

The Effect Of Religious Creeds On The Nigerian Political Landscape And National Development

Ajobiewe Jamiu Olatunji & Asuquo Victor

Centre for General Studies
Ogun State Institute of Technology
Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Religion Has Always Been Important In Nigeria As Well As Its Politics, Because Nigeria Is Regarded As Having The Highest Intensity Of Religious Identity (Creeds) In The World. Top This End, Religion Has Become A Pivotal In Political Success Of A Party In Nigeria. The Research Work Examined The Impact Of Religion On Nigerian Politics And National Development. The Study Adopted Descriptive Survey Research Design As The Information Collected From The Participants Were Used For The Purpose Of Predicting, Describing And Interpreting The Impacts Of Religion On Nigeria Politics And National Development. The Population Of The Study Consisted Of Some Selected Undergraduates Tertiary Institutions In Lagos State. A Total Of One Hundred (100) Undergraduates Participated In The Study. Through The Use Of Simple Random Sampling Technique, Twenty Five (25) Respondents Were Selected From Each Tertiary Institutions Without Any Bias For Gender, Creed Or Religion. The Main Instrument For Data Collection Was A Self-Structured Questionnaire Consisting Of 10 Items On Impact Of Religion On Nigerian Politics And National Development. The Study Found That There Is Significant Influence Of Religion On Nigerian Politics. The Study Concluded That The Relationship Between Religion, Politics And Development Is Likely To Be Complementary As Long As Religious Beliefs And Practices Promote 'Moderation' Rather Than Fanatism. The Study Recommended That Government At All Levels Should Support Unreservedly The Free Practice Of Religion Creeds By Nigerian Christians, Muslims And Traditional Animists. It Is Also Recommended That No Religion In Nigeria Should Be Deemed Superior Or Subordinate To The Other, And None Should Be State Sanctioned Or Enforced.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Nigeria, Impact And National Development.

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I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The connection between religion and politics has always been incontestable; people have the tendency to politicize religion and religionize politics. The Nigerian people are no exception. Religion has taken a position of importance in the country's politics. And this is understandable as Nigeria is vast with religious diversities which are intertwined with political activities in the country (Adebanwi, 2010). There are three dominant religions in Nigeria: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity, and the deologies of these three religions allow for interaction between religion and politics. Christianity and Islamic religion however, take the centre stage. Both have profoundly reinforced regional and ethnic differences, making stability for the country more difficult. This does not mean that African Traditional Religion is relegated to the background though (Ayantayo, 2009). A number of Muslim and Christian politicians, privately and secretly consult the priests of the ATR, especially when it comes to political agreements and business contracts. But, ATR is not such a strong factor in the moulding of state policies (Nmah, 2007).

Usually, there are three ways by which religion impacts politics: direct involvement of religious men in politics, fusing the two (religion and politics) as one, and subjecting of politics or government to the doctrine or laws of religion, thereby carrying out politics or governance along the line of religious doctrine, ideals or laws. Religion has always been important in Nigeria and in Nigerian politics (Ugwueye, 2009). "The intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world". This claim is supported by the fact that Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of religion than any other identity. Indeed, according to 2006 survey on Religion and Public Life conducted by the Pew Forum on "Religion and Public Life", 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. Among Muslims, the number naming religion as the most important factor is even higher (91%). In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians (Nmah, 2007). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Factbook lists Nigeria as 50% Muslim, 40% Christian, and 10% indigenous

beliefs. The intensity of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world (CIA Report, 2013).

The diversity of religion with political influence could be traced to amalgamation period. It will not be correct to say that Nigeria was created with a faulty foundation. The interest of its creators was not to build a nation, but to find an area for exploration. The administrative, political, social and economic system they adopted and employed was to facilitate this one goal. Nigeria was born as a result of the scramble and partition for Africa by imperial Europe. In 1884, leading European nations met in Berlin and divided Africa into nations to end terrestrial struggle among them.

