

**The Effects of Political Cynicism and National Siege Mentality on the Internalization of an Anti-European Sentiment****Zlatko Šram, Ph.D.****Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies****Trg Stjepana Radića 3, 10000 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia****Abstract**

This paper aims to provide an insight into the political-psychological understanding of an attitudinal construct labeled anti-European sentiment. A structural equation model for prediction was developed and evaluated by using full information maximum likelihood estimates obtained from LISREL 8.52 computer program. Assumption was that both political cynicism and national siege mentality would have an effect on anti-European sentiment. The data reported here were obtained by standard survey methods on the sample of adult population in Croatia (N=533). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed to explore factorial and construct validity of the measures used in this research. CFA yielded unidimensional construct measurements with acceptable fit indices. Structural equation model indicated that exogenous variables (political cynicism, national siege mentality) have significant effects on the anti-European sentiment used as an endogenous (dependent) variable in structural model. Goodness-of-fit indices suggested acceptable fit of the model (RMSEA=0.07, CFI=0.97, NNFI=0.97, SRMR=0.05). Given the amount of variance of anti-European sentiment, it was shown that political cynicism and national siege mentality have strong predictive validity for anti-European sentiment (43 percent of the variance was explained by the structural model). In order to explain the interactions among the latent variables investigated, the author proposed the distrust-threat model of political hostility.

Key words: political cynicism, siege mentality, anti-European sentiment, political distrust, perceived threat, uncertainty, distrust-threat model, political hostility

**INTRODUCTION**

The European Union (EU) is not only an economic but also a security organization that is indivisible from the EU integrative dynamics (Glaurdić & Vuković, 2015). The attitudes toward the EU as far as security needs are concerned are grounded in strongly divergent historical experiences of war and peace (Gabel & Palmer, 1995), or in national and regional historical legacies, influenced by national memories and contextual experiences of wars led in the region of former Yugoslavia in the 90s. This issue of the effects of different, historically rooted, security preferences on the levels of support for the EU is particularly important when it comes to the postwar region of the western Balkans (Glaurdić & Vuković, 2015, p. 2). In other words, the current problems confronting the integrity of the EU are not only confined to the domain of economics but can also be threatened by political and cultural crisis (Hartleb, 2012). Such crises are surely connected with the state sovereignty and national identity issues in the sense that nation-state sovereignty is being destroyed and national identities are being weakened. In this research, we have not been primarily concerned with the economic cost/benefit calculations, war legacies in former Yugoslavia, the roles of political parties as the agencies in shaping anti-European sentiment

(Glaurdić & Vuković), and with the causes and reasons of political distrust in general and as a legacy of communist rule (Mishler & Rose). Instead, we have primarily been concerned about the relations existing among the latent variables labeled political cynicism, national siege mentality, and anti-European sentiment, where the first two were the exogenous variables and the third was the endogenous (dependent) variable in the structural model. Taking into consideration the political-psychological meaning of the three attitudinal latent variables (defined, analyzed and explained below), we hypothesized that political cynicism and national siege mentality have significant effects on the internalization of an anti-European sentiment. We assumed that an anti-European sentiment is the component of a broader attitudinal construct, underlying similar political cognitive and motivational processes. In line with Jost *et al.*'s (2009) theoretical approach to the structure and function of political orientations, Jost & Amodio's (2012) model of motivated social cognition, and Jost & Napier's (2012) uncertainty-threat model of political conservatism, we have proposed a distrust-threat model of political hostility in explaining mutual relationships of political cynicism, siege mentality, and anti-European sentiment.

The opposition against EU can be culturally based, reflecting concerns with the establishment of a supranational European polity. Such a polity is establishing a new political community and threatening the autonomy of the established national political community, creating the perception that the EU endangers the existence of their nation. The threat that the EU poses to long-established national identity, i.e., fear of denigration to national community, a common perceived cultural threat (McLaren, 2002, 2004) as well as an economic national threat (Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012), and political alienation (Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh, 2001) can generate opposition to and hostility toward the European project. Implicit or explicit hostility toward the EU we have defined as an anti-European sentiment, as an attitudinal construct encompassing fear of the loss of sovereignty, the loss of national identity, the loss of natural wealth, and negation of getting any benefit from the EU. In short, the anti-European sentiment or syndrome we defined in this research as an explicit national threat perception and implicit economic threat perception posed by the EU integration, indicates the existence of a political distrust in European Union.

