

# **ELECTIONS AND GOVERNANCE**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

The debate on who should govern, who benefits from such a governance and how best to install a government, is as old as Political Science itself. Political theorists (Sabine & Thorson, 1973; Wayper, 1973; Ndu, 1998; Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2014) have demonstrated that although people have incompatible interests, they can only achieve their individual interests in association with others. Consequently, men are compelled to live in a collectivity. However, group life is the basis of almost all of societal conflicts. This is as the resources required to satisfy human wants are relatively scarce and the attempt by each individual to satisfy his/her needs, results in competition, and because of the greed, viciousness, selfishness and the corruption of people, inequitable resource allocation emerges (Ibaba, 2011). This contradiction tends to destroy society, and thus necessitates processes and institutions to deal with it. It is on this basis that governance evolved, whether primitive or modern, socialist or liberal democratic. The fundamental basis of governance is to solve the complexities of group existence by making authoritative decisions that are binding on society.

It is widely accepted that good governance is fundamental to the development of any state. As such, from Plato to Marx, Political Theory has

concerned itself with the type of governance that best has the capacity to pursue public good and how to install such a government. However, from the preference of Aristocracy in the time of Plato to the disdain of democracy, different societies have experimented different forms of governance. In recent times, democracy seemed to have gained ascendancy as the best form of government that has a greater capacity of promoting development (Diamond 2005; Ibaba, 2010 & 2013). A major appeal of democracy is its emphasis on popular citizen's participation. Its objective is to reinforce the 'necessary link' between popular preferences and public policy (Budge, 2005). The Athenian model and other early practices promoted participation through the assembly of the whole people (*Ecclesia*) as well as the filing of people for offices (courts, magistracies, etc.) by lots (Sabine & Thorson, 1973). In modern times however, the most profound instrument of participation in modern democratic governance is election.

Consequently, election has become almost synonymous with democracy. As such, no matter how autocratic a government appears, if it conducts periodic elections, it is perceived as a democratic one. This is evident in the assertion that, "the founding pillars of any democratic political system, whether considered fragile or established, remain undoubtedly elections" (Mesfin, 2008, p.1). As such, it is asserted that, the

selection of political representatives by citizens in free, fair and credible elections in combination with universal suffrage, arguably remains the most essential feature of modern democracy (Martin, Denters & Aarts, 2010). The crucial place occupied by elections in democratic governance can perhaps, be best appreciated when one looks at Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which reads thus;

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures (Article 21[3], UDHR).

It is discerning from the above that elections provide an avenue for citizens to periodically express their will and establish a social contract. It is important to state that the instrument of election is not an end in itself but a means to the enthronement of a disciplined, patriotic and honest leadership capable of driving development. In election, the means is as important as the end it serves. However, this paper argues that the way and manner elections are conducted, perceived, the dominant value system and strength of the democratic institutions in a political system is directly relational to the quality of governance enthroned.

It makes the point that the way elections are conducted, the perceptions and the value system surrounding elections, on the one hand,

and the strength of the democratic institution, on the other hand, is fundamentally responsible for the governance deficit experienced in Nigeria.

### **Elections, Good Governance and Development**

In recent times, scholars and the United Nations alike, have linked good governance to development. But what is Governance? Firstly, we would argue that Governance is not synonymous with Government. In this regard, Governance is a broader term than Government. Governance refers in its widest sense to the “various ways through which social life is coordinated. Government can, therefore, be seen as one of the organizations involved in Governance...it is possible to have Governance without Government” (Heywood, 2000). The literature has highlighted that violent conflict is the greatest inhibition to development in Africa (Adetula, 2006). However, Ibaba (2011) argued that even with the most perfect form of peace, development would be unattainable if it does not interact with good governance. Good governance ensures popular participation in public policy making and implementation process of the state (Adegbami & Adepoju, 2017). It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are

heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. The foregoing becomes clearer once one examines the indicators of good governance as outlined by The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

- **Rule of law:** Democratic governance requires that public institutions comply with laid down rules and regulations guiding their conduct and relationship/interaction. It requires that policies are made, interpreted and enforced by fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force. This is indispensable as the existence of rules to guide the collective.
- **Transparency:** This requires that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media.

