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## RELIGIOUSNESS AND RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF RURAL POPULATION IN SLOVAKIA ON EXAMPLE OF CHOSEN AREAS

### Introduction

Religiousness and religious structure of population of Slovakia played an important role in country's history. Many political, social, as well as the cultural processes and events took place especially under the effect of religious structure. Its effect outlived also in hidden or open forms even after the Second World War, in period of atheism and its importance grows again in present time.

Religiousness of the population of Slovakia has a very old tradition. The roots of Christianity-oriented religiousness are its roots in the historical activities of the St. Constantine and Methodius, brothers of Thessalonike and German missionaries.

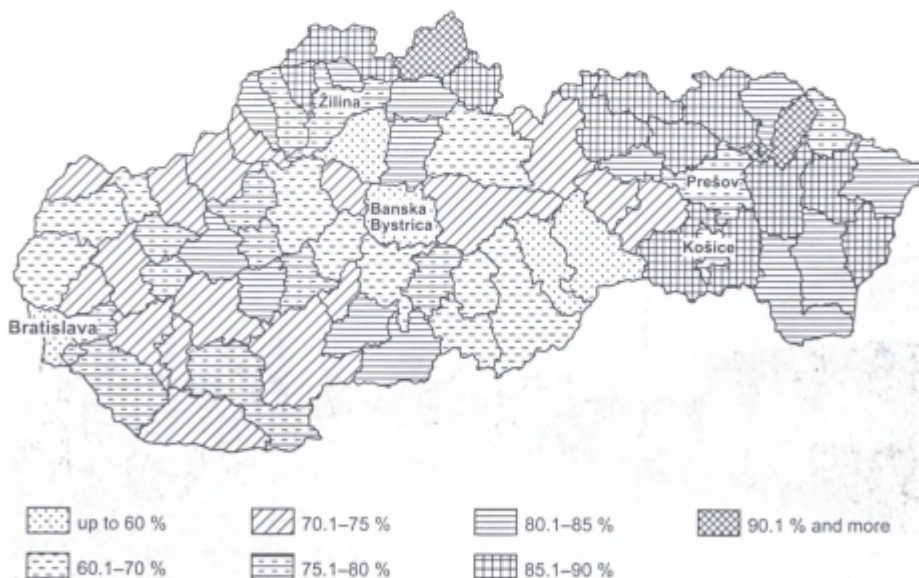
The basis of religiousness was and still is the family circle, i.e. education in the family. It is comprehensible, that the ideological part and the contents of the process was created by the Church which has established the necessary institutions for the purpose. Religiousness always influenced the life, conduct and acts of family members. This partially supports the fact that in spite of 40 year forced dissemination of the materialist and atheist propaganda accompanied by elimination of the denominations and orders and Church dignitaries, the majority of the Slovak population preserved their religiousness. We have to emphasise though, that the level of religiousness following the deformed development is from the viewpoint of particular data considerably distorted, as confirmed by the experts in statistics and demographers and the Church representatives. It is also proved by the fact that 17.4 % of inhabitants of Slovakia did not want, did not know, or hesitated to express their standpoint or relation to Church. They did not quote their religion asserting at the same time they were not atheists. This fact cannot be considered a lack of information, just the opposite, it is some information.

### General religiousness

Based on 1991 census data population of Slovakia amounts to 5.27 million. Out of this number 3.8 million adhered to some religion. It means that 72.8 % of inha-

bitants of Slovakia are worshippers and it also expresses the degree of population s religiousness. Its level is not the same as there are differences in single regions or provinces. Its limit values move between 57.6 % in province of Bratislava and 82.4 % in the province of Prešov. It must be noted though that with regard to overall level of population s religiousness of Slovakia its value for the population of Bratislava province is quite exceptional. As a matter of fact, the value of the second lowest religiousness occurring in province of Banská Bystrica is higher by 10.4 % reaching 68.0 % In the rest of provinces of Slovakia the degree of religiousness reaches the following values: Trenčín 72.0 %, and Košice 72.2 %. The level of religiousness in these provinces comes close to the Slovak mean. In Trnava it reaches the value 75.2 %, Nitra 75.7, and in Žilina province it is 77.1 % i.e. over the national mean. The quoted data show that the level of religiousness in Slovakia increases while proceeding from the west to the east and from the south to the north.