Unfortunately, there was no African represented. From here they proceeded with the conquest of Southern and Northern territories, When the conquest was completed in 1903 they divided the nation into North and South Protectorates and the Colony of Lagos. In 1906 the Lagos colony was amalgamated with the Southern Protectorate to become the Southern Protectorate. Nigeria evolved as a nation when the Southern and Northern Protectorates were amalgamated in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard who also became the first Governor General of Nigeria. The North was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group while the West was dominated by the Yoruba and the East by the Ibos. The amalgamation really caused the problems of religion in Nigeria (Okafor, 2011). This is the beginning of influence of religion in Nigeria politics.

According to Hornby (2010), politics has to do with "the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society". Etymologically, politics refers to the art of governing a city. Iwe in Nmah (2007) defines politics as the process of adjustment and inter-play of power and interest within the public life and affairs of a society on national and multi-national levels. According to Dahl in Okafor (2007), politics has to do with who gets what, when and how. The very decision to support a particular religion or set of principles in a society as opposed to an individual is a political decision. Politics is essentially about good governance and primarily involves the structuring of power for achieving some articulated goals.

Development has been defined variously by scholars. Rodney (2011) sees development as many-sided process in human history, which at the level of the individual implies increased skill, discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentials of a nation are enhanced until it reaches its stable position. It is a process of allowing people to meet their own aspirations. Hence, the sharpening of human abilities and the productive organization of nation's mentality are of utmost importance for development because the agents and beneficiaries of development are the humans of a given nation. Obi opines that "development is the harnessing of available resources by a people for the realization of their major objectives, solving their major articulated problem without deliberately creating new problem situations" (Obi, 2019: 63).

In Nigeria today, it is rather difficult to hold a public office without being affiliated to a religion. Politicians make use of the power rooted in religion, not only to achieve their aims, but also to subjugate their opponents and to legitimize their religion. It is not secret that politicians openly advocate religious sentiments in campaigning for public support. While these political office holders misuse religion as a tool to get to power, religious leaders seize the opportunity to gain from those who hold public office. In the 1999 elections, Pentecostal Christians openly supported Obasanjo's contention under the umbrella of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and after Obasanjo was elected president, Pentecostal leaders conducted an all-night prayer meeting for him. This gesture was politically endorsed and rewarded with the construction of a chapel in the Presidential Villa, the seat of national politics.

Again, people vote according to their faith regardless of the capacity of the candidate to lead the country. It has been common practice in the southeast. In the last elections, catholic priests in Anambra State openly charged their members to vote for Peter Obi (former governor) because of his religious inclination. APC candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), scored the highest vote in the 2011 presidential election in Jigawa State, polling 665,994 votes to beat his closest rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who polled 419,252 votes. During the announcement of the result at the INEC headquarters in Dutse, the presidential election Collation Officer for the state, showed that the total votes cast were 1,214,774, adding that the total valid votes were 1,140,766. According to him, Nigeria is governed by the constitution, not by any of the holy books, because party politics goes beyond religion and tribal consideration.

Therefore, there is need to consider the role of religion in Nigeria political associations, the government policies as well its impact in Nigerian politics. This paper therefore investigates the impact of religion on Nigeria politics using Lagos State as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

Religion has been a dominant factor in Nigerian politics especially in Nigeria today. In whichever way one sees religion, the fact cannot be denied of its interaction with politics as well as development in Nigeria. The obvious interplay between religion and politics has attracted the reactions of scholars (Sahara Reporters, May 02,

2013; Vanguard, February, 09, 2014 and Human Rights Watch. 2014) and what seems the consensus of such reactions is the ambivalent role of religion in the growth, development, and survival of the Nigerian nation (Ihedirika, 2011; Onapajo, 2012; The Punch, Wednesday 2nd April, 2014; Obiefuna, 2018). Accordingly, it is not a small question to ask in which way religion involves itself in political realm for on this depends to some measure how much value Nigerians attach to their faith. This is to say that the impacts of religion on Nigerian politics could be both positive and negative. Some findings (Tar and Shettima, 2010; Okafor, 2018 and Ruby & Shah, 2020) agree that religion and politics are intertwined and it empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to contribute his ideology. But little has been researched a regards the inter-relationship between religion, politics and national development in Nigeria.

