

Illegal Migration in Nigeria-Cameroon Border in Cross River State and The Crisis of Internal Security in Nigeria, 2015 – 2025

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ABSTRACT: The internal security crisis in Nigeria cannot be unconnected from illegal migration. Nigeria's porous borders and the influx of undocumented migrants into the country, which gives room for criminals to come into the country is a major contributing factors to Nigeria's internal insecurity. These have to do with the influx of drug peddlers, human traffickers, terrorists, armed robbers into the country, etc. Though the government of the day cannot be exonerated in the present internal security crisis of the country, (as it has the constitutional responsibility to ensure that Nigeria's land and sea borders are secured) a major contributing factor to internal insecurity in Nigeria is illegal migration and multiple entry points, especially in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State. The study examined the various entry points at the Nigeria-Cameroon border as basic routes for undocumented migrants and the implications for internal security of Nigeria. The study employed the quantitative and qualitative methods in the collection of data and simple percentage in the analysis of data. It is observed that the determinant of illegal migration is failure in governance. There should be adequate manpower for the security of our borders, and ensure accountability within border agencies. The study employed the push-pull theory to explain the reason why people migrate from their home countries.

KEYWORDS: Cameroon, Nigeria Illegal migration, internal security.

INTRODUCTION

The transnational movement of people across national borders is not new, but encompassing in this contemporary era of globalization, as other accompanying aspects of cross-border movement of people includes, but not limited to the movement of goods and services, technology, transnational terrorism, movement of criminal elements across borders, where there is renewed interconnectedness of sovereign states and people, reducing the world to one global system. The global system entails opening barriers, allowing people, nations and institutions to penetrate countries without hindrance, which involves breaking national barriers (Nein, et al, 2022). This global phenomenon has further intensified the movement of people, goods and services, terrorist networks, organizations, arms, human traffickers etc, across national borders, and Nigeria is no exception.

Nigeria and Cameroon have several border crossings, which have overwhelmed the country's security architecture which is saddled with the responsibility for border security. These numerous border openings in the Nigeria-Cameroon border have since become avenue for terrorists networks and organizations, dealers in arms, drug peddlers, human traffickers, bandits, armed robbers, etc. At the International Youth Day Celebration (IYJ) in Ikom Cross River State, organized by the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN), it was revealed that about 222,000 Cross River residents and about 1.4 million Nigerians use hard drugs. Stakeholders affirmed this is worsened by the closeness of Ikom to the Nigeria-Cameroon land border (Itang, 2022). The influx of these undocumented migrants into Nigeria has further exacerbated the internal security challenges of the country. Cross-border migration poses a serious threat to national security as migrants and migration are seen as having a close tie with national security (Ayeni, et al, 2023). The influx of these unwanted migrants into the country is precipitated by the lack of adequate manpower to man the very many border openings or porous borders and failure on the part of government to ensure the security of its borders. These have in turn contributed to a failed national security system, that has enabled the ubiquitous operations of terrorists and bandits in Nigeria. Though, the focus here is irregular migration as a major contributing factor to Nigeria's internal security problems, however the failure of governance in Nigeria, and prevailing systemic corruption in the country is disturbing and seen as major determinant of internal security crisis.

OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

Illegal Migration

Illegal migration as applied in this study refers to the movement into Nigeria from the Cameroon side of the border in Cross River State, and out of Nigeria into Cameroon, by undocumented or irregular migrants who violate Nigeria's Immigration laws. It also

includes the stay in Nigeria of persons who continue to stay in Nigeria after the expiration of their valid visas. These movements are mostly made through the many undesignated entry points or by using fake travel documents.

Internal Security

Internal security here, refers to the maintenance of peace and stability within the territorial borders of Nigeria. This entails the protection of lives and property within Nigeria, from threats of terrorism, insurgency, and other organized crimes such as human trafficking, illegal arms dealing, drug peddling, fraudsters, freedom from threat of regular migrants etc. Internal security has since eluded Nigeria, as terrorism, insurgency, banditry and other organized crimes have overwhelmed Nigeria's internal security architecture, causing an unprecedented escalation.