**Fig. 1: Religiousness of population of Slovakia in 1991**  
Share of worshippers



A more detailed picture of the religiousness level is provided by its study in the districts (Figure 1). Mean value of religiousness on national level is reached or approximated (5 % above or below the mean) by 25 districts, out of it 16 in western, 6 in central and 3 in eastern Slovakia. The data show that the mean value was most influenced by the districts in western part of Slovakia. Out of these districts the same

or almost the same level (plus-minus 2 %) were in districts of Pezinok (71–8 %), Galanta (73.9 %), Skalica (71.1 %), Ilava (72.2 %), Nitra (74.7 %), Nové Mesto nad Váhom (71.5 %), Levice (74.0 %), and Šaľa (71.0 %), i.e. 50 % of districts. Other parts of Slovakia represented by such share of worshippers are the districts of Banská Štiavnica (71.1 %), Brezno (73 %), and Turčianske Teplice (72.9 %) in central Slovakia, Gelnica (72.7 %), Spišská Nová Ves (73.2 %), and Poprad (71.3 %) in eastern Slovakia. Taking into account the districts with value of religiousness moving between 60 and 80 % there are more than 41 districts in the quoted range. There live 3.174 million inhabitant representing 59.8 % of population of Slovakia. The number of worshippers in these districts reaches 2.266 million and represent religiousness 72.0 % which is at the level of the national mean. It is apparent that the level of religiousness of population in districts of western part of Slovakia does not show big differences between single districts. The districts of Bratislava differ from each other (except for Bratislava) by 7 %, in Trnava province it is also 7 %, in Nitra province it is 14.7 %, and in Trenčín province it is 20.4 %. Besides Bratislava where the value of religiousness reaches only 52.2 %, low levels are observable in districts of Prievidza (61.1 %), Myjava (67.6 %), Senica (66.4 %), and Malacky (69 %). The limit values of religiousness were taken in districts Zlaté Moravce (84.8 %), Topoľčany (83.8 %), and Púchov (81.5 %). Low level of religiousness in districts Prievidza, Myjava, Senica, and Malacky can be explained by several factors while it is an effect of always a different factor prevailing in a particular district. The same can be said of



A typical road-side village in southern Slovakia.

high level of religiousness in Zlaté Moravce, Topoľčany and Púchov. Such explanation of low or high levels of religiousness ensues to certain extent from the heterogeneity of the said districts. An above-average level of religiousness population as compared to the national mean, and out of them with religiousness above 76 %, was in districts Bánovce nad Bebravou (79.5 %), Hlohovec 78.7 %, Považská Bystrica 78.2 %, Piešťany 78.1 %, Nové Zámky 76.8 %, Dunajská Streda and Partizánske both with 76.2 %. Lower level of religiousness than the national mean is in six districts: Ilava 72.2 %, Pezinok 71.8 %, Nové Mesto nad Váhom 71.5 %, Skalica 71.1 %, Šaľa 71 %, and Komárno 70.1 %. Generally small differences in religiousness of the population point at homogeneity of the western part of Slovakia of this index.

In the areas of central Slovakia, provinces Banská Bystrica and Žilina the differences between the minimum and maximum values of religiousness are in bigger span than in western Slovakia. In Žilina province the difference between the single districts at the level of religiousness reaches even 36.1 %. The share of worshippers in district Martin reaches 57.0 %, the lowest level in central Slovakia, while district Námestovo reaches the value of 93.1 %, the highest level of religiousness in the province but also in national scale. The limit values of population s religiousness i.e. under the national mean can be found in district Liptovský Mikuláš (62.8 %). The share of worshippers above the national mean is in all remaining districts of the province: six districts reached the level above 80 % — Tvrdošín (89.9 %), Čadca (9.6 %), Bytča (88.6 %), Kysucké Nové Mesto (82.6 %), Ružomberok (81.4 %), and Dolný Kubín (80.1 %).

