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Article

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HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AGAINST THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the development of community resilience in response to the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria. It explored how local communities developed adaptive strategies to cope with prolonged insecurity, particularly during periods when state institutions experienced operational limitations. The study adopted a historical research design using a qualitative approach based on secondary sources, including scholarly works, official reports, and relevant documentary materials. Data were analyzed through historical and thematic methods to assess the evolution and significance of community resilience mechanisms. The findings revealed that community resilience in Borno State was strengthened by indigenous structures such as traditional institutions, religious organizations, family networks, and community-based groups that promoted cooperation, social support, and conflict management. The insurgency further transformed these mechanisms, resulting in the emergence of organized responses involving the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), youth groups, women's associations, and local volunteers. These actors contributed to community protection, humanitarian support, livelihood restoration, and social recovery. However, resilience efforts have been constrained by persistent insecurity, displacement, economic challenges, weakened institutions, and inadequate resources. The study concluded that community resilience has played a crucial role in helping communities survive, adapt, and recover from insurgent violence. It recommended strengthening indigenous institutions, supporting livelihood recovery programmes, and incorporating community-based resilience approaches into broader security, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery strategies among other recommendations.

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Keywords: Community Resilience, Boko Haram Insurgency, Borno State, Indigenous Institutions, Conflict Recovery, Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Boko Haram insurgency has become one of the most devastating security challenges in contemporary Africa. It is profoundly reshaping the political, socio-economic, and humanitarian landscape of northeastern Nigeria. Since the group's violent uprising in 2009, the conflict has evolved from localized extremist violence into a prolonged humanitarian crisis with implications extending across the Lake Chad Basin region. Although sustained counterinsurgency operations by the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) have weakened Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), both groups continue to launch attacks on civilian communities, security formations, schools, and public infrastructure (Obi & Rustad, 2019). Consequently, Borno State has remained the epicenter of insurgency related violence, experiencing widespread destruction of settlements, disruption of agricultural livelihoods, collapse of local markets, displacement of millions of residents, and weakening of traditional governance structures. Recent studies argued that while military operations have reduced insurgent territorial control, they have not eliminated the structural conditions that sustain violent extremism, including poverty, weak governance, social exclusion, youth unemployment, and institutional fragility (World Bank, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2020; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). This underscores the need to examine the historical evolution of community resilience beyond conventional military perspectives. The prolonged insurgency has produced severe socio-economic and humanitarian consequences that extend beyond physical destruction to undermine livelihoods, social cohesion, and community institutions. The destruction of homes, schools, healthcare facilities, markets, religious centres, and agricultural infrastructure has displaced millions of people while exposing vulnerable groups to food insecurity, interrupted education, livelihood loss, and psychological trauma (Manyena, 2006). Despite these challenges, many communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience through indigenous coping mechanisms, collective action, and locally driven recovery initiatives. Contemporary resilience scholarship views community resilience as the capacity of communities not only to withstand shocks but also to reorganize institutions, mobilize local resources, preserve social cohesion, and transform adversity into opportunities for recovery and sustainable peace (Thurston, 2018; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Norris *et al.*, 2008). This perspective shifts attention from portraying conflict affected populations solely as victims to recognizing them as active agents in peacebuilding and recovery.

Historical evidence indicated that resilience in Borno State predates the emergence of Boko Haram and is deeply rooted in indigenous governance systems, traditional institutions, kinship networks, religious organizations, women's associations, and communal support structures. Before the insurgency, these institutions played critical roles in conflict mediation, resource sharing, and community development. Thurston, (2018) noted that as the conflict escalated, these structures became vital channels for sharing security intelligence, coordinating humanitarian support, assisting internally displaced populations, and sustaining social cohesion in the face of limited state capacity. Community members increasingly relied on informal social networks to provide food, shelter, psychosocial support, and livelihood opportunities, thereby complementing formal government interventions. Studies have shown that these indigenous institutions significantly strengthened local ownership of peacebuilding efforts and enhanced communities' capacity to withstand

