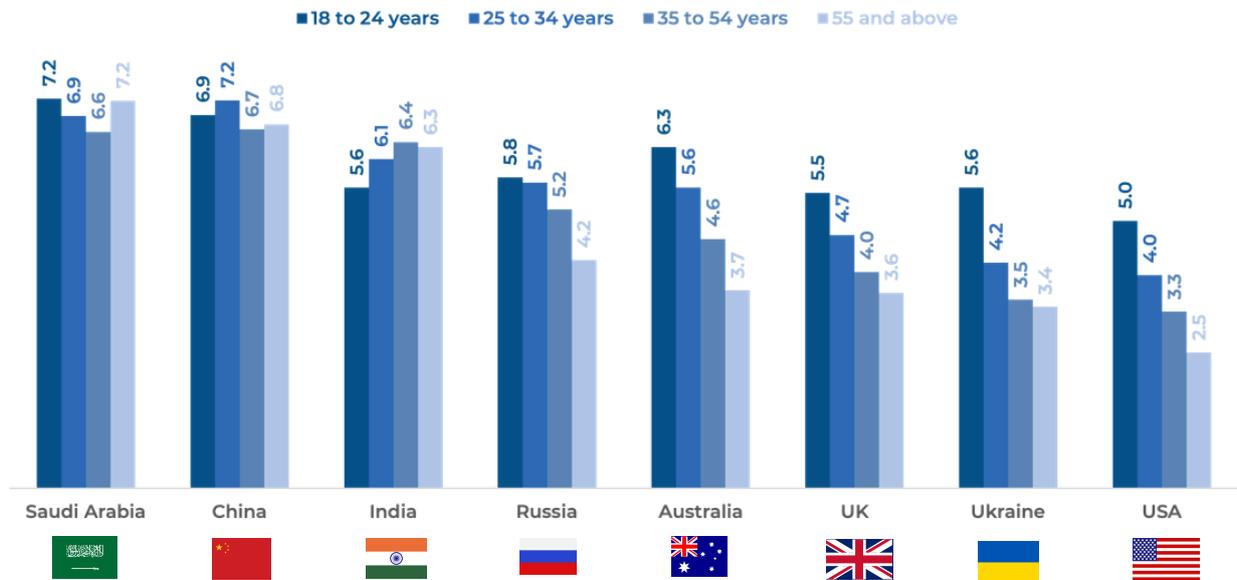
When we break down the results by gender, we find that female respondents rated Saudi Arabia more favourably than male respondents (7.2 compared to 6.6), while men expressed slightly more positive views of China than women, with average scores of 7.0 and 6.7 respectively.

Across most of the remaining countries, female respondents tended to give marginally higher ratings than men. India was viewed more positively by women than men (6.5 compared to 5.9), while men rated Russia slightly higher than women. Women consistently expressed somewhat more favourable opinions than men towards Australia, the UK, Ukraine and the United States.

When comparing the results across age groups, younger respondents tended to express more favourable views of foreign countries than older age groups, strikingly so when it came to Western countries. The United States recorded the sharpest generational divide, dropping from a score of 5.0 among 18–24 year-olds to just 2.5 among those aged 55 and above.

Saudi Arabia and China received the highest scores across all age brackets. India was something of an outlier in so far that younger people ranked it less favourably than older people.

Figure 3: Rating of Foreign Countries Across Age Groups (Weighted)