Illegal Migration in Nigeria-Cameroon Border

Nigeria and Cameroon have several border openings and crossings at different points, both legal and illegal. These illegal entry points have long been channels for undocumented movements, creating avenue for transnational criminals, such as small and light weapons (SALW) peddlers, human traffickers terrorists, drug traffickers, armed bandits as well as unwanted migrants who cause a nuisance to the host state. These transnational movements of criminals and unwanted migrants through the various entry points in Cross-River State pose a threat to Nigeria's Internal security and consequently puts pressure on national security architecture. Oshokamel (2025), argues that, the dangers of illegal and irregular migration far outweigh what is seen as benefits for individuals and groups, from illegal migration which pose a threat to the internal security of Nigeria. According to her, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) employ both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to address the numerous challenges of irregular and illegal migration. This influx of undocumented persons through the various border entry points in Cross River State is precipitated by several factors, which have become basic characteristics of the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State. These factors include porous entry points inadequate man-power not commensurate for the various border crossings, compromise of security personnel, too many borders openings etc. As reported by Asare (2025) in the daily post of 13 February 2025, Ginika representing the State comptroller of immigration said, there are too many illegal immigrants especially from neighbouring Cameroon. So many Non-Nigerians from Cameroon have entered the country through unrecognized routes, many without passports and are perpetrating crimes that continue to threaten our internal security. This is because the entry points far out number the manpower saddled with the responsibility to secure the border crossings, therefore the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) will remain over-stretched. As Ginika (In Asare 2025) further stated, "they are giving us sleepless nights, we move from hotels to hotels, fishing them out and profiling them, and in many cases, we ease them out by moving them out in tricks. We have repatriated a good number".

Activities of Security Agencies and Enforcement of Immigration Law along Cameroon-Nigeria in Cross Rivers State.

It is a herculean task coordinating and controlling movement of people along this border region for obvious reasons of topography and the porosity of the borders. The much that security services are doing is the traditional mounting of road block and checkpoints at designated points considered strategic in an attempt to ensure that irregular migrant and sundry criminals are intercepted. That has been the lot of the Nigeria Immigration service and other agencies saddled with the responsibility of internal security of the country. Some of the established bases were sighted at Akpabuyo-Calabar road, Ekpiron-Itu-Uyo road, Itigidi-Abomege-Abakaliki road, Yehe-Abakaliki road, Bachau-Amana-Gakem roads in boki et al. They have overtime recorded some successes. Troops of forward operation base of the Nigeria army on the 22nd June, 2022 intercepted explosives, ammunitions in Cross rivers state at Utanya village, Amana town. The soldiers operating under the auspices of 13 brigade of the Nigeria army, intercepted a Toyota Camry car with Reg No JAL 492 AA, loaded with assorted munitions while enroute Utanya village toward Obudu mountains in Cross river state. A thorough search conducted on the vehicle revealed it was conveying 72 improvised explosives device chargers, 121 dynamite liquid, 200 rounds of 7.62mm (NATO) and 82 rounds of 7.62mm special ammunition, military uniforms and kits (pulse.ng. 2022).

The Nigeria-Cameroon border is very porous, and as such the prevalence of crimes such as human trafficking, drug peddling, arm smuggling, banditry, terrorism, armed robbery, etc, across the border line and infiltration into Nigeria (Tamfu et al 2025). In its effort to checkmate criminal activities on that axis some breakthroughs have been recorded by the Nigeria Immigration Services. For instance, on the occasion the service apprehended intercepted some suspected arms and gun-runners at Mfum, a notable commercial entity and a melting port for immigrations on that axis. It was revealed that two of them were Nigerians and the other a Cameroonian who claimed to be member of the Ambazonian rebel group who are agitating for the liberation and independence of South West Cameroon from Cameroon (Businessday, 8th August, 2022).