The value of religiousness of the population in southern part of central Slovakia is lower by more than 9 %. The difference in the size of the share of worshippers between single districts reaches the value 27.9 %. The limit values of religiousness were taken in districts Banská Bystrica (56.8 %) and Krupina (maximum 84.7 %). The level of religiousness is lower than the national mean even in eight districts out of thirteen, and in seven it is lower than 70 %, while in Banská Bystrica and Revúca it drops below 60 %. The share of worshippers exceeds 80 % only in two districts — Krupina and Veľký Krtíš with religiousness 80.7 %. The quoted data sufficiently explain the fact that the province of Banská Bystrica with its religiousness level 68 % occupies the last but one position in scale.

The districts of central Slovakia compared to other regions of Slovakia are remarkable for distinct differentiation of religiousness level. These distinct differences can be observed also in contiguous districts which create otherwise a common natural whole. Classic example of the fact is offered by several typical areas of Slovakia. The region of Liptov is certainly one of them. While the religiousness level in old district of Liptovský Mikuláš reached the value 71.1 %, i.e. it was close to the national mean, after division of the district considerable differences in population s religiousness showed up in newly created districts of Liptovský Mikuláš and Ružomberok. The

eastern part aligned to the district of Liptovský Mikuláš had an increased religiousness level (81.4 %) while the religiousness level of the western part annexed to district Ružomberok increased to 81.4 %. The changes in religiousness level provoked in this manner, that is by the changes in territorial organization, and a transition to a more detailed territorial division have showed up also in other areas of central Slovakia and beyond its limits. Orava was subject to similar differentiation. The overall religiousness of population of Orava was reaching a high 88.2 %. After the division of the territory the religiousness level in new district Dolný Kubín dropped to 80.1 %, while it increased in newly created districts of upper Orava region: in Tvrdošín to 89.9 % (third place in national scale of religiousness) and in Námestovo to 93.1 % (the highest place in national scale). In Turiec, within the said territory in old district of Martin, where there used to be the religiousness level at 59.4 %, it differentiated in newly formed districts as follows: it dropped in old district of Martin to 57 % i.e. one of the lowest in Slovakia, but it exceeded the Slovak mean (72.9 %) in newly created district Turčianske Teplice. Considerable differences in religiousness level were observed also in region around Hron. In former district Banská Bystrica the religiousness level reaching 62.6 % moved 10 % below the national mean. After division to two districts, the district Banská Bystrica with 56.8 % dropped to the third lowest level of religiousness of all Slovak districts. On the other side religiousness in district Brezno increased to 73 % and exceeded the national level. In old district Zvolen where the 70.9 % religiousness was below the national level, after division to three districts, it dropped to 63.1 % in old district and increased above the national level in new districts. In district Detva it exceeded the national level (78.5 %) by almost 6 %, in district Krupina (84.7 %) it acquired the leading position in population's religiousness within the province of Banská Bystrica and joined the districts of Slovakia with the highest values of religiousness.

In eastern Slovakia the difference in span between the maximum and minimum value of population's religiousness reaches its maximum — 45.1 %. The limit values concern the districts Rožňava with 56.3 % of worshippers and Stropkov with maximum religiousness 91.4 %. Compared to the mean level of population's religiousness in Slovakia and its level in eastern Slovakia its low values in district Rožňava are quite extraordinary. Close to it is the religiousness of Košice-city district with 61.7 %. Otherwise we can generally say that in eastern Slovakia there is the highest religiousness of population in Slovakia. Out of 21 eastern Slovakian districts only four are below the level of the national mean. With exception of Rožňava and Košice-city there are also the districts Poprad and Gelnica the religiousness values of which (71.3 % and 72.7 % respectively) are only slightly different from the national mean. Out of 21 districts even 14 have 80 % of worshippers. Eight districts can be classified as the absolute top in population's religiousness with more than 85 % of worshippers: Stropkov (91.4) %, Stará Ľubovňa and Bardejov (88.6 %), Vranov nad Topľou (87.1 %), Sabinov (86.3 %), Sobrance (86.8 %), Kežmarok (85.4 %), and Košice-rural area with 85.1 %.