Thus, the domains of religion, secularism and politics are becoming increasingly intermingled in both overt and covert ways. Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion on politics in Nigeria since independence. In addition, the study intends to find out how religion can bring sustainable development to our politics and to Nigeria as a nation, hence the study.

Research Objective

The overall objective of the study was to examine the impact of religious creeds on Politics and National Development of Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

- (a) investigate the significant influence of religious creeds on Nigerian politics.
- (b) examine the significant impact of religious creeds on Nigerian National development.

Research Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant influence of religious creeds on Nigerian politics.

HO2: There is no significant impact of religious creeds on Nigerian National development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief Overview of Historical Influence of Religious Creeds in Nigerian Politics and National Development

The British colonization of Nigeria both ended the dominance of the Islamic Sokoto Empire and legitimized Muslim cultural, religious, and governance systems (Atubi, 2007). British support for preexisting Islamic leadership, educational, and judicial systems thus created a unified, if less economically developed, northern Islamic political bloc. Muslim traders (wangawara) had first brought Islam to northern Nigerian urban centers in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Muslim missionaries began to convert the rural and common people to their blend of traditional tribal practices and Qur'an-based teachings. But Sunni purists saw this blend as "impure," and between 1804-12, the jihad of the Fulani cleric, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, replaced Hausa leaders with a new caliphate (Online Wikipedia, 2020).

This Sokoto Empire controlled northern Nigeria until 1903 when the British invaded and joined these northern lands to Bornu lands on the southern border. The British then protected Muslim areas from Christian missionaries since they believed the latter would destabilize colonial rule (Famulusi, 2010). In the North, the British made use of Muslim emirs. Their centralized administrative system gave them this advantage. The Northern emirs based their administrative system on Islamic religion. The British used them as agents of colonialism not just over Muslims but non-Muslims as well. The emirs were charged with collecting taxes, local administration, and justice.

For effective administration, the North was divided into emirates, and not just the Muslims areas. This whole system can be best described as joint British-Hausa/Fulani rule and political control over the North (Atubi, 2007).

Another way that Islam influences politics in the midst of Non-Muslims in the South is noted when Afonja, the powerful leader in Ilorin sought for assistance. To strengthen Ilorin's position, Afonja called on the support of Muslim elements in the kingdom. He was not a Muslim himself, and it appears to have been a piece of political opportunism, to harness forces which were proving to be invincible in the states to the north. He enlisted the help of an itinerant Fulani scholar, Alim al-Salih, better known as Mallam Alimi, who declared a jihad at Ilorin. Other support came from Yoruba Muslims led by a man called Solagberu, from pastoral Fulani, and from Muslim slaves who deserted their owners and fled to Ilorin from the adjacent towns. From these, mainly northern, elements, a military force was created which started to lay waste large areas of the Oyo kingdom. Alimi's influence among these troops grew stronger, and Afonja belatedly realised that he was no longer in control. His attempts to disband them led to a civil war, and he was killed in the fighting, probably about 1823 (Boer, 2013). Solagberu was also eliminated. On Alimi's death, control of Ilorin passed to his son Abudusalami. He declared his allegiance to the Sokoto Empire and was recognized as Emir. The Fulani dynasty in Ilorin has survived to the present (Boer, 2013).