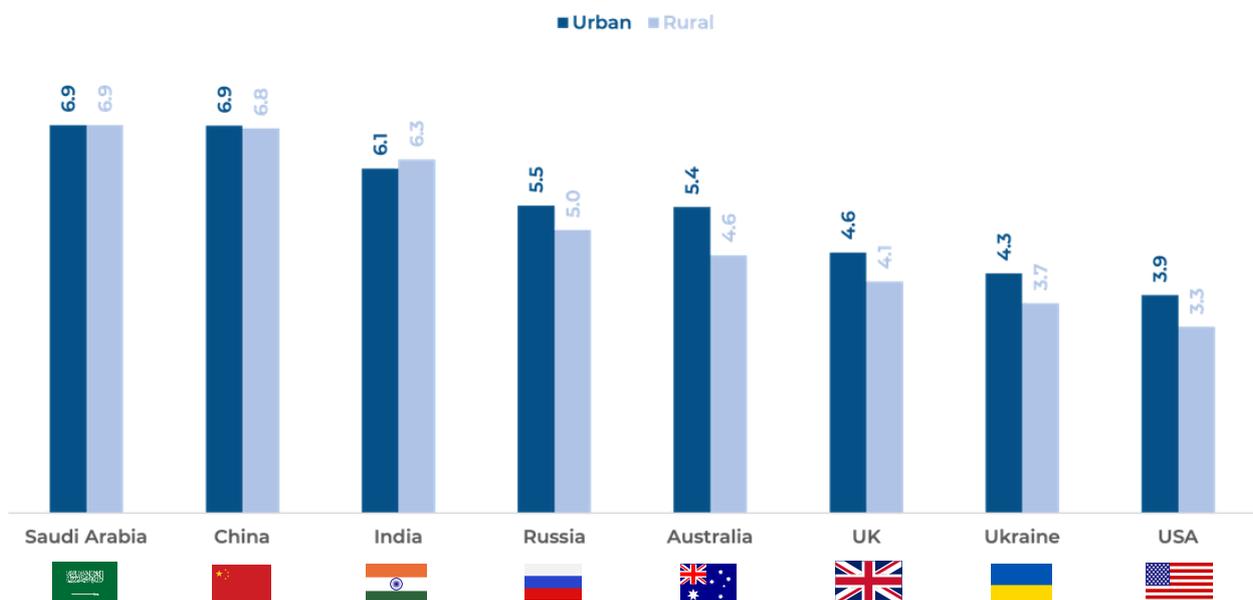


When the results are disaggregated by urban and rural areas, we found modest but consistent differences between urban and rural respondents. Saudi Arabia and China are viewed most favourably by both groups, with nearly identical scores for Saudi Arabia and only a slight urban-rural gap in perceptions of China. India also receives relatively strong ratings overall.

For the remaining countries, urban respondents tended to hold more favourable opinions than rural respondents. Russia, Australia, UK and Ukraine received higher scores from urban areas. The United States ranks lowest overall among both urban and rural respondents, with particularly low scores in rural communities.

Urban areas include Male' and cities with a population higher than 5,000, including Kulhudhufushi, Thinadhoo, Fuvahmulah and Addu. Rural areas are categorised as islands with a population less than 5,000.

Figure 4: Rating of Foreign Countries Across Island Types (Weighted)



About Our Polls

The Baani Centre for International Policy, an independent NGO based in the Maldives, has been conducting opinion research since April 2023, when we started tracking the popularity of political leaders ahead of that year's presidential election.

Our opinion polls gauge public opinion through random telephone interviews, which are conducted in Dhivehi by a team of trained Maldivian enumerators. Our telephone polls follow internationally established methodology guidelines regarding sample size, as well as weighting for respondents' age and gender, ensuring that the results are representative of the Maldivian voting population.

This poll has a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This means that if the poll was conducted multiple times, 95% of the time the results would be within 5% of the results of our poll.

Methodology

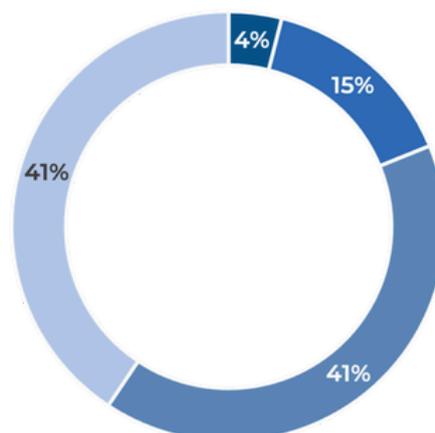
Sample

Baani used random digit dialling in order to collect data. Random digit dialling can generate a large share of invalid or nonworking numbers (e.g., disconnected lines, business numbers, or numbers not assigned to individuals), which reduces efficiency and increases call attempts without being able to reach a valid individual. Accordingly, 4,029 of the numbers we contacted in this survey were invalid. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the limitations section.

As seen in Figure 5, Baani conducted 391 successful interviews (7 interviews more than our target of 384 to achieve our desired confidence level and margin of error). Of all the active numbers that Baani reached, 15% of the calls (1,480), were persons who either did not wish to participate in the survey or belonged to a demographic that was not eligible to participate in this survey – due to being minors under 18 or foreigners; 41% of the calls (4,016) were persons who either did not answer the call or had their phones switched off.

Figure 5: Total Calls Breakdown

■ Success ■ Rejected ■ No Answer ■ Switched Off



As shown in Figure 6, 228 respondents (58.3%) were male while 163 respondents (41.7%) were female.

When looking at the different age groups (Figure 7), 12.5% of respondents were between 18 to 25 years old, 23% were between 25 to 35 years old, 47.3% were between 35 to 54 years old, 11.8% were between 55 to 64 years old, and 5.4% were above 65.

When looking at the geographic spread of the respondents (Figure 8), 67.8% were from rural areas with a population of less than 5,000 people whereas 32.2% were from urban areas with a population of over 5,000.