The northern, north-eastern and eastern district of eastern Slovakia have generally the highest share of worshippers. Together they form a territory stretching from district Púchov to district Trebišov with its religiosity value 81.1 %. The said share in this territory is 6–10 % higher than the national mean. There are the districts where the religiosity level reaches the maximum values. They do not represent a continuous territory. It is interrupted in the area of central Slovakia by a corridor of districts with the religiosity percentage below the national mean or a minimum one. There are then in Slovakia two more or less isolated areas with high share of worshippers. Their special feature is that each of them is remarkable for a separate religious structure. In the north-west and north of Slovakia the decisive share in regional structure corresponds to the Roman Catholic confession with a negligible share of Evangelicals, the area in the north-east and east is characterised by variegated structure. Besides the prevailing Roman Catholic Church also the members of Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical and Reformed Churches are represented. There are differences also from the point of view of the size of particular areas. The region in the north and north-west is smaller and it is restricted to the boundary area. It consists of eight districts. On the other side the region in eastern Slovakia is considerably larger and the number of districts is bigger, when out of 21 districts 16 have the share of worshippers bigger than 80 %. The common trait of both regions is a lower percentage of citizens with not identified confession and a very low percentage of atheists.

In the districts with under-average or close to average values of population religiosity there is higher percentage of not identified confession and a very low percentage of atheists. This is especially so in the districts of central and southern parts of central Slovakia.

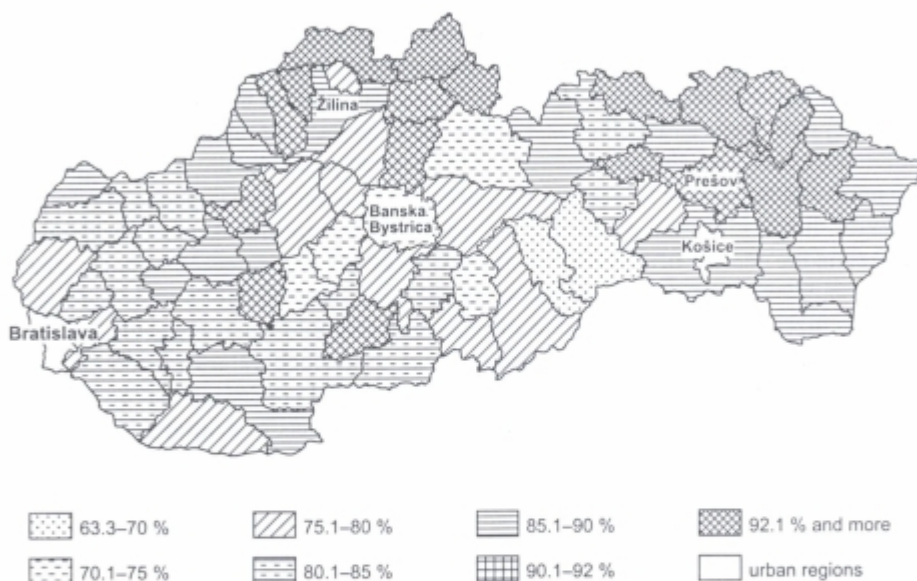
## Religiosity of rural population

Religiosity of the rural areas population of Slovakia was estimated based in share of worshippers who adhered to single Churches. In 1991 census more than 2.272 million rural inhabitants adhered to some Church, representing 86 % of rural population in Slovakia. Atheism was declared by 82 thousand inhabitants, i.e. 3.6 %. No determined standpoint was given by 539.6 thousand persons or 10.5 % of population. In the same census 1.881 million or 22.6 % out of 2.293 million urban inhabitants adhered to some Church, 433.9 thousand or 14.5 % were atheists and no determined standpoint to the subject was quoted by 671 persons or 22.6 %. Comparison of the quoted data shows that religiosity of the Slovak countryside is not only different in level but also in its essence as compared with situation and conditions existing in the towns. Social environment of rural area influences the increased share of worshippers as related to more intensive human relations and links.

## Regional differences in religiousness of rural population

Statistics show that the religiousness level in individual districts of Slovakia is not the same. Its limit values oscillate from the lowest 63.3 % in district Rožňava to the maximum value 95 % in districts Námestovo and Humenné with 94.9 % (Figure 2).

**Fig. 2: Religiousness of rural population of Slovakia in 1991**  
Share of worshippers



In relation with religiousness of the rural population the percentages of not identified confession and atheists are remarkable. While the shares of population with not identified confession and atheists in national level are 17.4 % and 8 % respectively, the same shares in rural population drop to 10.5 and 3.6 % respectively. It is the most important trait of religiousness of rural population in Slovakia.