About 40 weapon traffickers were arrested in Nigeria in late august 2021, accused of being regular supplier of weapons to rebel groups in Cameroon. They were arrested in the Nigeria border town of Ikom and charged with various crimes, including supplying guns, ammunition and explosives to separatist. In an interview broadcast by Cameroon state television, the Nigeria Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Frank Mbah said that 13 AKA47 rifles, 750 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 58 packages of explosive suspected to be dynamite were seized from one Ntui Lambert a Cameroonian along with three others in Ikom, later transferred to

Owerri, Imo State and subsequently to Abuja. The 40 suspects were charged with terrorism funding, arms trafficking, cybercrime and abduction (News African, 2021).

Then Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayeda had blamed the Ambazonian separatists in Cameroon as well as the Cameroon government of smuggling goods and arm through 27 illegal routes in the state. According to him, the secessionists are recruiting Nigerians into their fighting force and smuggling goods from Cameroon to Nigeria and using the proceeds to acquire arms and ammunitions. About 222,000 Cross Rivers inhabitants of Ikom were found to be engaged in the use of drugs, stakeholders were in agreement that the situation was worsened by the closeness of Ikom to the Nigerian-Cameroon land borders (Tribuneonline.ng, August 17, 2022). Despite the presence of security operations along the identifiable entry and exit points, the spate of criminal activities has not abated. At the last count, various agencies like the Nigeria Army, The Nigerian Police, the Nigeria Customs Service, Department of States, Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and others have checkpoints scattered all over the border areas. A water tight control of movements along the border area remains a mirage.

Crisis of Internal Security in Nigeria

Nigeria's internal security has been a thing of major concern not only to the government of the day but also to all Nigerians and residents of Nigeria. Several factors are responsible for these numerous challenges of Nigeria's internal security. Terrorism, banditry, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), smuggling, armed robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, drug addiction and peddling, etc, are some of the major challenges fueling Nigeria's internal security crisis. However, these internal security challenges are not unconnected to Nigeria's porous borders, inadequate security personnel to man them and too many entry points, failure of governance and corruption. These factors have contributed to the influx of undocumented migration into the country especially the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State. They pose a threat to internal security. Though cross-border migration is an international phenomenon, it poses serious threat to national security, as migrants and migration have reputation of being perceived as having a close tie to national security (Aveni, et al 2023).

It is also contended that, international security scholars are finding it increasingly difficult to ignore the relationship between migration and security in a highly interconnected global system defined by globalization (Adamson, 2006). Though, some migrants contributes meaningfully to the development of the state, unchecked influx leads to the influx of criminals, terrorists, bandits, drug peddlers, human traffickers, and these also put pressure one public services, sometimes leading to social and economic tensions between migrants and local populations, especially the border communities and states. Nigeria's internal security crisis is also been exacerbated by poor governance. Nigeria lacks the political will to manage several areas of national life, which continue to plague all spheres of national life, therefore yet to fully and effectively manage its numerous borderlines and internal security. This inability of the country to manage its internal security and porous borders has transcended into the current spate of insurgency and banditry that have overwhelmed the state. Corruption has also been a cause of Nigeria's porous borders and influx of undocumented migrants into the country. This is so because security budgets and those saddled with the constitutional responsibility to secure our borders have severally compromised.

Border Control and Management

Migration management is associated with the effective monitoring and supervision of the recognized entry points. It also encompasses the surveillance of every nook and crannies of the borderline to ensure that only authorized routes are used by travelers across the divide. National security as well as territorial integrity cannot be guaranteed without adequate border management programs put in place so that cross border cooperation and relations would not be hindered (Ayodele and Shiru, 2024). Recognized entry points are embarkation and disembarkation points where there are facilities for immigration, custom and health inspection of and citizens who are coming or leaving the country. The Ministry of Interior considers these ports as possessing facilities and designate them as such. These entry points could be on land, sea and airports for departing or arriving vehicles, ships and aircrafts. Passengers using these ports must arm themselves with proper travel documents to guarantee entry into Nigeria. These documents include visa, employment papers and international certificates of health valid for entry into or travel through any other country as may be required. However, for the movement through illegal and unrecognized route in and out of the country, the procedure is different. The rule is that a foreigner who enters the country through unrecognized point or route is to report to the nearest immigration formation for clearance.