prolonged insecurity (Obi & Rustad, 2019).; International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022). This demonstrates that resilience is a historically embedded process shaped by indigenous knowledge, collective memory, and evolving community institutions. The evolution of resilience strategies also reflects the changing dynamics of the insurgency. During the early years (2009–2014) of insurgency, community responses focused largely on survival through displacement, extended family support systems, informal vigilante groups, and self-help initiatives. Following the recapture of many communities from 2015 onwards, resilience gradually shifted towards reconstruction through the rehabilitation of schools and markets, restoration of agricultural livelihoods, psychosocial support, and reintegration of displaced populations. Aldrich, (2012) noted that more recently, communities have confronted new challenges associated with reintegrating former insurgents, rebuilding trust, addressing youth unemployment, adapting to climate-related pressures, and responding to recurring attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP. Consequently, resilience has evolved into a multidimensional process involving security, social cohesion, institutional rebuilding, livelihood recovery, and sustainable peacebuilding. Scholars increasingly argued that durable stabilization requires strengthening local governance, rebuilding community trust, promoting economic recovery, and encouraging community participation in post-conflict reconstruction rather than relying solely on military responses (Mercy Corps, 2019; UNDP, 2021).

Although extensive literature exists on Boko Haram insurgency, much of the literature concentrates on terrorism, counterinsurgency, humanitarian crises, violent extremism, internally displaced persons, and regional security. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to the historical evolution of community resilience and the indigenous mechanisms through which local populations have adapted and sustained themselves throughout different phases of the conflict. Existing studies tend to examine resilience as a contemporary development intervention without adequately tracing its historical foundations or explaining how traditional institutions, social capital, communal solidarity, and indigenous coping mechanisms have evolved to sustain communities (Obi & Rustad, 2019; Mercy Corps, 2019; UNDP, 2021). Addressing this gap is essential because a historical understanding of resilience provides deeper insight into the continuity and transformation of local adaptive capacities, thereby informing context-specific strategies for post-conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. It is against this backdrop that this study undertakes a historical analysis of community resilience against Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, with a view to examining the evolution, drivers, and significance of indigenous resilience mechanisms in mitigating the long-term impacts of violent extremism.

Statement of the Problem

The Boko Haram insurgency has remained one of Nigeria's most devastating security challenges, with Borno State bearing the greatest burden of violence, displacement, destruction of livelihoods, and institutional collapse. Despite sustained military operations and humanitarian interventions, attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to hinder community recovery, social cohesion, and sustainable development (ICG, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Existing literatures have largely focused on terrorism, counterinsurgency, humanitarian crises, internally displaced persons, and post-conflict reconstruction (Aldrich, D. P. 2012; UNDP, 2021). However, limited attention has been given to the historical evolution of community resilience and the indigenous mechanisms through which local communities have adapted to and recovered from the insurgency. In particular, there is insufficient

historical evidence on the roles of traditional institutions, religious leaders, community organizations, and informal support networks in sustaining social cohesion, rebuilding livelihoods, and complementing formal interventions. This gap underscored the need for a historical analysis of community resilience against Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State. Accordingly, this study examines the evolution, drivers, and significance of indigenous resilience mechanisms to generate historical evidence that can inform community-based peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, and sustainable development in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to undertake a historical analysis of community resilience against the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the historical evolution of community resilience against the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State.
- ii. Identify the indigenous community resilience mechanisms employed by communities in Borno State to cope with the effects of the Boko Haram insurgency.
- iii. Identify the challenges confronting community resilience initiatives in mitigating the long-term effects of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State.

Research Questions

The following research questions are generated to guide the study:

- i. How has community resilience against the Boko Haram insurgency evolved historically in Borno State, Nigeria?
- ii. What indigenous community resilience mechanisms have been employed by communities in Borno State to cope with the effects of the Boko Haram insurgency?
- iii. What challenges confront community resilience initiatives in mitigating the long-term effects of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Social Resilience Theory. The theory was propounded by Neil Adger (2000) and later developed by Norris *et al.*, (2008) and Aldrich and Meyer (2015), explains that communities can withstand, adapt to, and recover from crises through social capital, collective action, indigenous knowledge, and strong local institutions. The theory views resilience as a continuous process of adaptation and transformation rather than simply returning to pre-conflict conditions. The theory is supported by Norris *et al.*, (2008), who argue that adaptive capacities such as social capital, economic resources, information systems, and effective institutions enhance community resilience. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) also maintain that communities with strong social networks and trust recover more rapidly from disasters and violent conflicts. However, critics such as Cannon and Müller-Mahn (2010) and Joseph (2013) argue that the theory gives insufficient attention to structural inequalities, governance failures, and state responsibilities, while placing excessive emphasis on the capacity of communities to recover independently. The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how communities in Borno State utilized indigenous institutions, social networks, and collective action to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the Boko Haram insurgency. It therefore provides an appropriate framework for examining the historical

evolution of community resilience, indigenous coping mechanisms, and the challenges affecting resilience initiatives in mitigating the long-term effects of the insurgency.

