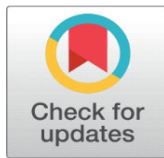


NAVIGATING CHANGE: THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF ASSAM AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary political issues of Assam are collective and profoundly rooted in socio-historical processes. Some of the most important issues include illegal immigration, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), anti-dam protests on the Subansiri River, persistent underdevelopment, gender-related issues, opposition to land and irrigation policies, ecological issues like river erosion and landslides, calls for new states, and opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Assamese youth organizations have become influential stakeholders, bringing up these issues through democratic and non-democratic channels, presenting logical reasons to authorities, and encouraging widespread involvement. This essay examines the ideological stances, tactics, and political ramifications of the protests carried out by several youth organizations, especially those connected to the NRC and CAA [Baruah \(2020\)](#)

Keywords: Illegal Immigration, NRC, Subansiri River, Land Policy, Assamese Identity, Political Mobilisation, Youth Organisations

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "youth bulge" describes a demographic period in which a sizable portion of the population is young, presenting both opportunities and challenges for the advancement of society. This demographic advantage is important for Assam as long as the state creates the platforms, skills, and resources needed for successful young involvement. Youth organisations therefore occupy an essential place in political mobilisation, grassroots leadership, and the articulation of regional aspirations. [Henrik \(2006\)](#)

The concept of the "youth bulge" refers to a demographic phase in which a large proportion of the population reaches productive age due to the transition from high to low fertility, but the fraction of children and old stays comparably small. However, progress cannot be ensured by numbers alone; human resource quality is crucial.

Only by enacting laws that provide young people with chances for meaningful participation and pertinent skills can a state or country capitalize on the advantages of a youth bulge. In today's competitive environment, unorganized and politically neutral adolescents typically find limited possibilities for employment and influence. Acknowledging this, policy-making circles are placing more emphasis on how youth groups influence social and economic results, especially in areas like Assam where youth have a great deal of potential to contribute to socioeconomic development. Planners and policymakers unhesitatingly acknowledge the value of this demographic as human capital, and the active participation of a predominantly youthful electorate demonstrated, for instance, in favoring stability during national elections further reinforces the nation's faith in the vision and agency of its youth. According to [Atal \(2005\)](#), the term "youth" has biological and sociological connotations and encompasses a variety of culturally distinct subgroups. In India with high dropout rates and socio-economic inequalities youth organisations provide as vital forums for expression, involvement, and representation [Yogesh \(2005\)](#)

Despite high illiteracy and dropout rates in India, which limit the proportion of students, the youth of Assam comprise a substantial and lively demographic resource. According to government policy pronouncements, these groups should not only profit from development initiatives but also serve as active stakeholders in planning and decision-making processes. To boost their contribution to national development, the Government of Assam has launched efforts targeted at enhancing the ability, effectiveness, and socio-political participation of youth groups, making them economically productive, politically energetic, and socially constructive [Baruah \(1999\)](#).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Assam's political landscape has seen substantial transformation in the past decades, although the challenges at its core illegal immigration, identity insecurity, and uneven development remain largely unaddressed. The problems surrounding NRC and CAA continue to cause profound sociopolitical differences despite widespread mobilizations spearheaded by powerful youth organizations like AASU, AJYCP, AAMSU, and ABSU. The lack of clarity in policy implementation, the conflicting responses of political leadership, and the fragmentation among youth bodies have further compounded the situation. The challenge arises in recognizing whether these repeated cycles of agitation and reform efforts are addressing the core reasons or merely re-politicising historical worries. This study investigates how youth organisations traverse this complicated terrain and how their actions impact Assam's modern politics.

3. REVIEW LITERATURE

- 1) [Baruah \(1999\)](#), "India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality", explains the origins of Assamese ethnic nationalism and demonstrates how identity politics influence public protests. His examination of the Assam Movement offers an essential context for comprehending today's youth-led demonstrations.
- 2) [Weiner \(1983\)](#), "The Political Demography of Assam", investigates the political ramifications of immigration-related population shifts. His writings demonstrate why citizenship and identity are still major issues and give NRC-related discussions historical context.