- **Responsiveness:** Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. Who is accountable to who varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.
- **Consensus oriented:** There are several actors and as many viewpoints in a given society. Democratic governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community.
- **Equity and inclusiveness:** A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to

improve or maintain their well-being. Democratic governance requires equitable treatment of people from all parts of the state.

- **Accountability:** Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to who varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

From the characteristics enumerated by UNESCAP above, it can be seen that good governance entails a plethora of factors and it is the interaction of those factors that translate to any form of development that can be thought of. It is the interaction of the above factors that differentiates a government that is able to pursue public good from that which pursues private and sectional interest. It is the interaction of the above factors that determine whether a state lacks autonomy or not. Table 1 provides data on the development indicators of selected African countries, and it shows that

Angola and Rwanda that were engaged in many years of civil war have better development indicators than Nigeria.

**Table 1: Comparison of Five (5) Basic Development Indices among Ten (10) Selected Africa Countries**

S/N	Country	GDP Per Person Purchasing Power Parity	Effectiveness of Government	Political stability	Anti-corruption	Observance of rule of law
1	Mauritius	\$13, 700	71.6%	79.3%	66.5%	75.7%
2	South Africa	\$13, 700	76.8%	44.2%	70.9%	58.6%
3	Botswana	\$10, 900	73.9%	93.3%	78.2%	67.1%
4	Angola	\$4, 500	10.9%	28.8%	8.7%	7.1%
5	Senegal	\$1, 800	47.4%	37.5%	41.7%	45.7%
6	Rwanda	\$1, 600	39.8%	27.4%	55.8%	34.3%
7	Nigeria	\$1, 500	16.6%	3.8%	5.8%	8.1%
8	Kenya	\$1, 200	28.%	15.8%	16%	15.7%
9	Liberia	\$900	6.5%	12.5%	20.4%	11%
10	DR Congo	\$700	1.9	1%	2.9%	1.9%

**Source:** Adeyemo, 2008, p. 99.

The table above reveals the strong correlation between good governance and development. This is as countries that made the highest scores in the Gross Domestic Product per person purchasing power parity are the same countries whose indicators of good governance such as effectiveness of government, political stability, anti-corruption and observance of the rule of law are also high.

Similarly, Table 2 provides data which compares development among selected oil producing and non-oil producing countries in Africa and

it indicates the relation between good governance, Gross Domestic Product, human development ranking and failed state rankings

**Table 2: Economic Growth and Development in Africa: A Comparison of Oil Producing and Non-Oil producing Countries.**

Country	Failed State Ranking (2009)	Human Dev. Ranking (2007/2008)	GDP Per Capita (2006)	Good Governance Ranking (2000-2007 average)
<b>Oil Producing</b>				
Nigeria	15	Medium	10,940.14	3.8
Libya	112	Medium	2,677.43	7.4
Algeria	NA	Low	791.02	NA
Angola	55	Medium	13,295.57	7.6
Egypt	43	Medium	1,877.23	24.6
Gabon	99	Medium	8,819.64	5.4
Cameroon	26	NA	1,012.00	NA
<b>Non-Oil Producing</b>				
Botswana	116	Medium	10,940.14	3.8
Ghana	124	Medium	2,677.43	7.4
Tanzania	70	Low	791.02	NA
S/Africa	122	Medium	13,295.57	7.6
Uganda	21	Medium	1,877.23	24.6
Tunisia	121	Medium	8,819.64	5.4
Zambia	NA	NA	1,012.00	NA

Source: Rotberg and Gisselquist (2009).

