

## **Party Politics and Internal Democracy: The Dilemma of Political Development in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Politics and its praxis in Nigeria has had a chequered history and despite its seeming openness to the general public it is still a puzzle and arcane to the outsider. This study thus examined Party Politics and Internal Democracy: The Dilemma of Political Development in Nigeria. The paper made use of secondary source of data as the main source of data used in this paper. This method is adopted due to its intrinsic values. The secondary sources adopted in this study includes materials like newspapers, magazines, textbooks, internet, journals, government publications, official documents etc. which helped us to gain an insight into party politics and internal democracy in the country and elsewhere. Content analysis as a method of investigation is adopted in this study. This involves reading meaning into materials that are collected for the purpose of achieving reliable and verifiable conclusion. The paper affirmed that political parties in Nigeria today are bereft of the much needed internal democracy especially with recourse to candidate selection. The overbearing and domineering attitude of political incumbents and the so called godfathers was as well identified. It was recommended among other things that all political parties should have a clearly defined philosophy and ideologies that will enable them conform to the dictates of their manifestoes. That political party should be funded by contributions from party members. That government should look into the urgent need to reform political parties in Nigeria with a view to sanitizing the democratic process to ensure the survival and growth of hard-earned democracy and political development.

**Key words:** Development • Dilemma • Internal Democracy • Party Politics • Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Political party is a legitimate association of free men and women who congregate and agglomerate for the purpose of wresting power through the ballot box and forming the government in a democratic state. In the above light, the survival of the democratic processes is directly linked to the ability of the political party to aggregate freely, articulate, represent and to organize set limits in the quest for the use of political power. More so, it is indubitable, however, as adumbrated by Ragsdale and Theis [1] that for the political party to become capable of discharging these roles efficiently and effectively, certain criteria must be met, including autonomy, complexity and coherence.

Adducing from extant evidence, Vengroff [2] asserted that, the degree to which a party is able to meaningfully contribute to the political process is related to the existence of several factors: the development and maintenance of strong party organization with the depth

and breadth necessary for their operation and the degree of the institutionalization of the party as indicated by its historical roots, longevity, survival and continuing support. Again, the capacity to meet these conditions is a determinant of their potential contribution to the institutionalization of democratic government. The above assertion further goes to buttress the point earlier submitted in relation to the imperative of political parties in democratic consolidation.

With recourse to Nigeria, one really needs to think twice before concurring as to whether Nigerian political parties satisfy the required conditionality and the extent to which the inability or otherwise in meeting these basics have made or marred political development in Nigeria. Given the above yardstick for the measurement of the state of political parties in Nigeria, it then becomes consequential to infer with Odaudu [3] that the key party institutions, to date, have failed to fulfill adequately their functions. In the case of Nigeria, the situation is such that the formation, operational organization and other

activities of political parties seemingly serve parochial interests. This no doubt has serious consequences for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

What is discernible in the Nigeria political scenario is the lack of proper organization and apparently, perception of what a political party ought to be in a democracy, which is far from what is obtainable in praxis. Evidently and as adduced by Odaudu [3] going by the records of inter and intra-party squabbles in Nigeria, both in terms of principles and practices, political parties have indeed contributed immensely to the crisis that endangered the political system in Nigeria. The rot necessarily gets carried into the electoral arena where elections, in particular have been controversial, often lacking in credibility. To begin with, elections as instruments through which government derives the consent of the governed, are integral part of any democracy [3].

In the light of the above background therefore, this paper examines party politics and internal democracy: the dilemma of political development in Nigeria. The writer assumes Nigeria's political development to be at the cross roads as a consequence of the challenges of lack of internal democracy in the operations of political parties in Nigeria. These quagmires are evident in two major dimensions; firstly in composing the leadership of the party at various levels and secondly, in electing, selecting or nominating flag bearers of the party for various political offices. Crisis and controversies that have been generated within the internal operations of the various political parties on these dimensions have had far reaching consequences on the political development of Nigeria. The interest of this writer is to find a leeway out of this problematic.