Sample Size

The Maldives Bureau of Statistics' population projections for 2025 estimate that the population aged 18 years and above totals 274,625. Based on this figure, we need to conduct a minimum of 384 telephone interviews to generate results with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. We conducted 391 interviews for this poll.

In bigger countries, such as the United Kingdom, which has a population of almost 70 million, pollsters regularly conduct around 1,200 interviews, giving them a similar margin of error and confidence level to Baani's polls.

The Questionnaire

The telephone questionnaire collected the following information from each participant:

1. Citizenship (Q1)
2. Age (Q2)
3. Gender (Q3)
4. Permanently registered island (voting constituency) (Q4)
5. Approval rating of foreign countries (score of 0 - 10) (Q5)

Information was only collected from Maldivians, who are 18 years of age at the time of the call. The Poll was conducted in Dhivehi over the phone.

The full questionnaire (Dhivehi and English) can be found at Annex 1.

Figure 6: Gender Breakdown of Responses

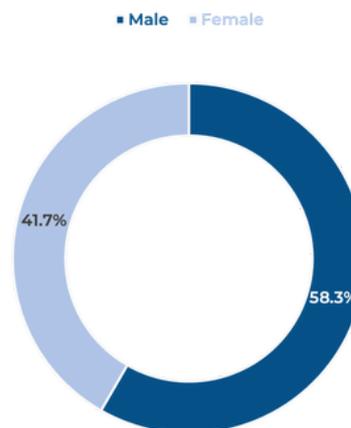


Figure 7: Age Breakdown of Responses

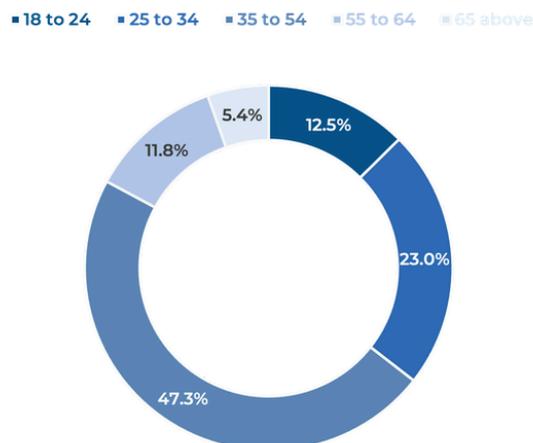
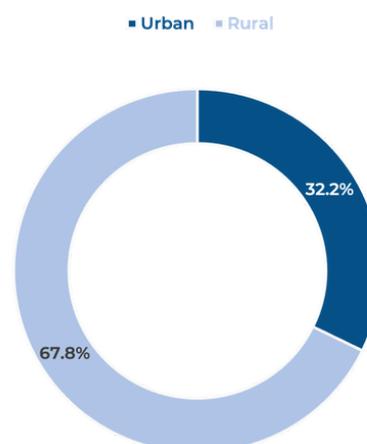


Figure 8: Geographic Breakdown of Responses



Phone Number Generation

As we were unable to obtain a list of active mobile phone numbers from telecom operators we had to generate our own list. To do this, we used a random number generator to generate two separate lists of 7 digit numbers. The first list consisted of numbers that begin with a “7” (Dhiraagu Numbers), and the second list consisted of numbers that begin with a “9” (Ooredoo numbers). The two lists were then merged and randomized to create a fully random list of phone numbers.

Polling Period

Data collection began on 23 November 2025 and concluded on 1 December 2025.

Enumeration

A team of experienced Maldivian enumerators were trained on how to conduct the survey and conducted all interviews in Dhivehi. They inputted the data gathered from the surveys into a data collection tool.

The enumerators also tracked the number of successful calls and deactivated numbers, allowing us to track call response rates.

Data Weighting

Baani weighted the data using the [Maldives Population Projections 2022-2062](#) published by the Maldives Bureau of Statistics. Baani chose to primarily use population projection data rather than the 2022 Census data, to ensure that our sample weighting was done with the most updated and representative information. However, it should be noted that as information on registered islands were not available in the population projections, data from the 2022 Census was used to derive the geographic population distribution.

Sample weighting was carried out using raking (iterative proportional fitting), and all analyses in this report are based on the weighted data. Raking was applied to ensure that the weighted data matches the actual population structure on the key demographic factors of gender, age and geographic location.

Limitations

Random Digit Dialling

Baani used random digit dialling by generating the numbers as stated above in order to reach individuals eligible to participate in the survey. However, we note that this is a costly and time consuming method of collecting data. This is because over 40% of the numbers we dial are non-existent numbers, meaning that a large amount of our data collection period is spent contacting inactive numbers.