- 3) [Misra \(2014\)](#), "The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland", believes that marginalisation and centre-periphery relations promote protest politics in Assam. The importance of youth organisations is implicit in his description of social mobilisations and regional political consciousness.
- 4) [Hazarika \(1994\)](#), "Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast", story emphasizes how immigration, insurgency, and ethnic tensions impact Assam's political institutions. The long-standing concerns that youth organizations channel during events like the CAA demonstrations are contextualized by his work.
- 5) [Baruah \(2017\)](#), "Youth Movements in Northeast India", especially explores the political activity of young groups in the Northeast, highlighting their power to activate civil society. Her research shows that student bodies are becoming more politically active.
- 6) [Goswami \(2020\)](#), "Citizenship, Identity, and Politics in Assam", investigates how youth organizations understand and challenge the socio-legal difficulties of NRC and CAA. She contends that at the national level, youth collectives magnify local issues.
- 7) [Sharma \(2006\)](#), "Territorial Politics and Migration in Assam", examines migration as a historical phenomenon and makes the case that deeper structural changes are the root cause of political disputes. Youth organisations are positioned as inheritors of a long history of mobilisation.
- 8) [Baruah \(2021\)](#), "The Politics of Citizenship in Assam", assesses how political affiliations of Assam have changed as a result of the NRC and CAA. His work reflects the evolving tactics of youth organizations and sheds light on ideological changes.

4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Assam's present political trajectory is inseparable from population transitions, ethnic contestations, and the long history of migration from adjacent regions. The 1979–85 Assam Movement represented a turning point, leading to the Assam Accord and altering political objectives around citizenship and identity. Youth organizations have been crucial in expressing public dissatisfaction in recent decades, especially with reference to the NRC update (2019) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019). Their significance extends beyond agitation they influence government, determine electoral outcomes, and express the voice of the state's numerous ethnic communities. It is necessary to place these organizations in the sociohistorical framework of Assam and examine how they have responded to current issues in order to comprehend their political significance.

5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine the results of Assamese youth organizations' agitations against the NRC and CAA.
- 2) To evaluate whether the problems with NRC and CAA are new developments or have their roots in Assam's lengthy political past.
- 3) To evaluate the philosophies, tactics, and inclinations of significant youth organizations with respect to these matters.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How have youth-led protests against the NRC and CAA affected Assam?
- 2) Do the current discussions surrounding NRC and CAA represent long-standing political complaints, or are they brand-new?
- 3) How do Assamese youth organizations understand political rights, citizenship, and identity?

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive research design and relies primarily on secondary data, including books, government reports, newspaper articles, and scholarly publications. Analytical methods such as content analysis and thematic comparison have been used to evaluate the strategies and outcomes of youth-led movements.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

8.1. NRC IMPLEMENTATION'S ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL DIFFICULTIES

When Assam's final National Register of Citizens (NRC) was released on August 31, 2019, 19,06,657 candidates who had applied to be added to the list of citizens were excluded. However, the names of individuals who were left out have not been made public. If people are dissatisfied with the decisions made on their objections and claims, they can ask the Foreigners Tribunals for additional review. A total of 3,30,27,661 persons applied through 68,37,660 NRC applications between late May 2015 and August 31, 2015. Each proposal was carefully examined to determine eligibility for inclusion, making the process extremely complex and costing the nation more than Rs 1,600 crore [Baruah \(2020\)](#).

In contrast to the rest of the country, Assam's NRC updating process is governed by Rule 4A and the related Schedule of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issuance of National Identity Cards) Rules 2013. The Assam Accord's deadline of midnight on March 24, 1971, was followed in the creation of these restrictions. The NRC updating process was started in Assam as part of the Supreme Court's 2013 ruling, according to a press statement from state coordinator Prateek Hajela. For a long period, about 52,000 State government employees have been working on the significant NRC overhaul. These statutory officers make all admissions and exclusion decisions.