**Statement of Problem:** It is a truism that most political nay electoral crises witnessed in Nigeria are by-products of the inability of the political parties to midwife a viable and workable internal democracy especially with recourse to candidate selection for various political offices. This trend if not abated no doubt spells doom for the consolidation of democracy in the country no sooner than later. The political history of Nigeria is replete with cases of cross-carpeting or decamping, parallel party leadership structures, factionalisation, monopolistic and over bearing attitude of political incumbents, party leaders and self serving godfathers and much more, which are capable of affecting, endangering and circumventing the credibility of the Nigeria political process. In the circumstance, there has been continuity in political cum electoral violence and acrimony; as there has equally been lack of continuity in

the political organizations through which both political cum electoral violence and acrimony have been perpetuated.

Each period has thus, produced new political formations, reflecting not only the penchant for lack of principle and shifting allegiance among members of the political elite but also the total-de-ideologization of the issues on which members of the elite were divided into antagonistic factions. The current scenario of lack of internal democracy among political parties is such that cases abound of unwarranted and questionable candidate substitution, disqualification and reversal of nomination of previously screened and cleared candidates by an interplay of party intrigues, naked power display, culture of impunity and disregard for fair play and internal democracy. Cases of parallel primaries are also part and parcel of the intrigues of lack of internal democracy among political parties in Nigeria.

It is against this backdrop that the call by the former Vice President, His Excellency Namadi Sambo, on political parties to work assiduously to enthrone internal democracy becomes more imperative than ever before. And this no doubt lends credibility to the quest to carry out this study with intent to finding solution to the challenges it possess to political development in Nigeria.

**Objectives of the Study:** The broad objective or aim of this paper is to examine party politics and lack of internal democracy with particular focus on the challenges it poses on political development in Nigeria. And the specific objectives are as follows:

- To interrogate the relationship between party politics and internal democracy in Nigeria.
- To ascertain the factors influencing the circumvention of internal democracy among political parties in Nigeria.
- To access the consequences of lack of internal democracy among political parties on the political development of Nigeria.
- To proffer solutions on how best to enhance internal democracy among political parties in Nigeria.

**Scope of the Study:** The scope of this study is strictly centered on the examination of party politics and internal democracy as a dilemma to political development in Nigeria. In specifics the paper focuses on the following; to interrogate the relationship between party politics and internal democracy in Nigeria; to ascertain the factors influencing the circumvention of internal democracy among political parties in Nigeria; to access the

consequences of lack of internal democracy among political parties on the political development of Nigeria; and to proffer solutions on how best to enhance internal democracy among political parties in Nigeria. The limitation of the work is quite enormous, since there is non availability of financial support to aid enough material for this study and the short time given for the study also made it difficult to accumulate enough information as possible for the study.

**Significance of the Study:** This paper will be considered significant in the following ways: Firstly, it will help decision making organs, institutions to determine the basis for political party formation in Nigeria in order to achieve National integration and political development. Secondly, invaluable, it will contribute to academic knowledge as regards to function of political parties to political development.

Furthermore, it will create awareness and inspire a sense of responsibility on members of political party on the role expected of them to achieve good governance and political development.

**Methodology:** The use of secondary source of data is the main method of data collection adopted in this paper. This method is adopted due to its intrinsic values. The secondary sources adopted in this study includes materials like newspapers, magazines, textbooks, internet, journals, government publications, official documents etc. which helped us to gain an insight into party politics and internal democracy in the country and elsewhere. Content analysis as a method of investigation is adopted in this study. This involves reading meaning into materials that are collected for the purpose of achieving reliable and verifiable conclusion.

**Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the group theory. This theory was adopted because of the strong view of scholar such as Bentley [4] who is of the strong opinion that the interactions of groups are the basis of political life and rejected statist abstractions. In his opinion, group activity determines legislation, administration and adjudication. He also went further to opine that institutional approach should not be used for political analysis as these institutions are static as against politics which is dynamic and full of activities. He argued that politics is a group affair and each group is competing against each other for power. He also added that the pattern or process involves mass of activities and not a collection of individuals.

