

Poor Governance and Resurgence of Coup d'états in Africa: Implication for Sustainable Peace and Security

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Abstract

This paper examined some democratic African states and the alleged regression of socioeconomic indicators, such as poor democratic quality, and a flagrant misdemeanor by political elites via widespread corruption. Custodian theory was adopted to account for the resurgence of military rule in Africa. While using extant literature, the paper drew attention to the basis of the allegation of poor democratic governance and cautioned power stakeholders on the dire consequences of this emerging trend. The study concludes that there is a need to recalibrate and reinvigorate the process of peacebuilding and the security architecture of the African Union by critical stakeholders. The promotion of democratic ideals by political elites, respect for the rule of law, provision of good governance, and conduct of periodic and credible elections were recommended as panaceas.

Keywords: Africa, military coup, poor governance, resurgence, sustainable peace and security

Introduction

The postcolonial era in most African states was characterized by instability and armed conflicts through military coups and counter-coups which many people blamed on weak government structure passed down by colonial masters. The resulting instability has made the search for peace and security inevitable for African leaders and the international community at large. Although most African states have evolved home-grown structures and have become more stable than in the immediate post-colonial rule, there were great expectations from the political elites that took over governance as many Africans clamored for speedy development and good governance. However, the vision and value system brought into governance by political leaders play a pivotal role in fostering peace, development, and security on the one hand or promoting oppression and resurgence of conflict at the national and continental levels on the other.

Unfortunately, many African political leaders in post-colonial states lack capacity for good governance as shown by poor democratic quality and regression of socio-economic indicators.

Scholars have defined the term “good governance” in many ways. The World Bank Report (2003) considered good governance as the process of decision-making and ways in which decisions are implemented. In most cases, the government is the major actor in state decision-making, but other non-state actors such as religious groups, tribal leaders, trade unions, social groups, and the military also influence or shape the decisions made and the ways they are implemented. However, there is no consensus as to what constitutes good governance. McGrew et al. (2004) posited the features of a good system of governance and this include being participatory, consensus-oriented, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable, and inclusive. For instance, the World Bank provided six indicators for measuring good governance including voice and accountability, political stability and lack of violence, the effectiveness of government, regulatory quality, respect for rule of law, and control of corruption (UN Economic Commission, 2003). These indicators are believed to be key factors indicating good governance in a democratic system and promoters of sustainable peace and long-term development (USAID, 2004).

When some African democracies are subjected to the test of good governance using these indicators, many of them did not pass the test as good governance indicators reflect underdevelopment, insecurity, instability, and violence across Africa. After 50 years of African independence, it is no more fashionable to blame the colonial masters for the woes of African democracies as this period is long enough for major correction of the past and follow the path of development if the actors have played it well. The poor performance of some governments and the misbehavior of some African political elites have greatly impacted negatively on the

growth and development of citizens and has called to question the nexus between good governance and democratization. Non-state actors have begun to ask if democratization automatically guarantees good governance, or under what conditions and situations will democratization provide good governance? More naturally, when citizens are pushed to the wall, the result often leads to violence and anarchy which in most cases constitute the *raison d'être* of the military men to topple democratically elected governments in some African states. It is noteworthy, however, that the African Union has taken some bold steps at addressing issues of poor governance among its member states through the initiative of "African solutions to African Problems" (Zekeri, 2016).

To address issues concerning governance and democratization in Africa, the African Union (AU) launched the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) as two major initiatives to promote good governance and democratization. The APRM instrument compels member states to voluntarily undergo a process of self-assessment. This process is divided into several phases and structured around four main axes: Democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development (USAID, 2004). The purpose of the African Charter on Democracy Elections, and Governance is to deepen the commitment of its members to democratic principles, elections, the rule of law and respect for human rights (Mc Grey et al., 2004).