It could be seen from the above that all the countries that performed better in the good governance ranking also performed better than the others in the indicators of development and failed state ranking. Thus, the foregoing substantiates the point that democracy promotes good governance and development more than non-democracies. This is as democracy embodies the notable drivers of good governance and development spelt out in table 1 and others such as: peace and stability, economic freedom,

political participation, predictability, competition, mobilization, guarantee of the rule of law, accountability, transparency, empowerment of the poor, production of public goods, income redistribution and funding of public services (Ake, 1993; Brown & Hunter; 1994; McGuire & Olson, 1996; Eicher, 2001; Rose 2006). To be sure, the foregoing indicators of good governance and development can best be attainable in a democratic state through the conduct of periodic elections. This is as elections are the acceptable means through which a responsive leadership is enthroned in modern democracies.

The point to note is that, election serves as a means of participation of the citizens in the establishment of a social contract as power is sourced from the people. In this regard, free, fair and credible elections enable citizens to remove inefficient governments and this serves as an incentive for political leaders to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people (Eicher, 2001; Diamond, 2004). Similarly, it has been argued that the patterned nature of leadership succession offered by elections provides the opportunity for the prediction of the stability of the political system and the mobilization of the citizens for development (Ibaba, 2010). This is predicated on the fact that humans are more attached to a process they have

participated in. It is on this basis that elections have become synonymous with modern democratic governance.

However, over the years, the idea which presents elections as indispensable prerequisites for democratic practice and its role in entrenching good governance has come under wide scrutiny by scholars worldwide. Even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already observed that elections alone were no guarantee of liberty: In his words;

The people of England deceive themselves when they fancy they are free; they are so, in fact, only during the election of members of parliament: for, as soon as a new one is elected, they are again in chains, and are nothing (Rousseau, 1947, p. 85).

In contemporary times, we have such scholars like Reybrouck (2016) who have asserted that, elections are the fossil fuel of politics. Once they gave democracy a huge boost, now they cause colossal problems. According to him;

...elections originated in a completely different context from the one that they function in today. When the supporters of the American and French revolutions proposed elections as a way of learning “the will of the people”, there were no political parties, no laws regarding universal franchise, no commercial mass media, and no internet. The forerunners of our representative democracy had no idea that any of these things would come into existence (Reybrouck, 2016 p.1).

The above criticisms of election emanate from genuine concerns that, elections only succeed in providing citizens with a chance to choose

representatives who would make policies on their behalf while it fails to incorporate the citizens into the policy making and implementation process. Consequently, it provides the people with right to vote, not right to speak (Reybroucks, 2013). This is especially true of hitherto autocratic societies that have transited to democracy where there is evident disconnect between popular opinion and policy outcome. Thus, good governance is sacrificed on the altar of periodic elections wherein people transfer their mandate to others without getting real value for it.

From the above, it could be seen that the relevance of elections has been criticized in modern democracies across the world. Nevertheless, election with all its imperfections is still the preferred criterion for the establishment of a social contract in a democratic state. It is important to state here that election in itself is not bad but it is the way it is conducted, the dominant culture and the strength of democratic institutions in the society that determine the turn of elections which in turn determines whether or not elections are able to promote good governance. Consequently, a country that is characterized by a culture of violence would most likely have violent elections.

## **The Character of Nigerian Elections and its Implications for Governance**

Elections involve competition amongst political parties and candidates for control of state institution and power. Representative democracy requires that elections are open, competitive, free and fair. Elections serve the function of the legitimization of the exercise of political authority (Martin, Denters, & Aarts, 2010; Kuhne, 2010; Agnieszka & Waldemir, 2013). By virtue of the fact that those who aspire to control and exercise legitimate group power in a democratic state know that it is impossible to get hold of political power except by elections, it promotes accountability, transparency, frugality in management of national resources, commitment to national development goals/objectives and actualization of aspirations of the people (Ibaba, 2010). Elections make leaders conscious of the need to retain their political mandate in the face of competition, and in comparison to the era of military juntas, have led to an improvement of citizens' participation in the choice of leaders.