The entire NRC update process has been conducted deliberately, impartially, and transparently. The AASU described the final NRC, which the entire state eagerly awaited, as flawed and lacking.

The disparity between the federal government's estimate of illegal immigration and the NRC's exclusion count was questioned by the student organization that spearheaded the six-year Assam Movement. We are dissatisfied with the outcome of the large-scale exercise and believe that the NRC has several shortcomings. The final exclusion amount of 19.06 lakh differs greatly from the Union government's monthly estimate. In the past, the union Home minister had said that the figure was about 50 lakh.

AASU chief adviser Samujjal Bhattacharya stated that while the Union and State governments offered a number of estimates, none of them were as low as the one in

the NRC. This is a serious problem that impacts not only the northeast but the entire country. The All-Assam Students' Union and the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) both took the time to carefully consider the problem and offer the best solution. The disputes and disputes around the solutions are closely related to the All-Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) and other student organizations, and they have made a number of reasons in favor of their stances [Baruah \(2020\)](#).

The AJYCP has investigated the infiltration problem in Assam. It has accused the Indian government of allowing the systematic infiltration of people from outside the state and the nation into Assam for the purpose of economic exploitation, which is driving the state into a severe crisis that affects social life. It suggested updating the National Register of Citizens. Infiltration, according to its brief to the prime minister, is the phenomenon of people migrating in considerable numbers across social, economic, and political divides within a country.

While the former causes psychological illnesses among a nation's citizens, an invasion by one nation threatens the nation's very integrity. For India, the invasion of infiltrators from Nepal and Bangladesh is a problem. As a result, it recommended conducting a thorough state-by-state survey of Indian citizens within a certain time frame. Following the conclusion of the survey, the best legal procedures should be followed to create the National Register of Citizens in each State of India. The next step will be to make plans for maintaining citizens' birth and death registrations. Every election's electoral rolls must be created using the updated National Registers of Citizens, with each constituency's birth and death records at the relevant election dates suitably corrected [Hazarika \(2000\)](#).

The indigenous people of Assam have recognized the approximately 2 million illegal immigrants who arrived between 1951 and March 25, 1971, as Indian citizens. P.K. Mahanta and B.K. Phukan of the AASU said earlier on October 22, 1981, that because to their narrow interests, the Congress-I and certain so-called communist groupings have been obstacles to solving the foreigners' situation. The policy of identifying foreigners based on their faith was not something that the AASU was ready to adopt. Several nations would agree if the Prime Minister decided to divide the streams of infiltrators from 1961 to 1971.

The government's spokespeople consistently attempted to divert attention from the core problem and failed to offer any genuine solutions. In advance of the next round of talks, which was scheduled to begin in Delhi on November 6, 1981, an advance team of the AASU met with a number of opposition members in Delhi from October 24 to October 30, 1981. Dr. D.B. Barua, Nurul Hussain, Joy Nath Sharma, Hiranya Kunwar, and Deba Kr. Bora made up the delegation. Additionally, the problem is not communal. It is an attempt to politicize the issue by giving it a linguistic or ethnic slant just because the majority of illegal immigrants are Bengali Muslims. For many decades, Muslims have lived in harmony with the diverse society of Assam. Sri Sankardeva, the patron Vaisnavite saint of Assam, and Muslim Pir Ajan Fakir are treated equally in this culture. The large-scale immigration and the government's strategy of welcoming Muslims from other countries actually make the native Assamese Muslims feel threatened. They founded the All Assam Khilanjiya Asomiya Musalman Unnayan Parishad for the benefit of the about 30 lakh native Assamese Muslims. According to the 2011 Census, there were 1.8 crore Muslims living in Assam [Misra \(2014\)](#).