After independence, the Muslim north dominated politics. Even in the north, however, Muslim leaders split into the Northern People's Congress (NPC), backed by Qadiriyya Sufi sect, and the Northern Elements

Progressive Party Union (NEPU), backed by the more popular Tijaniyya. The Constitution divided the country into three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern. Muslims became the Federal, Northern, and Western Prime Ministers (Hoffmann, 2014). The Nigerian Christian community is one of the major institutions in Nigeria. In numerical terms, it is bigger than any political party, trade union, or the rank and file of the Nigerian Army (Obiefuna, 2018). From the 1990s to the 2000s, there was significant growth in Protestant churches in Nigeria (Nmah, 2007). The Yoruba area contains a large Anglican population, while Igboland is predominantly Catholic and the Edo area is predominantly Assemblies of God (Nmah, 2007). Christian missions also carried out their mission work within these two broad societies in the North.

The Church in Northern Nigeria was born within three powerful contexts:

- (1) the traditional context, mainly in the Middle Belt areas;
- (2) the Islamic context, mainly in the Far North; and
- (3) the colonial context of British rule over the whole of Nigeria. This northern context had been transformed by the Colonial Administration and Christian missions. The consequences of this transformation in post-colonial Nigeria have influenced greatly the nature of politics and religious conflict in Nigeria (Atubi, 2007).

The growth of Christianity depends on the denominational strength, unlike Islam. Christianity has less involvement in power tussle on the nation. They were mostly after the propagation of the Gospel. Though the spread was hindered by the war lord and religious leaders, and war at the inception of pioneering work of missions, yet there was diversion to where it was accepted. During that time Baptist missionary W. H. Clarke explored up to Ilorin in 1857 but was equally disallowed by the Emir from settling in the city. European missionaries of the CMS Yoruba Mission also entertained serious plans to expand their area of activities further north up to Ilorin, but two visits, one by Reverend A. Mann in 1855 and another by Reverend H. Townsend in 1858, could not persuade the Emir to open his Muslim country to Christian missionaries.

Their encounter with Islam was thus restricted to engaging with Muslims in Yoruba-land (Obiefuna, 2015). And the presence of Church affected health sector, education and civilization of the area than others that disallowed (Ekechi, 2007). Nevertheless a few of the leaders allowed Christianity for personal gain. During time of Bowen of Baptist Mission as a case study, Kurumi received him very cordially and told him to select any place he wished in the town on which to erect his house. That personage evidently thought the missionary was a trader, and, when he saw there were no goods for slave, and the missionary did nothing but talk to the people, he called him to task, rebuking him as a lazy person who did nothing but sit in his pizza and talk. The interest of Kurunmi who invited Bowen to Ijaiye seemed to lie in the prestige and political advantage that his town would derive from the presence of a white resident (Chima, Korieh and Nwokeji, 2015). In Abeokuta, he was on the side of those who did not want the slave trade. Other missionaries from different denominations (e.g. Rev. Henry Townsend, of the Church Missionary Society) were also in the same town as Bowen (Atubi, 2007).

Christianity has distinguished itself in the areas of health care, education, the development and inspiration of African nationalism, and social relationships. What was not explicitly encouraged was active Christian participation in partisan politics. However, the missionaries laid the foundation for the church to oppose governmental policies that deprived citizens of their rights. The intimate relationship that missionaries had with the colonial masters did not stop them from opposing inhumane policies. In some ways, the lack of explicit Christian interest in politics was alleviated by its focus on the implicit socio-political emphasis in the Gospel (Adetayo, 2015). Today, Christianity has grown beyond the wall of the Church into politics as she formed a formidable body, CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) to speak for the Christians in government policy.

Though CAN is not directly governmental body but she has impact in influencing the politics of the nation through special advice to the presidency on religious affairs, through her members in legislature, judicial and executive arm of the government. Similarly, various appreciations of the role of Islam in the process of development and modernization have been made by sociologist and historians (Falola, 2001 & Ayanfayo, 2009). Nigeria has one of the largest concentrations of Muslims in the world, and Islam has played a leading role in its politics. Nigeria is not an Islamic state, as it is under a democratic government with a secular constitution and the rule of law. Nevertheless, Islam is important in Nigeria, with impacts on politics and social life. Islam is an old religion, with millions subscribing to the faith. In many historical periods, Islam has served as a source of unifying force (as in the case of the Sokoto Caliphate during the nineteenth century). Islam has also contributed in many ways to Nigeria's development, notably in providing the sources to organize politics and society, fostering community cohesion, and creating an ideology of change.