The value of mean national share of worshippers is reached or is close to (5 % above or below the mean) in 33 districts, out of it 19 in western, 5 in central and 9 in eastern Slovakia. These districts form in the territory of Slovakia larger or smaller areas and several isolated districts. In south-western Slovakia there is an area formed by 19 districts, in eastern Slovakia there are smaller areas of 6 or 4 districts. We can say that the mean share of worshippers in rural area was decisively influenced by the size of share in worshippers in districts of western Slovakia.

In connection with the limit values of the worshippers share generally and in rural

area the districts with higher religiosity are concentrated to north-west, north-east and east of Slovakia. Districts with religiosity above 90 % form a territory stretching from the district of Považská Bystrica with value 90.9 % up to district Humenné with 94.9 % religiosity. In western and eastern parts of this zone there are 7 and 8 districts respectively where the religiosity exceeds 90 %. More than 89 % of religiosity have also the districts Bánovce nad Bebravou (91.1 %), Zlaté Moravce (91.4 %), and Krupina (90.6 %). The degree of rural population's religiosity reaches high values also in other districts of Slovakia. In total 34 districts the share of worshippers is higher than the national mean. Out of them 16 are located in eastern Slovakia, 12 of it in province of Prešov. In central Slovakia 8 districts have the religiosity higher than the national mean, while only Krupina is in the province of Banská Bystrica. The remaining districts are part of Žilina province. In western Slovakia the rural population's religiosity exceeds the national mean in ten districts.

Below-average religiosity values of rural population were detected in 39 districts of Slovakia. These districts form more or less compact zone in south-western part of western and in central and southern parts of central Slovakia. The minimum values of population's religiosity are in districts Rožňava (63.3 %) and Revúca (69.1 %). Close to them come the districts Poltár (70.9 %) and Žiar nad Hronom (70.5 %).

## Religious structure of rural population

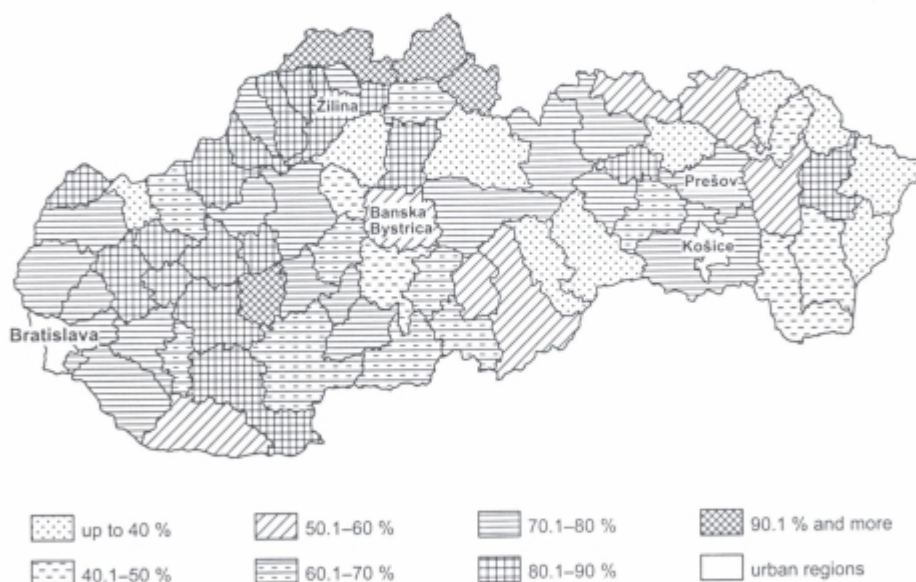
One of the demographic characteristics of population is also apurtenance to certain religion or confession. As the last census showed, population of Slovakia adhered to 18 different Churches or denominations. From the point of view of the share of population adhering to individual Churches the five largest are: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical of Augsburg confession and Reformed Christian Church. This goes as much for the general religious structure as for the rural population's religious structure.