Traversing in and out of country has adverse influence on stability and security of the locality. It makes it possible for individuals with incendiary motives to foment trouble. This has a huge propensity to render the environment insecure. Unsettling in economic lives of individuals and their families, severance due to ecological disasters, and political and religious mistreatment have damaging outcome on human security (Ceccorulli 2009).

The need for hands to facilitate industrial advancement after the World' War 2 within countries was a factor in the drive towards immigration acceptance. It was not properly assessed as a danger. Migrants were expected back to their home countries at the expiration of the contract. When migrants started to settle down in recipient regions, the economic downturn propelled nations to

think towards a certain contagious restrictive approach towards inflow. Nations began to show concern about the consequences of 'unwanted' migration and possible related dangers.

Globally, the Single European Act (1986) was a significant watershed for migration issues: internal free movement of goods, persons, services and capital was said to require 'compensatory' security measures to strengthen external border controls. Movement of workers was free only within the Union through the abatement of internal barriers. It was the willingness of France and the Federal Republic of Germany to speed up the abolishment of controls on common frontier that was at the foundation of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 with the Benelux countries. This later came into force in 1995, abolishing internal controls on the borders of signatory countries. When the Schengen Agreement expanded to encompass all other European states (albeit with exceptions), and internal controls were removed, it was even more apparent that controls at the external border together with cooperation on internal issues had to be intensified in order to enjoy a common internal security space' from 1986 to 1991. The Member States created over 20 new intergovernmental bodies dealing with issues such as police and custom cooperation on issues of abolition of internal controls, asylum, immigration and external border controls and drug-trafficking to a situation of free movement within the Union, which rendered de facto less traceable security threats.

The matter of migration-security connectivity began to assume a more serious dimension over the decades. It became palpable that increasing security threats was hardly manageable through traditional and confrontational strategies. Sovereign states began to view security as a collective management of sub national or transnational threats and the policing of borders and internal realm, rather than just the defense of territory against external attack. The implosion of the Soviet Union, which for decades controlled and contained migration flows, pushed a huge amount of people towards the West, creating souring pressures on Border States such as Germany.

The Yugoslavian conflicts- expedited provisions regarding refugee within Europe. also, opened up a case of humanitarian intervention. The armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the 1999 Kosovo war and the humanitarian crisis triggered by the displacement of more than 850,000 people from the region that prompted EU Member States to adopt a coordinated response to tackle the critical situation on the Union's borders. The flow of refugees was considered as a threat to regional security also because their movement could spread out the conflict in all Yugoslavia. In 2000 a European Refugee Fund was created (a new one has become operational since 2008). The Iraqi asylum seekers towards Europe after the Iraq Wars four decades back shaped the debate on international protection and internal security within the EU.

Practices with regard to Border Management:

- i. Implementing procedures for fair and non-discriminatory entry and exit procedures in connection with admission of migrants, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex and disability.
- ii. Establishing proper structures and mechanisms for the administration of borders ensuring well-functioning border crossing procedures, including pre-screening of arriving persons, pre-reporting by carriers of passengers who will arrive, and use of modern technology such as biometrics.
- iii. Exchanging information and cooperation among neighbouring States to promote efficiency of border control procedures and harmonize border controls.
- iv. Identifying and promoting full compliance with international standards on issuance, information and security control of travel documents.
- v. Training border officials on relevant national and international law requirements.
- vi. Strengthening cooperation in border management to combat smuggling and trafficking.
- vii. Providing assistance to migrants stranded or in danger.

The Need to Regulate Movement of Persons

No nation monitors or control foreigners outside her own borders since foreigners are outside her territorial jurisdiction. This is without prejudice to espionage activities. This takes us to some of the qualities of a state. First, it must possess a definite territory, in other words that the state must possess a definite territory known to its people and international community. Its laws must attest and affirm to its existence. Secondly, there must be a government in place for the enforcement of the laws of the state, protection of lives and property, dispensation of justice and administration of, the apparatus of government. Thirdly, it must possess identifiable population. This is without prejudices to population assumptions which appear to be the rule rather than the exception. Finally it must be so recognized as a sovereign nation with supreme power and freedom from external control. In that case it must be seen as being able to make law and enforce its laws with coercive powers if need be. Thus every nation has the power to make laws considered necessary for the security of the state including control of movement into, and out of the country. The need to regulate the movement of persons in and out of any state underscores the essence of immigration laws of nation states. This need may be attributable to a number of factors to wit;

- (a) The national security interest of states
- (b) Economic Interest of the state.