Currently, the big debate in the Nigerian political landscape today is whether it matters that the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) is fielding a presidential ticket with a southern Muslim as President and a northern Muslim as Vice President for election in 2023 (This Day, July 21, 2023). For sure, this ticket does not offend any clear constitutional provision, except a contestable reading of the requirement in Section 13 of the constitution mandating ethnic, religious, and social diversity in the management of the public service of Nigeria to prohibit a ticket that is not religiously diverse. Many prominent Christian leaders, especially from the north,

and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) slammed the decision to field a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket as the height of religious insensitivity and disrespect to northern Muslims.

Expectedly, opinions differ on whether religious composition of a presidential ticket should matter in Nigeria in the context of the developmental and other existential challenges that the nation faces post-Buhari presidency (After 2023 election). The 'religion does not matter' camp argues that what Nigerians across religious, ethnic, and social divides care about is a leader who can work the magic of producing jobs, foods, and security.

Religious sensibilities are superstructures that are dispensable in the acute situation of the perils of today's Nigeria. This camp is headlined by Governor El-Rufai's memorable interrogation of whether if you were to enter a plane you would bother to find out the religious affiliation of the pilot. The logic is that if you do not care about the religion of your pilot, you should not care about the religion of your president and his vice.

The problem with this logic however, is that it hypocritically trivializes religion and misreads the complexities and frailties of the Nigerian state. Because the same advocates of 'leave religion out of politics' are the architects of mainstreaming religion into the administrative framework of policymaking, whether in the executive, legislative or judicial branch. The same persons are those spending public finance to sponsor religious pilgrimages, without considering that such actions destabilize the non-establishment policy in Section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution. Their bigger sin is that they do not understand, or pretend not to understand, how much religion in politics defines the juridical order of the Nigerian state.

It is now time to be more decisive about religion and politics. And it starts with clarifying what matters for religion. First, we must distinguish between the theological and sociological aspects of religion. The state should not bother about the theological aspects of religion. We should never want to promote religion in a democratic state. That is the essence of the mountain of jurisprudential exegesis by the US Supreme Court on the vexed question of church and state (The Reuters 29th June, 2022). The key point is that the state should not advantage or burden religion in anyway. This conception of state-religion relationship is incorporated in both Sections 10 and 38 of the Nigerian constitution which states that:

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design type as the information collected from the participants were used for the purpose of predicting, describing and interpreting the impacts of religion on Nigeria politics and national development. The population of the study consists of One hundred (100) undergraduate students that were randomly selected from Four (4) tertiary institutions in Lagos State. Through the use of simple random sampling technique, twenty five (25) respondents were selected from each of the tertiary institutions without any bias for gender, creed or religion. The main instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire consisting of 10 items on impact of religion on Nigerian politics and National development.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections (A and B). Section A consisted of demographic data of the respondents, while Section B, contained ten statements based on the objectives raised in the study using four point Likert scale type of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). To validate the instrument, the self-designed questionnaire was presented to the experts in the field to determine the construct and content validity. Modifications made were used to improve the quality of the instrument. Reliability deals with consistency of the instrument.

From the result of non-parametric analysis obtained from Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), extract above is chi-square calculated, the table affirms that there is a significance impact of religious creeds on Nigerian National development ($\chi^2 = 146.769$, $df = 3$; $P < 0.05$). This depicts that religion has significant impact of religion on Nigerian National development.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From table 2, which displays the analysis on hypothesis one, which states that "there is no significant influence of religious creed on Nigerian politics". Among the five items of the research hypothesis One, only the 3rd item "I support church/other religion should come out in favour of one candidate over another during election" agreed with the null hypothesis with calculated Chi square value (1.200) lower than the table value of 7.815. This is also supported by Adebani, 2010 which submits that impact of religion in daily life of average Nigerians cannot be over-estimated. If truly Nigeria is preparing for a redemptive politics in Nigeria in 2023, we cannot afford to leave aside the discourse of religion in Nigerian politics.