It is surprising, however, that despite these efforts, many African political leaders and governments still run afoul of the ideals of democracy and Africans are beginning to witness the resurgence of military coups in the continent. Recalling in the recent past, military take-over of power become unpopular going by the wide acceptance of democratic governance

across the continent, which hitherto often spur them into seizing power from civilian administrations over flimsy excuses. Twenty to thirty years ago, military dictatorships have disappeared and both civilians and the military have come to embrace democracy in anticipation of better governance. Ironically, the much-awaited benefits of democratic government have not been felt owing to the recklessness, corrupt practices, nepotism, and oppression meted out to citizens by the political elites. Thus, the hitherto unpopular military regime is gradually becoming a welcome alternative in many African countries. Countries like Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Republic of Guinea are already under military dictatorships while Chad witnessed an attempted military coup on the 6th of January 2023.

The fact that Africans celebrate military coups in the continent is an indication that many African states are failing or failed states under democratic dispensations. If the common dictum of "the best military government is worse than the worst civilian government" is true, why the overwhelming welcome and embrace towards military administration in some African countries? These concerns compel the following questions: What is wrong with African democracies? Are there no ways to check the excesses of political elites? Are there foreign collaborators in the misrule and poor governance of African states?

If people are pushed to the wall under a democratic dispensation, they may be left with no other choice than to beckon to the military as an alternative if it is going to grant them what democracy cannot provide. The recent upsurge in military coups and military government in Africa suggests that no nation is immune to military coups so far as there is bad governance. This paper, therefore, examines the nature of African democracy and the resurgence of military coups to address some critical issues of governance and their implications for sustainable peace and security in Africa.

Theoretical Framework: The Customary Theory of Military Intervention

This study adopted the Customary Theory of Military Intervention (CTMI) which opines that the military is the custodian of the nation's constitution and as such it feels impelled to intervene when the constitutional framework is being violated. The justification for this is that the military will intervene where civilian governments lack legitimacy due to inadequate government electoral support and ineffective executive (Huntington, 1969). One of the prominent names of this theory is Dibia (2003), and he stated that the institution of military is the custodian of state's constitution. When constitution is being violated by civilian authority, then military considered it its responsibility to intervene and save the country from constitutional crisis. (p.102).

Theoretical Review

Some theories have been provided to explain the nexus between democratization and governance, some of which looked at different aspects of the subject matter but collectively attempted to deepen democracy and ensure good governance for the people. One of such theories that applies to this study is the Social Contract Theory (hereafter SCT). The SCT portrays governance as an agreement (contract) between the leaders and the led in a way that each party has duties and obligations to perform in the contractual arrangement for the contract to hold. The SCT pre-dated the birth of democratic governance but it is a prominent theory on the origin of the state and provides principles that govern modern democracy in America and across the world (Okonkwo et al., 2001). The works of Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1689), and Jean- Jacques Rousseau (1762) midwifed the SCT as we have it today. They conceived a contract or agreement by people to surrender their membership to absolute political sovereignty for the benefit of better security and self-preservation. In the context of this study, governance in post-colonial African states is seen as a contractual agreement between political

leaders and citizens in which the government owes the citizens responsibilities and basic civil liberties in exchange for citizens' allegiance.

The social contract portends that citizens have voluntarily transferred their natural rights and liberties to a sovereign political authority that would determine law and order through a common power as the head of their commonwealth (Subrata, 2007). However, in the governance of states, commonwealth could be formed by either invitation/agreement or acquisition/force. The acquisition of sovereign power (commonwealth) through invitation and agreement is commonly preferred and consistent with military rule. The SCT recognizes the possibility of both but hinges its forces on governance through agreement (social contract) because it is more credible and most importantly makes the "commonwealth" sovereign as against the latter form of governance which has the likelihood of resistance and violence (Popoola & Mohammed, 2023).

Many post-colonial African states at their evolutionary stages have witnessed a combination of governance based on a mutual agreement and consensus with the citizens as well as governance through the forceful acquisition of power (military coups) at intermittent periods of nationhood. Several reasons were advanced for this phenomenon but the most cited of them was the allegation of a weak governance structure handed over by the colonial masters. Over time, democratic cultures and principles prevail, institutions were built and forfeited and gradually political instability began to manifest in post-colonial African states until recently when the resurgence of forceful take-over of power through coup d'états in most African states.