However, this seems not to be the case in Nigeria as, from independence, elections in the country have been marked by widespread irregularities and undemocratic practices. It will be recalled that one of the root causes of the bloody Nigerian civil war was the way elections were

conducted and the grievances that arose from the first general and regional elections in the country. The 1964 federal elections in Nigeria and the 1965 Western Nigerian elections were characterized by widespread electoral malpractices and as such gave rise to political tensions and violence of great magnitude that ultimately contributed to the first military coup in Nigeria in January, 1966. Indeed, the greatest challenges of the Nigerian first republic were centred on elections, struggle for power and issues of ethnic domination (Dudley, 1973; Ibaba, 2012). Accordingly, the crisis that rocked the Action Group and the attendant treason trial of its leaders, were all connected with electoral violence (Ebiziem, 2015). It is therefore not out of place to state that elections that should serve as a vehicle for qualitative governance led Nigeria to a massive wastage of human and material resources in a fruitless war.

Nevertheless, one must have thought that with the long period of military rule and the return to democracy in 1999, there would have been a change in the political culture of Nigerians in terms of embracing peaceful elections and democratic elections midwifed by the rule of law. However, the opposite has been the case as it seems electoral malpractice and violence have been revolutionized, modernized and instituted almost as a normal phenomenon. Elections in Nigeria since 1999 have without exception, been

characterized by high rate of malpractices and violence either before, during and after elections which has tainted the elections in the country as anomalies. According to Aluaigba (2016), since 1999, no election in Nigeria can be absolved from venality, falsehood and duplicity occasioned by flagrant usurpation of electoral laws and abuse of the will of Nigerian electorates. It is rather a sad tale that election rigging has become an essential part of the democratic process in Nigeria (Alapiki, 1995; Agbaje, & Adejumobi, 2006) and probably for this reason, majority of Nigerians have lost faith in elections as an effective mechanism for the selection of leaders (Afrobarometer, 2006). The widespread dissatisfaction with election in Nigeria is evident in the many elections-related tribunal and court cases after each election, and the occurrence of post-election violence resulting to wastage of resources that should be used to deliver governance dividends (Eseduwo, 2010). For example, although the 2011 general elections in Nigeria were widely considered to be substantially better than the 2007 general elections, yet, violence broke out in some Northern states as the 2011 Presidential election results were announced (Ibaba, 2012).

Amongst the many shortcomings of elections in Nigeria are; electoral violence, money politics, vote buying, etc. Thus, while the features of elections are noted to include legitimacy, fairness of representation, voter

choice, effective parties, stable and effective government, effective parliament, stronger voter participation, accountability, simplicity and practicality, etc. (Agnieszka & Waldemir, 2013), in Nigeria, they are noted to include such fraudulent and abnormal practices as: vote rigging, dodgy politics, under-age voting, ballot-snatching at gun point, violence and acrimony, ‘thuggery’, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies (thanks to the unprecedented militarization of the electoral process) against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Eseduwo, 2010; Azeez & Olumuyiwa, 2015).

Similarly, it is a stark reality that Nigeria is bedridden by endemic corruption and contempt for the rule of law. Consequently, this has been incorporated into her electoral process. There is no gain saying from the hiring of thugs to the offering of money to voters (“tradermoni” inclusive) for the purchase of votes cost enormous resources on the part of political aspirants. It is difficult for one to involve in election irregularities such as vote-buying on a large scale without first diverting funds meant for the pursuit of public good into private purse. These resources when expended for this purpose are expected to be recovered most often with profit on entry into political office. Hence, politics in Nigeria has come to go by such descriptions as; politics of prebendalism, politics of underdevelopment, etc.