It will be a clear case of delusion if anyone embarks on a journey to Presidential election in 2023 without paying attention to how Nigerians can recalibrate the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. The recent posturing by the self-styled class of 'competence alone matters' that we ought not to pay attention to the diverse and oftentimes contending religious traditions and practices in the Nigerian state in setting stage for transformative leadership in 2023 is nothing but pure deception, or at best deep and dangerous ignorance.

From table 3 that discusses null hypothesis two which states that "there is no significant impact of religious creeds on Nigerian National development" was rejected, because three items out of five items disagree

with the null hypothesis, while the remaining two items (Items 7 and 10) with calculated values of 1.600 and 1.020 respectively were lower than the table value of 7.815.

This is supported by Okafor, 2011 that the sociological aspect of religion addresses religion from the perspective of social community which is not about the rightness of religious beliefs, but the fact of a religious society. This puts an obligation on public officials to recognize the reality of religion as an organizing logic for social action and national development. Democratic societies have responded to the sociological challenges of religion by the logic of secularity. This means that the state totally abstains from getting involved with religion. Nigeria proclaims itself a secular state but continues to meddle with religion in its constitutions. It creates an Islamic legal system and appoints Islamic judges to judicial chairs. This means that Nigeria chooses the principle of religious accommodation even as it calls itself a secular state.

V. SUMMARY

Religion, politics and development are seemingly inseparable. Conceptually religion provides believers a guideline about life and the life-after which provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive and godly activities during lifetime. Religions can be seen as a promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essential for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God. Most of the empirical studies point to a positive relationship between religion, politics, economic growth and development. Yet, there is no consensus on the precise causal relationship (one-way or both ways) between the three variables.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far, it can be concluded that that the relationship between religion, politics and development is likely to be complementary as long as religious beliefs and practices promote 'moderation' rather than fanaticism. Mismanagement of religion and politics can be complex and dangerous for a plural society like Nigeria. The core principle for democratic governance in plural societies is that the state should be agnostic to the extent that it does not recognize and provide for religion or any other comprehensive moral doctrines in public policy and administrative resources of the state. The late US political philosopher, John Rawls, provided a definitive guide on how to achieve such religious abstinence. That is the logic Nigeria seems to have rejected in its incoherent constitutional order. The next logic is the accommodationist logic which provides that the state should, while ensuring that no citizen suffers discrimination or gets an advantage on the basis of religious belief or membership, structure its political power in a manner that reassures all believers of different religions that they would not suffer any disadvantage on account of non-representative in political authority. Also, there should be no preconception against any religion as the study was conducted without bias for creed or religion. However, it is important to note that any policy based exclusively on a particular religious principle that has potential to serve national interest should be adopted.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The Government should formulate a policy (or a system) that will exclusively based on certain religious principles that has potential to serve the entire global community should be adopted.

There is a need to for government to sensitize the public for a need for peaceful coexistence of various religious groups affiliations within the nation which is a prerequisite for growth and prosperity in today's highly interconnected world.

Government at all levels should support unreservedly the free practice of religion by Nigerian Christians, Muslims and Traditional animists.

No religion in Nigeria should be deemed superior or subordinate to the other, and none should be state sanctioned or enforced.

There is a need for citizens to be willing to overcome the temptation to mix religion and politics or make religion a tool of national partisan politics because of the intricacies involved.

Religious leaders should learn to appreciate the position God has put them and use this position to change society for the better.

There is need for sincerity on the part of those who are engaged in the practice of using religion as a tool for achieving their political objectives.

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