Conceptual Clarifications

- i. **Community Resilience:** Community resilience refers to the collective capacity of a community to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, and recover from crises while maintaining its essential social, economic, and institutional functions. Norris *et al.*, (2008) describe it as the interaction of adaptive capacities such as social capital, economic resources, effective communication, and community competence, whereas Patel *et al.*, (2017) emphasize social cohesion, collective action, and local leadership as key determinants. In Borno State, community resilience is reflected in the use of traditional institutions, religious organizations, family networks, and community-based security groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to cope with the impacts of the Boko Haram insurgency. For this study, community resilience refers to the ability of communities in Borno State to mobilize indigenous resources and institutions to resist, adapt to, and recover from insurgency-related challenges.
- ii. **Boko Haram Insurgency:** The Boko Haram insurgency refers to the violent conflict initiated in 2009 by the extremist group *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (Boko Haram) against the Nigerian state. The insurgency has been characterized by terrorist attacks, kidnappings, destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement, and humanitarian crises, particularly in northeastern Nigeria. It has also evolved into different factions, including the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). In this study, the Boko Haram insurgency denotes the prolonged armed conflict that has profoundly affected the security, livelihoods, and social stability of communities in Borno State (Obi & Rustad, 2019).
- iii. **Historical Evolution of the Boko Haram Insurgency:** The Boko Haram insurgency originated in the early 2000s in Maiduguri, Borno State, under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf as a religious movement that opposed corruption, poor governance, and socio-economic inequality. Following Yusuf's death in police custody in 2009, the group transformed into a violent insurgency under Abubakar Shekau, employing tactics such as bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians and government institutions (Onuoha, 2014; Obi & Rustad, 2019). Between 2010 and 2015, Boko Haram expanded across northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region, causing widespread destruction, mass displacement, and severe humanitarian crises. The group's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 led to the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), resulting in a split within the movement. Scholars attribute the rise and persistence of the insurgency to factors such as poverty, youth unemployment, weak governance, corruption, and political marginalization (UNDP, 2021; Mercy Corps, 2019). The insurgency significantly disrupted the social and economic fabric of Borno State but also prompted the emergence of community resilience mechanisms. Traditional institutions, religious organizations, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), women's groups, and other local actors emerged to provide important roles in community protection, humanitarian support, and recovery. However, existing literature has focused largely on the military and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict, with limited attention to the historical evolution of these community resilience mechanisms. This study addresses that gap by examining how local communities in Borno State developed and sustained resilience throughout the different phases of the Boko Haram insurgency.

- iv. **Historical Evolution of Community Resilience in Borno State:** Community resilience in Borno State has its roots in longstanding indigenous institutions, including the Borno Emirate, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and extended family networks, which historically promoted social cohesion, conflict resolution, and mutual support. These structures enabled communities to respond collectively to social and economic challenges before the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency (Berkes & Ross, 2013). The outbreak of the insurgency in 2009 transformed these traditional resilience mechanisms. As state institutions became overstretched, communities increasingly relied on local initiatives for protection and survival. Traditional rulers coordinated community responses, religious leaders promoted peace and social solidarity, while the establishment of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in 2013 strengthened local security through intelligence gathering and collaboration with the Nigerian military (International Crisis Group, 2020). Beyond security, women's groups, youth associations, faith-based organizations, and community networks supported internally displaced persons (IDPs), restored livelihoods, and promoted reconciliation through communal labour and indigenous conflict-resolution practices. Although existing studies recognize these contributions, limited attention has been given to their historical evolution. This study therefore examines how community resilience mechanisms developed and adapted over time to strengthen resistance and recovery against the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State.
- v. **Community-Based Resilience Mechanisms:** Community-based resilience mechanisms are locally developed strategies and institutions that enable communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from crises using indigenous knowledge, social networks, and collective action. According to Norris *et al.*, (2008) and Berkes and Ross (2013), resilience is strengthened through social capital, effective leadership, trust, and active community participation. In Borno State, the Boko Haram insurgency weakened formal governance and public services, prompting communities to rely on traditional rulers, religious leaders, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), women's groups, youth associations, and local volunteers for security, intelligence gathering, humanitarian assistance, and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs). These community-led initiatives also promoted post-conflict recovery through livelihood restoration, reconciliation, and social cohesion. Although existing studies acknowledge the importance of community participation, they largely focus on humanitarian and security interventions, with limited attention to the historical development of indigenous resilience mechanisms (Mercy Corps, 2019; UNDP, 2021). This study addresses this gap by examining the evolution of community-based resilience against the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State.
- vi. **Challenges Confronting Community Resilience in Borno State:** Despite demonstrating remarkable resilience during the Boko Haram insurgency, communities in Borno State continue to face significant challenges that hinder sustainable recovery. Persistent insecurity, particularly from ISWAP attacks, continues to disrupt livelihoods, education, and humanitarian activities, thereby weakening community resilience (International Crisis Group, 2020). Prolonged displacement has fractured family structures and traditional support networks while placing enormous pressure on host communities and essential social services (IOM, 2021). Economic hardship remains a major constraint as the destruction of agriculture, markets, and local businesses has increased poverty and unemployment, leaving many households dependent on humanitarian assistance