The SCT envisaged the establishment of a "legitimate government" centered on several principles including the principle of consent, principle of separation of powers and the principle

of dissolution of government (Subrata, 2007). Accordingly, legitimate governance is a government based on the voluntary transfer of the collective power of people to a sovereign government. All through, legitimate governments were installed by consensus with the rule of the majority over time. The principle of consent stresses the need for individual consent to the mechanism by which political societies are created and individuals join these societies (Kain, 1993). In other words, citizens became subjects of political authority only by consent, and without consent no political state would exist.

The argument that not every citizen gives consent to the government under which they live, the SCT accords tacit consent. The intention of that consent claims that if anyone accepts the benefits of a government, the people have tacitly consented to the burdens that government imposes on him. Thus, if someone enjoys the right of citizenship or rights of education, of accommodation, of health care, roads, and other infrastructures, then the persons have given indirect or tacit consent to the government that provides all these benefits (Popoola & Mohammed, 2003). Thus, it implies that the legitimacy of government is drawn from citizens' tacit consent. In most post-colonial African states, especially where the democratic government was in place, citizens consent is the basis of the existence of such governments. Consequently, people deserve good governance which may come in form of peoples' parties' stability, respect for rule of law, transparency and a host of others (Griffith, 2001). These elements are often claimed to be violated by the military for staging coups and overthrowing democratic governments in most African states.

The principle of separation of powers also hallmarks the legitimacy of a government that performs its statutory roles without interference and intimidation from other tiers. Also, the structure of governance such as the legislative, executive, and judiciary be made to operate

independently under their constitutional provisions. The principle of separation of powers suggests that the legislature makes laws that will impact positively on the welfare of the citizens; the executive implements the laws and make impactful policies, while the judiciary interprets the laws and adjudicate on any matter in the state (Hampsher-Monk, 1992). In some post-colonial African states, these structures are there but have been compromised such that people-oriented programs are not implemented; the rule of law is not respected, and justice is miscarried. In some instances, the powers of a certain arm of government are suppressed and court orders/pronouncements are ignored. The aggregate effect of these actions may result in violence and to prevent such coup d'états marking forceful takeover of the reins of governance be curtailed from the democratically elected government may occur. Thus, the principle of separation of power must be respected if democracy will be sustained in the post-colonial African states.

The SCT does not, however, envisage a situation of total compliance with the principle of separation of powers as well as the provision of good governance to the citizens. As such, it provides for checks and balances between the people whose consent brought the government into place and the government itself. The third principle, "principle of dissolution of government" provides for the dismantling of a "legitimate government" by the people through consensus and majority voice. The principle of dissolution of government aims at preventing the arbitrary use of power and oppressive governance through autocratic use of authority on the citizens. The SCT envisages that the principle of dissolution of government could be invoked when any of the following including arbitrary use of executive powers, hindrance of the legislative arm of government, scuttling of electoral laws and regulations by the executive or legislature without the consent of the majority, contravention or undermining the sovereign powers of the state by the different arm of government, and disrespect to the rule of law.

Although these principles were well laid out to guide democratic governance and provide good governance for the people, the inherent checks and balances (especially the principle of dissolution of government) were often inhibited or deliberately de-activated by power-hungry military men who too overthrows democratic governments instead of allowing internal democratic control measure to take its course and/or ensure new democratic governments installed.

Africa and the Virus of Military Coup d'états

Africa has witnessed more coup d'états than any other continent in the world and sadly, the scenario still looks unending. Out of 486 attempted coups carried out around the world, almost 50 percent (214) of them occurred in Africa (Dazor & Williamson (2022). The rate of the coup d'états (in comparative terms) is not only alarming but the trend is very worrisome. Figure 1 showed the distribution of coup d'états in Africa using ten (10) years intervals (1950 to 2022.)