This greatly undermines the outcome of governance as political office holders during their tenure tend to be unaccountable and disregard the rule of law in their quest to recover expended resources and gather more to enable them or one who they perceive to be faithful cling on to power. Thus, in recent times, we have had high profile corruption cases in which resources misappropriated had been linked to electoral activities.

In addition, public institutions such as the police are often compromised in cases of electoral malpractices; human rights are often violated with impunity; individual political aspirants and political parties engage in unmonitored spending spree (Ovwasa, 2004; Eseduwo, 2010; Ebirim, 2014, Nwankwo, 2018). The above cases show that the fundamental requirement of democracy which requires that public office holders wield public power and resources in trust for the citizens and not for their own self-aggrandizement, has been reduced to a mere rhetoric in the Nigerian state. The foregoing has resulted to the lack of autonomy of the state which results in the privatization and personalization of the state and promotes the use of the state for the pursuit of private and sectional interest leading to the neglect and abuse of good governance (Ake, 1966; Ekekwe, 1986; Aaron, 2006). Due to the lack of autonomy of the state, the Nigerian state is pulled in different directions during elections and therefore, makes the struggle for

the capture and continuous grip of political power, a matter of warfare (Bello, 2014; Azeez & Olumuyiwa, 2015). It is for this reason that political oppositions in Nigeria are often times not seen as champions for the development of the state but as an enemy which should be destroyed by any means possible. This is aptly captured by Dudley (1973);

The shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics. To get politics, there is always a price.... To be a member of the Government Party means open avenue to Government patronage, contract deals and the like. But once, having known the profitability of having power, the party (and the individual members) naturally uses the same governmental machinery to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy- and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself (Dudley, 1973, p.3).

As Dudley (1973) has rightly asserted, in Nigeria, politics is the shortest cut to wealth and election seems to be the only obstacle between desperate politicians and their selfish and destructive ambitions. Therefore, it is in the interest of a wicked, greedy, unpatriotic, psychopathic and sociopathic group of politicians that elections in Nigeria do not measure up to high democratic standards as this helps them to advance their selfish interest. The point to note is that, there are groups of people that benefit from flawed elections and therefore want the system to remain flawed. Elections are thus like two-edged swords; at an ideal state, they serve the interest of the populace while in a flawed state, it serves the interest of those

capable of subverting the electoral process. Worse still, in a flawed state, election becomes an instrument of authoritarianism but yet, makes the world believe it is democracy. Consequently, a leader does what he wants and yet it appears he is serving the interest of the people – after all, he gained governmental power through election which is consensus-based.

Flawed electoral processes involve massive expenditure of resources; as such public office holders with access to the resources of the state often employ the state resources at their disposal in this struggle. These activities, one would note, only succeed in encouraging public policy formulators and implementers to formulate and enforce only those policies which would enable them divert resources for the pursuit of victory at the next elections and retain hold on power (Yusuf & Othman, 2016). Thus, the quality of representation is downplayed, as leaders are no longer representatives of the people but representatives of personal/sectional interests. Such a leadership that lacks discipline, honesty and patriotism cannot promote good governance as state power would rather be utilized for the formulation and implementation of policies which grant them personal control of state resources. This results in the enforcement of anti-people policies which has over the years, generated massive dissatisfaction amongst citizens across the country. Governance in Nigeria is thus no longer consensus based but

suffers from legitimacy crisis (Eseduwo, 2010). The result is that governance has come to be increasingly characterized by coercion and therefore unable to mobilize citizens for development.