(World Bank, 2017). Traditional leadership and indigenous governance structures have also been weakened through displacement and the loss of community leaders, reducing their capacity to mediate conflicts and coordinate recovery efforts. In addition, inadequate funding and limited institutional support restrict the ability of local organizations and community groups to sustain resilience and livelihood programmes, with many initiatives relying heavily on external donor assistance (UNDP, 2021). The long-term psychological effects of violence, displacement, and loss have further undermined social cohesion and reconciliation within communities. Overall, sustaining community resilience in Borno State requires coordinated efforts by government institutions, traditional authorities, humanitarian organizations, and local communities to address insecurity, strengthen livelihoods, rebuild governance structures, and promote lasting peace and recovery.

Methodology

This study adopted a historical research design using a qualitative approach to examine the evolution of community resilience against the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State. The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, archival materials, policy documents, newspapers, and reports from reputable organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Bank, and International Crisis Group. Data were collected through documentary research and analyzed using historical and thematic content analysis to identify patterns, trends, and changes in community resilience mechanisms before, during, and after the insurgency. To ensure the credibility of the findings, information from multiple sources was critically examined and cross-checked through source triangulation. Since the study was based solely on documentary evidence, no human participants were involved. Ethical standards were maintained through proper citation of sources, objective interpretation of evidence, and adherence to academic integrity. Although the study relied on secondary sources that may contain varying perspectives, the use of diverse and credible materials enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

Results

Historical Evolution of Community Resilience Against the Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno State: The study found that community resilience in Borno State evolved in response to the changing dynamics of the Boko Haram insurgency. Initially, communities relied on indigenous structures such as traditional institutions, family networks, and religious organizations to provide support, maintain social order, and cope with insecurity. As the insurgency intensified, resilience strategies became more organized through the emergence of community security initiatives, including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), youth groups, and local volunteers. Communities also adapted through mutual assistance, livelihood strategies, and collaboration with humanitarian organizations to address displacement and economic challenges. However, these resilience mechanisms became weakened by persistent insecurity, resource limitations, economic hardship, and the erosion of traditional institutions. Overall, the findings show that community resilience in Borno State transformed from informal coping practices into more structured collective responses that enabled communities to survive and recover from prolonged insurgent violence.

Indigenous Community Resilience Mechanisms Employed by Communities in Borno State to Cope with the Effects of The Boko Haram Insurgency

The study found that communities in Borno State relied on indigenous resilience mechanisms to cope with the effects of the Boko Haram insurgency. Traditional institutions, family networks, religious bodies, and community associations played important roles in maintaining social order, providing support, resolving conflicts, and assisting vulnerable groups. The emergence of community security initiatives such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), youth groups, and local volunteers also contributed to community protection and information sharing. Additionally, women's groups and local organizations supported humanitarian assistance and livelihood recovery efforts. Communities adopted adaptive strategies such as resource sharing, informal economic activities, and modified farming practices to sustain survival. Overall, indigenous resilience mechanisms were essential in enabling communities to endure and recover from insurgency-related challenges, although their effectiveness was limited by insecurity, displacement, and inadequate resources.

The Challenges Confronting Community Resilience Initiatives in Mitigating the Long-Term Effects of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno State