Furthermore, random digit dialling provides no prior information about the individuals being contacted, making it difficult to achieve specific targets for each demographic subgroup. This limits Baani’s ability to precisely control sample composition when disaggregating data by characteristics such as age, gender, and location in order to ensure representativeness of the Maldivian population.

Survey Participation and Response Accuracy

During the enumeration period, a significant number of respondents declined to participate due to distrusting that Baani was an independent institution as well as broader political disengagement that resulted in a reluctance to comment on political matters.

In addition, response bias, particularly social desirability bias, may have influenced some of the responses. Certain respondents may have felt pressure to provide answers perceived as neutral or non-offensive toward the current administration. This is particularly relevant given the proportion of civil servants within the population, who may have felt uncomfortable openly expressing critical views towards the government. This may help explain the prevalence of neutral responses, with most political leaders clustering around the middle of the scale and receiving average scores between 4 and 6.

Margins of Error by Subgroups

While the results are based on 391 interviews, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the analyses for each subgroup (age, gender and location), are based on smaller sample sizes. This means that the margin of error is likely to be higher than that of our overall results. In order to maintain a lower margin of error for each of these subgroups, Baani would have needed to have a larger sample size within each subgroup to achieve the same level of confidence and margin of error as our overall results.

Figure 9: Margins of Error by Subgroups

Gender	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Female	163	7.70%
Male	228	6.50%

Age	Sample Size	Margin of Error
18 to 24 years	49	14.00%
25 to 34 years	90	10.30%
35 to 54 years	185	7.20%
55 and above	67	12.00%

Island Size	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Rural	265	6.00%
Urban	126	8.70%

Figure 9 provides an overview of the margin of error for each of the subgroups. While the margin of error for gender and island type are not far off from our 5% margin of error target, the margin of error for each age category is notably higher. This is because the age breakdown was done based on four subgroups (18-24, 25-34, 35-55 and 55 and above), which reduces the number of respondents in each group. Consequently, the analysis for the age breakdown was done based on a smaller sample size and therefore carries a higher margin of error compared to gender and location.

Annex 1: Baani Opinion Poll Questionnaire

Introduction:

Assalaamu Alaikum!

My name is [name] and I am calling on behalf of Baani Centre, a local NGO. We are conducting a poll to gauge the public's opinion of Maldivian political leaders and foreign countries.

Your number was randomly selected for the survey, which will take 5 minutes. Participation is voluntary, and we will not ask any questions that can be used to identify you. We will share the results of the opinion poll with you when it is finished.

May I proceed with the survey?

- If yes - Proceed to Questions below
- If no - Thank them and conclude the call

Voter Characteristics Questions:

1. Are you Maldivian?

- a. Yes
- b. No (end call)

2. How old are you?

- a. 18 to 24 years
- b. 25 to 34 years
- c. 35 to 54 years
- d. 55 to 64 years
- e. 65 and above

3. Which voting constituency are you from?

- a. Open-ended

Main Question

4. I will now read out a list of foreign countries. What score between 0-10 would you give these countries?

- India
- China
- USA
- UK
- Australia
- Saudi Arabia
- Russia
- Ukraine

הגשתכם חייבת להיות!

הגישתכם חייבת להיות ברורה וקלה להבנה. כל פרטים שיש להם חשיבות מיוחדת חייבים להיכלל בהגשתכם.
הגישתכם חייבת להיות מקיפה וכוללת את כל הפרטים הנדרשים. כל פרטים שיש להם חשיבות מיוחדת חייבים להיכלל בהגשתכם.
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- הגישתכם חייבת להיות מקיפה וכוללת את כל הפרטים הנדרשים.

(Q1) מהו המונח המתייחס ל...?

- (א) המונח המתייחס ל...
- (ב) המונח המתייחס ל...

(Q2) מהו המונח המתייחס ל...?

- (א) המונח המתייחס ל...

(Q3) מהו המונח המתייחס ל...?

- (א) המונח המתייחס ל...
- (ב) המונח המתייחס ל...

(Q4) מהו המונח המתייחס ל...?

- (א) המונח המתייחס ל...

تشریح کر کے سیکڑی کھانسی کے سببوں کو لکھ کر تھریس تھریس کر کے لکھو۔

(Q5) سیکڑی کھانسی کے سببوں کو لکھ کر تھریس تھریس کر کے لکھو۔ 0 تا 10 تک کے سببوں کو لکھ کر تھریس تھریس کر کے لکھو۔

1. سیکڑی کھانسی
2. کھانسی
3. سیکڑی کھانسی
4. سیکڑی کھانسی
5. سیکڑی کھانسی
6. سیکڑی کھانسی
7. سیکڑی کھانسی
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