The political, social, and economic effects of Assam's demographic shift on the indigenous population are concerning. In 40 of Assam's 126 Assembly seats, immigrant vote banks are the decisive factor, giving them significant political clout. All attempts to repair the voter's lists by modifying the National Register of Citizens

NRC have met with significant resistance and violent protests. Today the pattern of immigration has changed. Assam and the northeast act as entry points for illegal immigrants who are assisted by foreigners who have settled here and spread to other parts of the nation. The last remarks of Additional Sessions Judge Kamini Lau's decision to sentence two Bangladeshi nationals convicted of dacoit cum murder in Delhi show how vulnerable the country has become as a result of this uncontrolled influx: "Our nation has turned into a sanctuary for these criminal elements, who are extremely vicious and cruel to anyone who crosses their path" [Myron \(1983\)](#).

The lack of coordinated government and administrative action has compelled the courts to step in. In order to safeguard the interests of Assamese indigenous people against the unrelenting infiltration of foreign nationals, nearly all youth organizations consistently called for reforming the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which was updated last year, and issuing identity cards to voters based on predetermined procedures. AJYCP claims that the State and Central Governments lacked the political will to complete the task, most likely as a result of the ruling party's fear of losing some voters.

9. PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO THE CAA AND YOUTH MOBILIZATION

The well-known Assam Movement of 1979 is linked to the anti-CAA movement, which is being led by several young organizations. This demanded the deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The lengthy six-year peaceful nonviolent protest came to a conclusion on August 15, 1985, when members of the Central Government, AASU, and AAGSP (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad) signed the Assam Accord on the Foreign National Issue in front of then-prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. It claims that finding a workable solution to the issue of foreign residents in Assam has always been the government's top priority [Sharma \(2019\)](#).

Due to the Assam Accord, the base date and year for the detention and removal of foreign nationals will be January 1, 1966. Everyone who entered Assam before to January 1, 1966, inclusive, and up until March 24, 1971, will be deleted in accordance with the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Foreigners Order 1964. The names of foreigners who are thus removed will be removed from the current electoral rolls. In accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules 1939, such individuals will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the applicable districts. The Indian government would sufficiently strengthen the governmental structure in order to achieve this goal.

The names of all such individuals who have been removed from the electoral rolls will be restored when 10 years have passed since the deletion date. Everyone who was previously exiled who has since unlawfully returned to Assam will be expelled. The law will continue to identify, remove, and deport foreigners who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971. Such outsiders must be practically and quickly banished. Along with other Northeastern states and the rest of India, Assam's protest movement against the CAA is very different [Baruah \(1999\)](#).

The protests in the northeast are for religion-based inclusion, whereas those in the rest of India are about exclusion based on religion. The Northeast has a history of illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal, which has led to existential problems for the local population. On December 12, 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Bill AB became the Citizenship Amendment Act CAA when the President of India approved it. By providing illegal migrants of Hindu, Shikh, Jain,

Buddhist, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities who had fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan prior to December 2014 with a path to Indian citizenship, it amended the Citizenship Act of 1955. However, locations covered by the Constitution's sixth schedule and having an inner-line permit would not be covered by the Act [Ahmed \(2020\)](#).

With the exception of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and the six scheduled areas of other states, protests against the bill persisted in the Northeastern states even after it was signed into law. It was made clear that these demonstrations would continue until the Act was repealed in this particular area. Protest against the Act initially began in Assam then in entire northeast and finally expanded all over India. Additionally, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura are the states where the CAA has been partially implemented. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution excludes the states' highland regions and Bodoland Territory Autonomous Districts. Prominent organizations like the Northeast Students Organization (NESO), the All-Assam Students Union (AASU), the All Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), the All Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), and others are appealing to other segments of society, including artists, intellectuals, and athletes, for support and to continue the agitation. As a result [Misra \(2014\)](#).