The group emerges from frequent interaction among its individual members which is directed by their share interest. The interest leads to the organization of the groups.

Bentley's group theory received blessing of scholars like David Truman, Robert Dahl, Grant Mc Connell, Theodora J. Lewi, Earl Lathans among others. They saw power as diffused among many interest groups competing against each other. Earl Lathan described a society as a simple universe of groups which combine, break and form coalitions and castellation of power in a restless alternation.

The adoption of this theory as basis for the examination of party politics and internal democracy vis-à-vis political development in Nigeria is incumbent on the interplay of forces and struggle for power among various groups in the Nigerian society which resulted in the circumvention of the rules to satisfy sectional interest. Therefore, the adoption of the group theory, helps us to examine how the intrigues among the various groups and the resulting consequences affect the outcomes political activities and in particular development of Nigeria.

**Issues in Literature:** A political party is a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principles which they are all agreed [5]. Elaborating on this definition, Lapalombara and Anderson [6] define a political party as "any political group, in possession of an official label and a formal organization that links center to locality, that presents at elections and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public offices.

Herbert Simon [7] defines a party as "a system of interdependent activities characterized by as high degree of rational direction of behavior towards ends that are objects of common acknowledgement and expectations. Elsewhere, Lapalombra in Omotola [8] also defines a political party as a universally adopted tool for mobilizing large numbers of persons to engage in forms of political participation, voluntary or coerced, that are not indispensable institutions of democracy and democratic societies.

Indeed, sustainable democracy is unthinkable without a viable political party system. In a real democratic sense, political parties are expected to serve as a formidable democratization force by articulating and aggregating public opinion and interests, engendering popular participation and promoting political education and national integration [8]. Hence, by promoting these virtues, political parties can contribute overtly to the

political stability of the system. Political parties have a responsibility to present candidates for elections, with the primary aim of capturing political power for the furtherance of the common good [8]. This responsibility becomes much more challenging, tasking and arduous in plural societies where it is often difficult to build societal consensus on critical national questions.

As Barongo [9] has pointed out:

Pluralist democracy rather than disperse and balance political power in society actually encourages the acquisition and monopoly of power by a few individuals and groups and provides grounds whereby the stronger group of individuals pre-empts and dominates public policy.

In this context, political parties expectedly should provide a formidable platform for consensus-building on crucial national issues, especially in plural societies such as Nigeria. In such settings, “political parties? democracies, by identifying, politicizing and representing social divisions”, include ethnicities, religious, classes and geographies [8]. It is for this reason that it has contended that perhaps more than any other factor, the success of democratic consolidation in a country is contingent on the effectiveness of political parties in structuring political conflict. Political parties can discharge these roles adequately, provided that they live up to their responsibilities [8]. But this is seldom, the case in some emerging democracies, especially in Africa. From a comparative African perspective, studies have shown that political parties falter in the representation of social groups, becoming instead tools for the promotion of neo-patrimonialism and violence [8].

The responsibilities of political parties operate on three levels; electorate-related functions, government-related functions and linkage-related functions. In such that, parties electorate-related functions entails political representation, expression of people’s demands through interest articulation and aggregation and the simplification and structuring of electoral choice. They also include the integration of voters into the system through political education and mobilization while the government-related functions include making government accountably by effectively implementing party policies and exercising control over government administration [8].

In other words, in between the governments and electorates, political parties play a type of mediatory role. They do this by aggregating and channeling public

interests and recruiting and equally training political leaders. In the support of the foregoing functions of political parties, Reilly [10] speaks about what he calls the “deeper, systemic support” of political parties that help make democracy work effectively.

According to him:

- They mediate between demands of the citizenry on the one hand the actions of the government on the other hand, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent public policy.
- They make effective collective action possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shifted from issue to issue and vote to vote.
- By providing a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives, parties are also the primary channel of democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance.