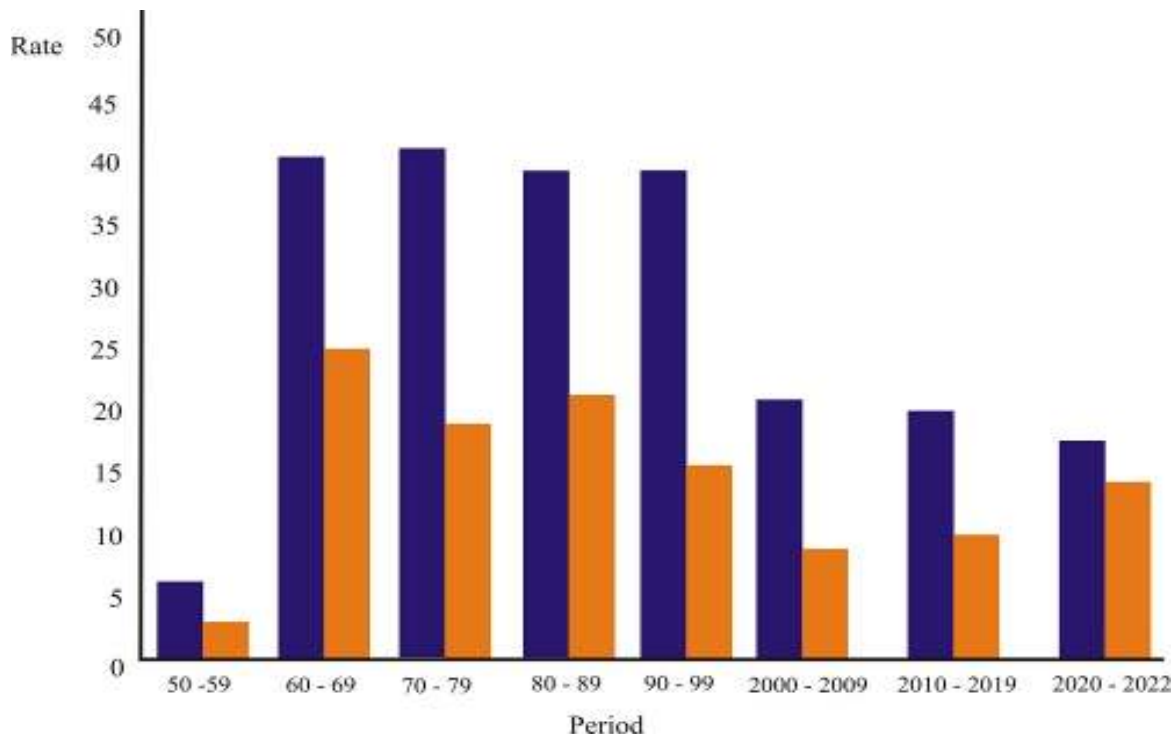


Figure 1: Showing the attempted coup d'états in Africa (1950 – 2022).

KEY: Attempted Military Coup

Successful Military Coup

Figure 1 showed the distribution of coup d'états in Africa on a ten-year basis beginning from 1950. The period between 1950 and 1959 showed that there were six (6) attempted coup d'états but (3) three were successful. There were 41 attempted and 25 successful coup d'états between 1960 and 1969, while the period between 1970 and 1979 recorded 42 attempted and 18 successful coup d'états in Africa. Similarly, there were 39 attempted and 22 successful coup d'états between 1980 and 1989, whereas 39 attempted and 16 successful coup d'états took place between 1990 and 1999. In the same vein, 22 attempted and 8 successful coup d'états were recorded between the years 2000 and 2009 while 17 attempted and 8 successful coup d'états were witnessed from 2010 to 2019. Within the frame of three years (2020-2022), Africa recorded 8 attempted and 6 successful coup d'états (Powel & Thyne, 2022). Summarily, 214 attempted coup d'états were staged in Africa between the period of 1950 and 2022. It also follows that 106 of these coup d'états were successful and military regimes were installed.

On a percentage basis, Africa alone recorded a 49.5 percent (approximately 50 percent) success rate within the period under review. Further analysis of data in Figure 1 showed that records of coup d'états in Africa started with 6 coup d'états (1950-59), jumped to between 4 and 39, and remained at an all-time high for a period of four decades (1960 and 1999) before it came down to 22 and 17 within the next two decades (2000-2019). However, when many observers were thinking the era of coup d'état is over, 8 coup d'états were staged within a time frame of three years (2020-2022) with a success rate of 75 percent.