- (c) Safeguard against Espionage Activities including acts of terrorism.
- (d) Protection of citizens from ideological influence.
- (e) The doctrine of reciprocity.

Imperatives of Immigration Law

A major consideration in the international power equation is the ability of nations to assert its sovereignty. This includes the protection of its citizens from foreign interlopers, protection of its economic and political diversities and the maintenance of a stable polity for peaceful coexistence with its neighbours. Against this backdrop is the ability of nations to identify its territorial boundaries. Thereafter it behooves on its people and government to guard the territories jealously. Apart from possible military incursions from neighbouring countries especially in times of war, it is the duty of the various states to put machinery in motion that could guarantee that it allows only those that are worth admitting into its territory. Presently, the world is passing through a phase epitomized greatly by human traffic. We have already examined the reasons for this extensive movement of people across countries and continents. The control and coordination of these mass movements have become a source of concern to the world which in an attempt to grapple with the challenges has witnessed a flurry of activities by world bodies like 'the United Nations (UN), and the African Union with their affiliate agencies. The result is the drafting and ratification of charters which streamline and prescribe uniform rules to guide the interdependence and inter relation of nation subscribing to such charters. These include laws on the treatment of prisoners of war, immigrants etc and is without prejudice to the municipal laws of the constituent States.

It must be noted that all sovereign nations cherishes its independence and guards it jealously against subversive activities. In other to protect its sovereignty and guard against subversive acts, either from within or from outside, nations make laws which seeks to regulate the movement of person in and out of their territory. These are properly called immigration laws and regulations and are imposed on immigrants who must comply with the letters of the law in order to be admitted and enjoy unencumbered stay in the country. Any attempt to run afoul of their provisions would naturally elicit the coercive force of the state. The Nigerian immigration law is aimed at serving several purposes such as; National security, aimed at regulating the entry into and out of Nigeria. Border control and management, which is essential to prevent illegal crossings, smuggling, movement of terrorist and criminals etc. national identity which has to do with the protection of citizens rights, and economic development which ensures that foreign nationals contributes to Nigeria's economy (Ogbonnah, 2023).

Even in traditional societies and in all known civilization, instance of regulation of movement of person(s) into another territory abound. A nation or society to which one aspire or intends to go to for any reason whatsoever has to consent to such intention after the letter had made his intention to do so known. The recorded case of exodus of the Israelites from the land of Egypt over, 3,400 years ago in 1452 B.C demonstrates in clear terms the essence, purpose, form and characteristic of immigration laws. The movement of the Israelites from Egypt to the land of Canaan remains the largest migration of people in human history. In the process the Holy Bible was able to unravel the fundamentalism that underscores states discretion in their treatment of immigrants. In Number 21:21-23, it said; *"And Israel sent messengers to SIHON, King of Amorites saying let me pass through thy land; we will not turn aside into the fields of vineyards; we will not drink water from the well, we will go by the kings highway until we have passed through your territory"*.

The King of the Amorites however took exception to this request and refused Israelites passage through his territory. Note that the people of Israel had at that time realized that the Amorites would not grant them passage without permission hence the application for that authority. Not even the assurances not to venture into their fields of vineyards nor drink from their water wells could sway the king of the Amorites. In immigration parlance, the people of Israel applied for a "transit Visa" to pass through the land of the Amorites to an onward destination to the Promised Land but the king of the Amorites rejected the application. While we are concerned with the authority of the king to decide who enters or passes through his borders, this also raises the question why did the king refuse Israel the right of passage? As we would see subsequently, a number of variables may have been responsible for the decision of the king. Thus apart from factors seen and unseen, the national security interest of the Amorites appears ipso facto the key consideration.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the mixed method in the collection of data. In other words it applied the qualitative and quantitative methods. As demonstrated in the study, the simple percentage method was employed in the analysis of data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Sex/Questionnaires	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	265	65.43%
Female	140	34.57%
Number of Questionnaires retrieved	405	90%
Total number of Questionnaires	450	100%

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RQ1

The numerous border-crossing in the Nigeria-Cameroon border are basic routes for illegal migration.