The most spread Church in rural area, and in general, is the Roman Catholic (Figure 3). It has 1.595 million members and 70.2 % of it are rural population. Seventeen districts of Slovakia, out of it 5 in western Slovakia, 9 districts in central Slovakia and 3 districts in eastern Slovakia reach or come close to (5 % above or below the mean) the Slovak national mean of the share of Roman Catholics. The value of the share of Roman Catholics in range of 7.5 % below and 7.5 % above the national mean is reached by total 26 districts, out of it 10 in western Slovakia, 10 in central and 6 eastern Slovakian districts. An above-average share of Roman Catholics is in districts Čadca (93.6 %), Námestovo (94.8 %), Tvrdšíň (93.4 %), and Zlaté Moravce (90.8 %). It is remarkable, that the representation of the Roman Catholic Church members in eastern Slovakia drops distinctly in favour of other Churches. On the other side the smallest representation of Roman Catholics is in districts of central



Slovakia and namely its central part. An absolute minimum of Roman Catholics is in districts Medzilaborce and Myjava with 4.6 and 5.1 % of worshippers respectively. Expressed in absolute manner, there are mean 22,786 members of Roman Catholic Church to one districts. The mean value of number of Roman Catholics is reached or is approximated by (within the range of 20 % i.e. between 18.2 thousand and 27.3 thousand) 19 districts, that is only in 27 % of districts. It suggests great span between the maximum and minimum number of Roman Catholics in individual districts of Slovakia. The limit values concern the districts Medzilaborce with 312 and Myjava with 583 Roman Catholics on the lower, and Nové Zámky with 71,206 and Nitra with 53,318 Roman Catholics on the upper end of the scale.

**Fig. 3: Share of Roman-Catholics of Slovakia in rural area**  
Share of Roman-Catholics



The second most numerous Church is the Evangelical Church with 226.6 thousand worshippers. It represents 10.1 % of the Slovak rural population. The national mean of the share of Evangelics to one district is reached or is approximated (in range 5.1 to 15.1 %) by 18 districts of Slovakia, out of it 8 in its western part, 2 in central Slovakia and 7 districts in eastern Slovakia. The biggest share of the Evangelics corresponds to the districts Myjava (75.5 %), Liptovský Mikuláš (40 %), Martin (37.3 %), Turčianske Teplice (34.4 %), Zvolen (32.1 %), Dolný Kubín (23.7 %), Banská Bystrica (23.2 %), Nové Mesto nad Váhom (22.4 %), Bánovce nad Bebravou

and Poltár each with 20.3 %. A high share of Evangelics live also in districts Rožňava (34.2 %), Revúca (30.7 %), Komárno (23.7 %) and Rimavská Sobota (22.4 %). We must emphasize though that the quoted values include a considerable part of members of the Reformed Christian Church. On the other side a minimum representation is that of Evangelics in north-Slovakian districts Čadca (0.1 %), Kysucké Nové Mesto (0.1 %), in eastern Slovakia in districts Humenné, Levoča, Medzilaborce, and Snina with 0.1 % share. In average 3280 Evangelics live in one district and rural area of Slovakia. The number includes also members of the Reformed Christian Church who live in southern districts of Slovakia. It is notable that both limit values of number of Evangelics are in northern districts. The biggest number of Evangelics concentrate in districts Liptovský Mikuláš (13,255), Martin (11,177) and the least number of Evangelics live in districts Kysucké Nové Mesto (15), Čadca (60), Námestovo (66), Tvrdošín (78).

Both quoted Churches have in common that they are spread all over Slovakia. Difference is in number of their members. Distribution of the worshippers of another three churches has some regional and nationality-bound restrictions. Greek-Catholic Church is spread above all in eastern Slovakia. Its members represent 4.6 % of rural population with number 104,571. The largest share of Greek Catholics out of the total population number is in district Sobrance (37.1 %), Snina (23.6 %), and Svidník (46.6 %). The distribution of the members of Orthodox Church is similar. The number of its members reaches in total 34 thousand in Slovakia, out of it 20 thousand in rural area equaling 0.9 % of the rural population. In districts Snina and Svidník they represent 27.2 % and 22.5 % of the rural population. They are mostly Ruthenians.

The members of the Reformed Christian Church are mostly Hungarians and they concentrate in south-eastern parts of the western, central and eastern Slovakia.

## Conclusion

Religiousness of the rural population as a rule increases while proceeding from the west to the east and from the south to the north of the country, with interruption of the trend in central and southern part of central Slovakia. Geographical distribution of the worshippers of single religions in the Slovak countryside is stable. The share of population lacking confession and with the not identified confession has increased only slightly.

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