Post-colonial African states have indeed suffered great setbacks from coup d'états. Out of 54 sovereign states in Africa, 45 of them have experienced coup d'états at varying degrees and

frequency. The regularity of coup d'états in about 13 countries has become so worrisome in recent times (Kazeem, 2017). Duzor and Williamson (2022) documented African countries with the most coup d'états (attempted, successful, and unsuccessful) and reported that Sudan tops the list with 17 Coups, Burkina Faso has recorded 8 successful coup d'états, Nigeria has also witnessed 8 attempted and 6 successful coup d'états, Chad recorded 7, Burundi 6, Ghana 6, Comoros 6, Mauritania 6, Ethiopia 5, Libya 5, Sierra Leone 5, Central African Republic 5, Benin 5, and others like Mali, Guinea and Guinea Bissau that have experienced coup d'états ranged from 4 to 5 times. Fortunately, many other African countries such as Botswana, South Africa, South Sudan, Cape Verde, Malawi, Namibia, Eritrea, Senegal, Sao Tome, and Principe, Seychelles, and Mauritius have not experienced coup d'états. However, what could be the plausible explanation of such frequency coup d'états in Africa. There are three broad scholarly views on the incursion of the military into politics. These schools of thought are the structural model, the politicization school, and the economic deterministic views (Obi, 1999). The structural model opined that the reasons for military intervention in politics could be explained by the internal structure of the military as an institution. The internal structure of the military which involves the social background of the military officers, their skill structure and career lines, military internal cohesion and cleavages, and military professionalism and ideology, all cumulatively impacted the psyche of military officers to intervene in politics (Finer, 1967; Horowitz, 1980). The structural model emphasized that military professionalism and discipline necessitated the development of the spirit of praetorianism which amplifies the notion that soldiers are the saviors of their countries and in the face of internal instability, they have a cause to step in and maintain law and order (Decalo, 1973).

The politicization school argued that the political set-up rather than the structure of the military should be blamed for military intervention in politics. This view was developed by Huntington

(1968) in his seminar paper titled, "Political Order in Changing Societies" wherein he opined that the explanation for military intervention in politics cut across politics, economy, and societal factors. He submitted that military intervention in developing societies is only an aspect of the general politicization of social Forces and institutions. For instance, in a society where most social forces and institutions are highly politicized (like in Africa) the tendency for politicized military to interrupt democratic governance to satisfy their political ambition will always be there.

The third school of thought on economic determinism was championed by Wolpin (1981) through his write-up titled, "Militarism and Social Revolution", where he argued a very radical view of the social class division of society and the role each plays in the process of production and social relations of production. He premised his argument on economic determinism as the motivation for the military incursion into politics. In his view, the military is a conservative socio-political force that shares with the bourgeoisie similar materialistic class interests. Therefore, the corporate interest of the military cannot be isolated from those of the bourgeoisie and for this reason any threat to his self-interest or its satisfaction would always energize him to take over power. To the bourgeoisie, politics is an easy and lucrative means of fulfilling the material interest of the military class. Thus, these schools of thought have provided some explanations for the rationale for military incursion into politics. It is left to the political class in Africa to recognize the dynamics of governance, good governance to the people and respect the rule of law if Africa is to witness a drop in coup d'états.

Development and Sustainable Peace and Security in Post-Colonial Africa

Like in other climes, post-colonial African states require rapid development, peace, and security to make a significant impact locally and among the committee of nations. However,

these achievements are anchored on the provision of good governance across all levels. A good system of government is one which encourages a wide range of citizen participation in decision-making, one that takes decisions on widespread agreement by the people, one that is open to scrutiny in decision-making processes, listens and responds to the needs of citizens, provides basic services to its population, including the vulnerable and marginalized ones (Albert, 2017). The search for good governance in post-colonial African states was not limited to these nations alone but a shared value between some bilateral and multi-lateral institutions especially the stakeholders in the project Africa. Many of these institutions have defined good governance according to different indicators suitable to their use. The World Bank identified six parameters for measuring good governance to help countries identify areas of weakness to encourage capacity building and strategic assistance for effectiveness. These indicators include voice and accountability, political stability and lack of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, respect for the rule of law, and control of corruption (Duzor, 2022). Thus, international agencies such as the World Bank consider good governance as a prerequisite for peace, and long-term development and insist on its use as a major requirement for the provision of aid across the world, especially in African states.