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	306	75.56%
Agree	75	18.52%
Undecided	4	0.99%
Disagree	15	3.7%
Strongly Disagree	5	1.23%

Field Work

As demonstrated in the table above, in response to research question one, a total number of 381 respondents (94.07%) affirmed that, the numerous border crossing in the Nigeria-Cameroon border are routes for illegal migration. 306 (75.59%) respondents strongly agreed while 75 respondents (18.52%) agreed that these numerous border entry points in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State are routes for illegal migration. 4 respondents, making about 0.99% of total respondent were undecided while 15 respondents which is about 3.7% of total respondents where of the view (Disagreed) that the Nigeria-Cameroon border crossing were not routes for illegal migration into Nigeria and out of Nigeria, and 5 respondents making 1.23% of total respondents strongly disagreed that the border crossings are routes for illegal migrants. As observed in this study, and as captured in the table above, the numerous Nigeria-Cameroon border crossing in Cross River State constitutes avenue for the influx of undocumented migrants into Nigeria, and this compounds Nigeria's internal security crisis.

RQ2

Illegal migration in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State contributes to Nigeria's internal security crisis.

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	215	53.09%
Strongly Agree	70	17.28%
Undecided	16	3.95%
Disagree	80	19.75%
Strongly Disagree	24	5.93%

Field Work

As shown in table two above, majority of the respondents agreed that illegal migration in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State contributes to Nigeria's internal security crisis. 215 respondents, making about 53.09% of total respondents agreed to the research statement, that illegal migration in Nigeria-Cameroon border contributes to Nigeria's security crisis, while 70 respondents which is about 17.28% strongly disagreed and 16 respondents (3.95%) were undecided. Opposed to the research statement, 80 respondents which is about 19.75% of total respondents disagreed, while 24 respondents, making about 5.93% of total respondents strongly disagreed. Based on the position of respondents above, in relation to research question two illegal migration in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State contributes to Nigeria's internal security crisis, which has become an unending menace to the people of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Illegal migration through the numerous border entry points in the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Cross River State has given room for the influx of small arms and light weapons terrorists, bandits, smugglers, human traffickers, drug peddlers, etc, into Nigeria. This is facilitated by too many entry points without a commensurate manpower to man them. These undocumented migrants, and the illegal routs through which they come into the country contributes to Nigeria's internal security crisis and continuous to pose a threat. Nigeria's current security travails cannot be unconnected to its porous borders and lack of adequate manpower to man these entry points. Terrorism and banditry have overwhelmed Nigeria's internal security architecture, because the borders are still not adequately secured or manned. Though the problem of Nigeria's internal security is also attribute to illegal migration, the problem is multidimensional and encompassing, as governance failure and corruption are major determinants of internal security crisis in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- (i) If Nigeria must squarely address its current internal security challenges, especially of terrorism, arms, proliferation, human trafficking, banditry, etc, it must recruit personnel to adequately man all entry points at the border, to prevent them in (terrorists, bandits, human traffickers, dealers in arms etc) from freely moving in and out of Nigeria.
- (ii) The work of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), is encompassing and cannot effectively and efficiently secure the Nation's borders therefore a border security outfit should be established to solely focus on Nigeria's border security, just like the coast guards in the west.
- (iii) Citizens cooperation is required in the fight against internal insecurity therefore Government should provide good governance for its citizens this way they (citizens) would not be easily proselytized into terrorism, banditry, trafficking networks or illegal activities that pose a threat to the state.
- (iv) Corrupt officials who compromise border security must be severely penalized to deter others.

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