They believe that foreigners from Bangladesh and Nepal, two neighboring nations, are illegally taking territory and exercising their political rights in Assam and the Northeast. They are prevalent in vast numbers. The government has attested to this fact. Between 1951 and 1971, 17.17 lakh people arrived in Assam from these countries, according to the Registrar General of Census. This evidence clearly and properly shows that our nation's sovereignty is being seriously threatened.

The State's artiste fraternity, led by singer and filmmaker Zubeen Garg, staged a protest program called "NO CAA-Concert for peace and harmony-voice of All Artists of Assam." According to Garg, the young of Assam have the power to transform the nation, and now is the ideal moment to do so. The CAA is currently pending before the Supreme Court, which will only rule on the Act's validity after receiving 144 petitions from different people and organizations, including AASU. In response, Sarbananda Sonowal, the current chief minister of Assam and former president of AASU from 1992 to 1999, says that everything will be very apparent once the laws are made.

There is no foundation for the figures that are circulating. No fresh entrants would be allowed. It should be mentioned that a large number of artists who had previously opposed the CAA joined the BJP, which now controls both the Union and State governments, in August and September of 2020. Furthermore, on September 14, 2020, Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP), a new regional political party, was established by two of Assam's leading youth groups, AASU and AJYCP. Furthermore, this is the second political party in history of Assam for AASU [Baruah \(1999\)](#).

Table 1

Table 1 Key Youth Organisations in Assam and Their Role in Contemporary Political Mobilisation				
Youth Organisation	Year of Formation	Primary Focus / Agenda	Major Political/Social Movements Involved	Methods of Mobilisation
The Union of All Assam Students (AASU)	1967	Protection of indigenous Assamese identity, student rights	Assam Movement (1979–1985), NRC, CAA demonstrations	Peaceful demonstrations, petitions, public campaigns

Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP)	1978	Regional identity, youth empowerment	NRC changes, CAA opposition, land rights	Mass rallies, memorandum submission, advocacy
All Bodo Students Union (ABSU)	1967	Bodo ethnic rights and self-governance	Bodo cultural preservation, land rights, and territorial concerns	Protests, sit-ins, and conversations with authorities
AAMSU, the All-Assam Minority Students' Union	1960s	Minority rights protection	NRC and CAA advocacy, minority welfare	Public awareness campaigns, legal advocacy
The Union of All Koch Rajbanshi Students (AKRSU)	1990s	Rajbanshi community problems	Political and cultural representation	Community mobilisation, demonstrations
All Tai Ahom Students Union (ATASU)	1980s	Ahom ethnic identity and cultural preservation	Land and cultural issues	Cultural gatherings and advocacy initiatives

10. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The major findings of the study are:

- 1) The analysis concludes that the arguments around NRC and CAA have their roots in historical migration patterns that date back to colonial times rather than being modern creations. Long-term concerns over identity and resource distribution were brought on by Assam's population changes between 1951 and 1971. Youth organizations inherit these unresolved disputes from earlier upheavals, especially the Assam Movement of 1979–1985. Therefore, current agitations are an extension of a long-standing political conflict.
- 2) In Assam, youth organizations have become important political players, often filling the voids left by larger political parties. Their ability to change public opinion is demonstrated by their active participation in organizing significant demonstrations. Among indigenous populations worried about demographic shifts, they are highly trusted. Political participation in the state is redefined by their influence.
- 3) Diverse youth organizations have different ideological perspectives on CAA and NRC. While AAMSU concentrates on preserving minority identities, organizations like AASU and AJYCP support ethnic protection and indigenous rights. Within the larger protest movements, these ideological differences give rise to competing narratives. Sometimes the collective bargaining power is weakened by the absence of uniformity.
- 4) Prominent youth organizations acknowledged that the final NRC list, which was released in 2019, was flawed. In example, AASU found significant discrepancies between exclusion rates and previous government estimates of undocumented immigrants. This discrepancy raised doubts about the accuracy and openness of the NRC process. As a result, calls for NRC reform intensified.
- 5) Rather than being motivated by religious bigotry, Assamese opposition to CAA stems from concerns over population growth. Youth organizations argue that granting citizenship to more immigrants, irrespective of their religious convictions, threatens the Assamese language and cultural identity. This distinguishes the protests in Assam from those in the rest of India, where the primary grievance is religious intolerance. Thus, the protests in the northeast are essentially identity-based.