The nature of Nigerian election characterized by electoral malpractice and violence denies citizens the opportunity of choice, establishment of social contract and responsive governance. It is often ritually interpreted to a subversive end that the end justifies the means. Nevertheless, the fact is that the means matter as much as the end it serves. Accordingly, it is erroneous to think that all means justifies an end as a flawed election would most likely result in governance deficit. In the Niger Delta region for example, whereas the Willink Commission Report of 1957 is widely cited as one of the best documents that should guide Niger Delta Development, and by extension the management of the conflict, the underlying assumptions of its recommendations are often overlooked which state that the best protection for a remote territory against governmental neglect or discrimination is the voting power of its inhabitants (Ibaba, 2017). This logically means that the Niger Delta and by extension all parts of the country are unprotected with the present unfortunate turn of elections in the country. More so, election violence and rigging impedes development

as it promotes the lack of accountability in governance. In the words of Ibaba (2010);

Because political office holders are not chosen by the people, there is no incentive for the leader to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the citizens. The backlash is corruption as state funds are diverted into individual pockets through inflated contracts, payment for ghost projects, over-bloated security votes, and so on (p.41).

The fundamental point to note is that flawed election characterized by violence and malpractice can hardly promote good governance as the leadership is often times disconnected from the citizenry. In a state characterized by the culture of electoral malpractice, violence and the lack of democratic values and institutions, sovereignty lies not with the people but with those that are capable of subverting the electoral process. This results in legitimacy crisis. The implication of the foregoing is that leaders do not have respect for those they govern. This is evident in a statement credited to a one-time Deputy Premier of the Western region of Nigeria Chief Remi Adetokunbo Fani-Kayode that “whether you vote for us or not, we will remain in power” (Dudley, 1973, p.42). Such, public statement only shows that elections in Nigeria are devoid of a social contract and choice and therefore, leaders can do what they like while the electorate are at the mercy of a leadership whose human nature remains largely untamed.

In addition, elections are part of a bigger system and therefore cannot stand alone. The ineffectiveness of elections to serve as viable tools for ensuring good governance cannot be disconnected from the nature and strength of the democratic institutions and judicial systems in Nigeria. Political parties in Nigeria lack internal democracy, ideology and good value orientation as such, they largely pursue and profess democracy outside the gates and resist it within the gates (Ibeanu, 2013). As a result, an institution (e.g. INEC) that is supposed to drive the movement for a free, fair and credible election has also been implicated in the perpetration and abetting of electoral frauds (Akudo & Yakubu, 2014; Ebirim, 2014). Similarly, the judicial system that should adjudicate on election-related matters has performed rather poorly. The adjudication on cases of electoral malpractice takes an unnecessary long duration and often appear compromised. More so, the civil society organizations whose aim is to fight for the entrenchment of democratic values is weak and largely controlled by a government whose interest is to keep elections in their perverted state in order to serve their interest.

## **Conclusion**

The way elections are conducted largely determines the quality of governance. Elections interact with the dominant political value system and

the existence of strong democratic values and institutions in ensuring good governance. In Nigeria, the high level of electoral violence and systemic rigging buoyed by a largely amoral political class denies citizens the opportunity to choose who governs, thus no social contract is established. This remains the most unflattering recipe for failed governance.

In other words, the acutely pervasive monetization of elections with the attendant destructive corruption of the system along with the awesome militarization of the electoral process is one of the greatest threats to our corporate existence as a nation. In this regard, we would argue that the solution lies fundamentally in the restructuring of the country to enthrone a truly federal system as against the present unholy unitary system, operating in the guise of federalism and imposed on us by the military, through the instrumentality of the fraudulent 1999 Constitution which clearly negates the quintessential tenets and norms of federalism. Federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the general and the regional Governments are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent (Wheare, 1963). In the words of Professor Ben Nwabueze “the essential of restructuring is to enable the component nationalities, grouped together by affinity or culture/language or territorial contiguity, to govern themselves in matters of internal concern, leaving matters of common concern (not overwhelmingly

extensive in their range) to be managed under a central government constituted in such a manner as to ensure that it is not dominated by anyone group or a combination of them and above all to ensure Justice, Fairness and Equity to all in the management of matters of common concern". A truly federal system arguably remains the preferred choice if we must escape from the vicious cycle of failed elections and governance.

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