The key components of good governance amongst others include democratization, free and fair elections, decentralization, participatory politics, political parties, women's participation in politics, independent civil society, media, rule of law (Cramer, 2006). These indicators provide good grounds for the measurement of good governance and peer review parameters among developing countries to advance the development and provide sustainable peace and security in Africa.

The corruption Perception Index of Transparency International (CPI) featured ten African countries in the list of the top 20 countries with the highest corruption index in the World in 2008 (Transparency International Survey, 2009) and since then, an appreciable impact has not been made by most African countries on these ratings. The "Fragile States Index" prepared by Brookings Global Economy and Development, rated 22 out of the 28 countries judged as "Fragile States" to be in Africa. This submission was however challenged and its authors accused of hiding substantial differences in contexts and situations. Thus, a homegrown indicator (Ibrahim Index for African Governance) rated countries such as Mauritania, Cape Verde, Botswana, and South Africa high on positive evolutions in governance and closely followed by countries like Namibia, Ghana, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, and Senegal while countries such as Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Angola, Central Africa Republic, Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Guinea-Conakry, and Nigeria have been consistently reported as the poorest on the indicators (IIAG, 2020). True to this assessment, some of these countries are now under military rule.

There is no doubt that the poor quality of governance in these African countries has impacted greatly on the development and by extension peace and security of the continent. Many scholars have attributed the persistence of armed violence in certain phases of socio-economic indicators to poor democratic quality, misbehavior of African political elites, and widespread corruption (Rose & Peiffer, 2019). Little surprise, armed conflicts have been recurring in the analysis of post-colonial Africa. In the 60s, a total of 24 sub-Saharan African countries (which is about 50 percent of African States) suffered war, while 22 other countries managed to "avoid it" (Obi, 1999). These figures, no doubt, have tremendously increased by now. Some countries that have continuously recorded high levels of tension, violence, and political and social instability have been given special attention. It is noteworthy that the Africa Union through

various instruments has made and is still making deliberate efforts to address the issue of peace and security in the continent including the emergence of an African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). APSA consists of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Stand by Force (ASF) whose ambition is to become the military intervention and rapid reaction force of the AU.

In the year 2001, the African Union (AU) adopted a pragmatic approach on the issue of peace and security to address the dilemma raised by the principle of sovereignty and interference that often characterized the maintenance of peace and security across the continent through APSA. This initiative was designed to be a homegrown interventionist framework to provide African solutions to African problems to consolidate the achievements of previous regional organizations in several "peacekeeping" operations such as the Economics Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that intervened in Liberia and Sierra Leone through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and so on. Other agencies in Africa into peacekeeping include AMIB in Burundi, AMIOC in Comoros, AMISOM in Somalia, and UNAMID in Darfur. Despite the various interventions and tremendous supports from the international community, peace and security remain fragile in Africa orchestrating the resurgence of coup d'états in Africa.

Conclusion

Post-colonial African states have witnessed mixed fortune in terms of governance occasioned by the intermittent incursion of the military in politics through coup d'état. The governance crisis in Africa has been partly seen as an outcome of the historical trajectories of state formation and the dynamics of power relations between those who control it and opposition

parties including non-state actors. Poor governance systems and the excesses of the political elites have contributed immensely to creating the enabling environment for military intervention in post-colonial African states. The nature and trend of coup d'états in post-colonial Africa span a seemingly three-phase period. First, was a time of increasing rate up to the peak of coup d'états, the second was the period up to the end of the Cold War, and the resurgence of civil society agitation for democratization. The wave of democracy across Africa through the Introduction of the multi-party system gave room for people with all shades of opinion and doused the tension generated by the one-party state system. There was a little respite during this period. The third period is very recent when Africa began to witness the resurgence of coup d'états across Africa.

The resurgence of coup d'états in Africa is generating a lot of tension and giving people concerns as no African state is immune to it. The vulnerability of states is heightened by the increasing boldness of the military and the apparent embrace of coup d'états by citizens of some states. Except the political elites exercise extra caution and something drastic is done to reverse the trend, the contagious effect of a coup may have spillover effect in countries that are relatively stable thereby throwing the whole continent into unwarranted militarism.

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