It should be noted, however that the discharge of these tasks depends much on the degree of institutionalization of the political parties with respect to organization, discipline, internal democracy and cohesion [10]. Thus, when these are lacking, political parties are likely to be reduced to mere formalities just to fulfill the sense of righteousness, but democracy exists in such circumstances without real political competition. When an atmosphere of this nature prevails, parties become deficient and ill-equipped to cope with their responsibilities. In these circumstances, various interest groups may be tempted to devise alternative devices to channel their demands, including grievances, not only within the parties but also throughout the entire system. The end result, if unmitigated in time, will be an overloading of the system with more than it can shoulder at one time, resulting in the weakness of the political system and possibly the breakdown of the political order and stability [10].

Therefore, this is partly why there is growing worry over political parties as a destabilizing force, or even as a threat to the consolidation of democracy, in transitional democracies [10]. Again, Reilly gives a vivid description of the main features of political parties in such contexts. As he argues, “in many countries, particularly in transitional democracies, multi-parties struggles to play these roles, instead, parties exhibit a range of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of system benefits on which representative politics depends.

Some of these pathologies include:

- They are frequently poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting basis of support.
- They are often bound around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole.
- They are typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time.
- They may have little in the way of a coherent ideology.
- They are frequently unable to ensure a disciplined collective action in parliament with members shifting between parties.
- They often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda.
- Political parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public goods and thus to promote development.

In other words, the point is that a political party can provide a basis for conflict or consensus, depending on its organization, internal discipline, coherence and understanding of democracy. The higher the level of its institutionalization, the more the system benefits in terms of political stability and vice versa. Yet, whatever their direction, whether as sources of conflict or consensus in society, political parties have crucial role to play as makers of democratic government and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.

**Political Parties in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria:**

The 1999 constitution contains provisions that spell out, in an unambiguous manner, the expected roles of Nigerian parties as much as the conditions attached to their existence. The 1999 constitution, in section 221 provides that:

No association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidates at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.

Section 222 provided that no association by whatever name called shall function as political party, unless:

- The names and address of its national officers are registered with the Independent National Electoral Commission.
- The membership of the association is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping.

These provisions, no doubt are born out of the intention to differentiate political parties from other organizations such as pressure groups in terms of their roles and to ensure smooth transition or succession in the political system. By conferring on political parties the monopoly of the right to field candidates for elections and to establish the conditions under which they may operate, parties are expected to be a viable basis of consensus-building.

In furtherance of this concern, the constitution forbids any political party from having or operating on its own, any form of quasi-military organization, including the use of thugs.

**Thus, Section 227 of the 1999 Constitution States That:**

No association shall retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of persons for purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use of display of physical force or coercion in prompting any objectives or interest or in such manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organized and trained or equipped for that purpose.

In reality, however, Nigeria parties honour these provisions merely on paper. The manner of origin of Nigerian parties, especially in recent times, tends to limit their capability to sustain political stability.

**Factors Influencing Lack of Internal Party Democracy:**

There have been some factors hindering internal party democracy in Nigeria. Bamgbose [11], stated the following:

- **Ethnic politics:** Ethnicism is highly pronounced in Nigerian politics, more so within political parties. The former colonialists used divide and rule to fragment and factionalize the people. In the circumstance ethnic variable and consideration take precedence in the internal activities of political parties.
- **Monetization of politics:** In the past, political offices did not attract much monetary benefits as it has become today. The government in recent times has made politics more financially attractive that nobody wants to engage in any other profession than politics. Seeing these benefits, some Nigerians view politics as a sure means to making it big time; such persons join politics through various political parties and does anything at all cost to win election.
- **Unnecessary Political Ambition:** Nigerians have becomes highly politicized. In fact, the demand to participate in politics keeps on increasing in geometrical progression while the absorbing capacity

of these participants increases in arithmetic progression. This leads to intense competition among the political aspirants who are prone to take the most extreme measures in order to win and maintain political power.

So far, we have seen the nature or factors that mar internal party democracy in Nigeria and the reason why politicians do what they do, in other to win elections at any cost. However, with these actions, it is very difficult for political parties to perform their democratic duties. The reason for political existence in a democratic environment like Nigeria is simply to offer alternative platforms to citizens who have the passion to serve their country and have something serious to contribute to serve their country. That is why political parties are ideologically driven. Yet, in Nigeria, these multi-political parties seem to have no clear ideology, nor programmes.