The study found that community resilience initiatives in Borno State face significant challenges in mitigating the long-term effects of the Boko Haram insurgency. Persistent insecurity, especially from insurgent attacks, continues to disrupt livelihoods, movement, and recovery efforts. Prolonged displacement has weakened family networks, traditional support systems, and placed pressure on host communities. The study also revealed that economic hardship caused by the destruction of agriculture, markets, and businesses has increased poverty and unemployment, limiting communities' ability to achieve sustainable recovery. Additionally, weakened traditional institutions, inadequate funding, and dependence on external humanitarian support have reduced the effectiveness and sustainability of local resilience initiatives. The psychological consequences of prolonged violence, including trauma and loss of social trust, have further affected reconciliation and social cohesion. Overall, the findings show that while communities in Borno State have developed strong coping mechanisms, their resilience remains constrained by insecurity, displacement, economic challenges, institutional weaknesses, and limited resources. Strengthening local institutions, livelihood opportunities, and peacebuilding efforts is essential for sustainable recovery.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that community resilience was central to helping communities in Borno State withstand and recover from the Boko Haram insurgency. The study found that resilience was rooted in longstanding indigenous institutions, including traditional rulers, religious leaders, kinship networks, and community associations, which promoted social cohesion, collective action, and mutual support before and during the conflict. This finding is consistent with Berkes and Ross (2013), Aldrich (2012), and Putnam (2000), who emphasized that social capital and strong local institutions enhance communities' capacity to cope with crises. The study also found that the insurgency transformed traditional resilience mechanisms into more organized community responses. The emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), together with the active participation of women's groups, youth associations, religious organizations, and local volunteers, strengthened intelligence gathering, community security, humanitarian assistance, and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs). These findings support Norris *et al.*, (2008), Magis (2010), and Patel *et al.*,

(2017), who argued that resilience depends on adaptive leadership, community participation, and institutional flexibility.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that community resilience extended beyond security to include livelihood restoration, communal labour, psychosocial support, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery. Traditional institutions and community organizations complemented government and humanitarian interventions by rebuilding livelihoods and strengthening social cohesion. This supports the views of Ungar (2018) and Folke (2016), who regard resilience as a continuous process of adaptation, learning, and transformation. However, the study identified persistent insecurity, displacement, poverty, weakened traditional institutions, inadequate resources, and psychological trauma as major constraints to sustainable community resilience. These findings are consistent with reports by the IOM, (2022), the World Bank (2017). and the ICG (2024), which identified socio-economic deprivation, weak governance, and continued insecurity as significant barriers to recovery in northeastern Nigeria. Finally, the study demonstrated that community resilience in Borno State evolved from traditional systems of mutual support into organized community-based responses throughout the Boko Haram insurgency. It also fills an important gap in the literature by showing that indigenous institutions and local initiatives are fundamental to conflict mitigation, recovery, and peacebuilding. The findings therefore underscore the need to strengthen traditional institutions and integrate community-based organizations into formal security, humanitarian, and post-conflict recovery strategies.

Conclusion

This study concluded that community resilience played a significant role in enabling communities in Borno State to survive, adapt to, and recover from the Boko Haram insurgency. Indigenous institutions, traditional leaders, religious organizations, kinship networks, and community-based groups provide essential support through security initiatives, humanitarian assistance, livelihood recovery, and peacebuilding efforts. Although these resilience mechanisms contributed greatly to conflict management and recovery, their effectiveness is limited by persistent insecurity, internal displacement, poverty, weakened institutions, and inadequate resources. The study therefore emphasized the need to strengthen local institutions and integrate community-based resilience strategies into security, humanitarian, and post-conflict recovery programmes to promote sustainable peace and development in Borno State.

Recommendations

Based on the three major findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Strengthening Indigenous Institutions and Community-Based Resilience Mechanisms:** The study found that traditional institutions, religious organizations, community associations, and local groups played significant roles in supporting communities during the Boko Haram insurgency. Therefore, government and development partners should strengthen these local structures through capacity building, institutional support, and greater inclusion in peacebuilding and recovery programmes. Their indigenous knowledge, legitimacy, and community acceptance should be integrated into formal security and development strategies.
- ii. **Enhancing Economic Recovery and Social Support Systems:** The findings revealed that poverty, internal displacement, livelihood destruction, and unemployment weakened community resilience in Borno State. Consequently, government agencies and humanitarian organizations should prioritize sustainable livelihood programmes,

including agricultural support, vocational training, entrepreneurship opportunities, and employment initiatives. Special attention should also be given to women, youths, and internally displaced persons through psychosocial support, education, and reintegration programmes to promote long-term recovery.

- iii. **Improving Security Coordination and Sustainable Peacebuilding:** The study established that persistent insecurity, weakened institutions, and inadequate resources continue to limit community resilience. Therefore, there is the need for stronger collaboration among security agencies, government institutions, traditional leaders, and community actors. Local intelligence networks, early warning mechanisms, and indigenous conflict-resolution practices should be incorporated into security and peacebuilding frameworks to enhance sustainable peace and resilience in Borno State.

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