- 6) Students, artists, intellectuals, and farmers were among the social categories that youth organizations successfully mobilized, according to the study. The level of participation in CAA protests indicates widespread public involvement outside of organizational boundaries. Such massive mobilization demonstrates widespread indigenous population insecurity. It also emphasizes how important young organizations are as catalysts for increased civic engagement.
- 7) A significant political change was brought about by the formation of the Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) by AASU and AJYCP. This demonstrates a shift toward formal electoral action from non-party agitation politics. AASU's contribution to the formation of a political party is only the second instance in Assamese history. This trend calls into question how "non-political" youth movements are evolving.
- 8) The study shows that while most youth organizations employ democratic strategies including marches, public events, and memoranda, there are instances of violence and coercion. A portion of young people participated in disruptive activities during the anti-CAA agitations, blurring the lines between legal protest and illegal conduct. This dichotomy complicates the public's perception of youth-led movements. Additionally, it creates issues with legitimacy for the organizations involved.
- 9) The national and state governments' reactions to NRC and CAA concerns are frequently motivated by politics and are inconsistent. According to the study, there is insufficient political will to deal with infiltration or guarantee citizenship verification. The affected population is further confused by frequent changes in policy. This prolongs cycles of agitation led by young organizations and fosters mistrust.
- 10) Identity politics continues to be the primary political driver in Assam notwithstanding modernization, economic reforms, and social mobility. The majority of youth organizations base their actions on the preservation of indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and demographics. Public discourse and election results are still impacted by issues like illegal immigration. Identity is therefore a key factor in political mobilization.
- 11) Despite the fact that youth organizations are crucial for influencing public opinion and putting pressure on lawmakers, they often lack a long-term plan. Many protests are more reactive than proactive, focusing on pressing issues rather than long-term changes. This limits how long their achievements can last. It also raises concerns about political maturity and organizational coherence.
- 12) According to the study, the tactics, feelings, and demands of the 1979–1985 Assam Movement are strongly reflected in contemporary youth-led protests. The unsolved nature of the migration issue and its generational transmission is demonstrated by this persistence. Youth organizations present themselves as guardians of the legacy of the Assam Movement. The persistence of these difficulties indicates that the Assam Accord was not well implemented.

11. CONCLUSION

An important development in Assamese politics is the establishment of the regional political party Asom Jatiya Parishad, which is led by AASU and AJYCP. This shows how important young organizations are becoming in influencing regional politics. These NRC and CAA-related operations raise questions about the underlying objectives, whether they are self-serving or collective, but they are a part of a historical continuum that started with the Assam Movement in 1979 and culminated with the Assam Accord in 1985. The study highlights the critical role of ideologically grounded youth activism in Assam's socio-political development by suggesting that youth organizations motivated by the collective interest of society, such as AASU, ABSU, and AJYCP, exhibit more admirable ideological commitment than those primarily aligned with political party interests [Deka \(2017\)](#).

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

Their goals and objectives must be clear and specific so that the general public can understand and support agitations against the NRC and CAA. This will boost the momentum of the movement. Protests have been held on numerous occasions throughout the years, and both problems have deep historical roots, primarily related to illegal immigration in the area. However, these initiatives have often failed to provide significant results. Public agitation must be complemented with political discourse for meaningful results. It is important to remember that the Indian Constitution guarantees every Indian citizen the freedom of speech and the right to protest, but exercising these rights responsibly entails abiding by the law and morals. It is unfortunate that some young people took part in violent protests against the CAA. Nonviolent protest strategies are always favored and more successful than violent ones in a democratic society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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