**Political Parties and Internal Democracy in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges:** About eighteen years after the re-enthronement of democratic governance in Nigeria, it is still obvious that the nation's politics is democratic only by nomenclature. The political parties have, all these years, failed to internalise the principles of democracy in their choice of not only candidates for public elective offices (president, governors etc.), but also for those of their party machinery. In the beginning, it was the issue of godfathers imposing candidates on the party they claimed to finance and own. Then it was a case of he who was paying the piper dictating the tune. At another time it is consensus candidacy, a process whereby a cabal within the party usually led by the incumbent political executive meets and imposes candidates on the rest of the party, bypassing the democratic procedure of politicking, horse-trading involving give and take. The practice is that they constrict the political space by insisting that a particular political position is not vacant. Or those interested in those offices, if they are vacant, must be anointed by the powers that be and their spouses. In some ridiculous cases, interested aspirants are denied access to nomination forms, as the party deliberately prints just one form for the preferred candidate, or fixes the cost of the form so high, that only those who have the financially wherewithal can contemplate expressing their intention. In the end, the nation is denied the services of its best, just because they cannot play the game the dirty way by ingratiating some expired politicians who believe that the nation exists to serve their insatiable acquisitive propensity.

Due to lack of internal democracy, the cabals in most political parties dreaded conducting primary elections, which should be supposedly the beauty of party politics. In the circumstance, party primaries become mere ritual for endorsing the already anointed candidate, or end in shambles as it is reduced to a disgraceful caricature of what elsewhere is a representation of what is noble and desirable. They turn out to be smokescreens, intended, ab initio, to ratify decisions previously agreed to by a set of political grandmasters. This conspicuously is a departure from international democratic best practices. In the context of lack of respect for internal democracy within political parties, the electorate is denied the opportunity of making desired choices. Consequently, the much talked about democracy consolidation becomes mere rhetoric.

This scenario is in contra-distinction with what obtains elsewhere where political parties define the guidelines for the emergence of candidates for elective offices and allow them the latitude to play the game the best possible way, based on clearly defined rules. Nigerians decry this penchant by parties to set aside accepted norms and insist on imposing candidates not only on the party, but also on the electorate. It is also morally wrong to deny people who have laboured for the party opportunities to express their political aspirations, just because they don't have the kind of money the godfathers demand, or lack connections. It is our view that the interest of democracy will definitely suffer if this trend persists.

In a commentary published in the Pointer of Monday April 3 2017..... it was asserted that in modern societies, the application of the concept of internal democracy in the conduct of the business of political parties, particularly with regards to candidate selection and primary elections, is inviolable and, therefore, sacrosanct. The concept of internal democracy operates on the premise of due process, fair play, equity and good conscience in the discharge of duties and obligations to organizations, groups or the society at large.

Among Nigerian political parties, however, internal democracy as a seemingly fundamental political concept is only honoured more in the breach as primordial considerations such as avarice, greed, nepotism and outright inordinate ambition, have continued to be elevated over and above the wishes of the people [12]. This, no doubt, explains the endless cases of decamping by party members who, aggrieved by obvious injustice meted out to them by so called party godfathers and stalwarts have no option than to seek their political fortunes elsewhere. Even though one may not be

oblivious of the fact that some decampers are not anything but political flirts, yet it is the firm stand of this writer that a preponderance of every act of decamping is deeply rooted in reaction to attempt to shortchange, manipulate and circumvent the rules and other acts prejudicial and, indeed, inimical to the enthronement and sustenance of internal democracy.

Absence of internal democracy in the affairs of political parties robs the society of competent, diligent and transparent leadership as products of unjust and undemocratic leaders can only give what they have. The world is rapidly changing with global best practices and Nigeria as a member of the global community cannot afford to lag behind.

It amounts to stating the obvious that Nigeria, like many other African countries, has had its fair share of democratic challenges, but it has also recorded some achievement over the years. There have already been calls across the country for some adjustments and improvements on the way political parties are run and managed, in the years to come. Many have argued that Nigeria must necessarily adopt the methods that will guarantee the rights of its citizens to elect leaders of their choice as provided for in the country's constitution [13]. Meanwhile, despite the advantages inherent in democratization and enthronement of democratic principles, the presence of ethnic as well as religious blocs in Nigeria has continuously and consistently made electoral contests fiercely competitive and sometimes violent. The contest is often complicated by divergences in language, religion and level of economic attainment. All these have coalesced to reinforce the problems besetting the Nigerian State. Thus, the dominant pattern of political behaviour in Nigeria can be defined in terms of endless pressure on the state power [14].

#### **Party Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria:**

The global acceptance of liberal democracy as a major vehicle in attaining peaceful co-existence in a multi-faceted society, promotion of economic development, individual liberty, human rights restoration, rule of law and freedom of healthy competition in global socio-political activities, necessitated the quest for democratic consolidation especially in society like ours that have experienced dictatorship over the years [15]. Hence, reputed as the makers of democracy, political parties are by all standards, one of the most outstanding and distinguishing elements of modern government [8]. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable in the absence of viable political parties. Political parties are expected to participate

in the political socialization of electorates, contributes to the accumulation of political power, facilitate recruitment of political leadership and equally serve as unifying force in a divided polity. And therefore, political parties can only cope with these pivotal roles, only provided that they are viable, in such that they are well institutionalized, internally democratic, coherent, disciplined and autonomous [8].

It is commonly held that the survival of the democratic processes is directly linked to the ability of the political party to aggregate freely, articulate, represent and to organize set limits in the quest for the use of political power. It is equally obvious, however, that for the party system to become capable of discharging these roles efficiently and effectively, certain criteria must be met, including autonomy, complexity and coherence [1]. In this regard, too Vengroff's [2] argument becomes especially relevant. Drawing from the experience of Mali, Vengroff asserted that the degree to which a party system is able to meaningfully contribute to the political process is related to the existence of several factors: the development and maintenance of strong party organization with the depth and breadth necessary for their operation and the degree of the institutionalization of the party as indicated by its historical roots, longevity, survival and continuing support. Again, the capacity to meet these conditions is a determinant of their potential contribution to the institutionalization of democratic government [2].

Hence, if the above forms the yardstick for the measurement of the state of political parties in Nigeria, it then becomes inescapable to conclude that the key party institutions, to date, have failed to fulfill adequately their functions [3]. Over the years, what became apparent is the lack of proper organization and perhaps, perception of what a party system should be. Indeed, as records of inter and intra-party squabble show, both in their methods and practices, multi-parties have contributed immensely to the crisis that engulfed the political system in Nigeria [3].

**Recommendations:** Based on the issues reviewed in this study, the following recommendations are apt:

- All political parties should have a clearly defined philosophy and ideologies that will enable them conform to the dictates of their manifestoes and the fundamental laws of the land.
- Political parties should be funded not by government but by contributions from party members. Government funding for political parties should therefore be stopped, so that only the serious ones can survive and face up to the dictates of their calling and others wither away naturally.

- That government should look into the urgent need to reform political parties and party politics in Nigeria with a view to sanitizing the democratic process to ensure the survival and growth of our hard-earned democracy and political development.
- That there is need to strengthen our democratic institutions, a total overhaul of present electoral laws regulating party registration should commence.
- The people should be politically educated so they can understand their rights, responsibilities and the role of the state. They should be educated to demand accountability on the part of those elected into office. They should be in a position to recall those who have failed to deliver.

### CONCLUSION

Political parties are very important in any democratic system of government. Agbaje in Anifowose [16] puts it succinctly when he said, dysfunctional political parties in a supposedly democratic country is worse than tea without sugar, it is like trying to pass brown water as tea. There can be no meaningful democracy without a properly functioning political party system. It is obvious; therefore that political parties constitute the heart of democracy - the more vigorous, democratic and healthy they are, the better assured is the consolidation of the democratic process itself.

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