Schyns and Koop (2007) found some common elements in definition of cynicism given in the literature, such as a disbelief in the goodness of political actors and a general disdain toward politics. Specific for political cynicism is perceiving immorality and incompetence of political actors. Political cynicism thus entails denial of the sincerity of the motives or actions of politicians. In our definition of the construct of political cynicism, we followed the definition offered by Schyns and Koop (2007), who argue that political cynicism as an individual's attitude consisting of beliefs and emotions indicate the presence of the immorality and incompetence of politicians, political institutions or political system as a whole. In other words, political cynicism indicates the existence of belief that politicians are wicked, selfish, corrupt, and insincere. The construct of political cynicism, used in this research, was primarily defined in terms of perceived immorality of politicians following the perceived incompetence of the government. In such a defined political cynicism, politicians are considered extremely selfish, corrupt, and hypocrite, while the government is perceived as incompetent in a sense that it is not responsive to people's concerns, i. e., it does not take into account the interests of the people.

The concept of siege mentality was first introduced by Bar-Tal (1986) and labeled as the Massada syndrome. The political-psychological meaning of the concept of siege mentality was later defined as "a mental state in which members of a group hold a central belief that the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions toward them" (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992a, p. 634). Namely, the siege mentality belief "refers to the perception by group members that the out-groups have intentions to do wrong or inflict harm on their group" (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992b, p. 251). In other words, siege mentality implies the belief that a nation is standing alone against a hostile world, there is a threat to the group existence, and that a nation cannot expect help from anyone in time of need. The operationalization of the construct of siege mentality, used in our research, was somewhat more specific than it is operationalized in General Siege Mentality Scale (GSMS), developed by Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992a) and constructed on the basis of the conception of Massada Syndrome, presented by Bar-Tal (1986). However, the main political-psychological core was retained. The concept of siege mentality used in this research was primarily defined in terms of perceived national threat, that is why it is labeled as national siege mentality. It indicates the existence of negative intentions of the world against one's nation and readiness to use all means for self-defense, including the force to deter enemies from their attack, and negative political expectations from neighboring countries.

The main aim of this research was to find out whether attitudinal constructs labeled political cynicism and national siege mentality have significant effects on the internalization of anti-European sentiment. Since political cynicism, anti-European sentiment, and national siege mentality could be considered in terms of political distrust (Goldfarb, 1991; Hart, 1978; Morris & Klesner, 2010; Skinner, 2010; or Vujčić, 1999, 2008) and in terms of perceived threat (Jost & Napier, 2012; Šram, 2006, 2007, 2009b), we proposed the existence of the distrust-threat model of political hostility that could help explain the interaction among political cynicism, national siege mentality, and anti-European sentiment. We assumed the existence of an underlying political cognitive and motivational processes within a proposed political distrust-threat model. We also assumed that political distrust as well as perceived threat are dynamic concepts that can be understood in two time projections: in a "retrospective evaluation of events and a prospective assessment, which determine expectations of negative outcomes with a certain degree of conviction" (Bertsou, 2014, p. 2). From such a dynamic perspective that implies retrospective evaluation of the past events and prospective assessment of the future events anticipating bad social, political, or individual events, we could understand and explain mutual relations among the investigated latent variables.

## **METHOD**

### *Subjects and procedure*

The data reported here were obtained by standard survey methods on a sample of adult population (N=553) in the Croatian east regions of Slavonija and Baranja. The sample should not be considered national representative. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. As we can see, the sample was skewed toward above-average educational attainments because such a research requires an adequate literacy of respondents. This research report is a part of a much larger investigation from the field of political sciences and social psychology, carried out in the autumn of 2013. The self-report questionnaires of over 500 manifest variables were administered to respondents in their own homes by the trained interviewers. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaires by themselves. The filled questionnaires were picked up by the interviewers the next day. We found

statistically significant, but weak correlation between age groups and school attainment (members of the oldest group of respondents have more often completed elementary school, while the members of the youngest group more often have university degrees).

*Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	46.5
Female	53.5
<i>Age groups</i>	
30 years or lower	21.8
31-45	35.5
46-60	27.6
61 or higher	15.1
<i>School attainment</i>	
Elementary school	11.4
Vocational school for skilled workers (three years)	22.1
Secondary school (four years)	42.1
College	12.2
University degree	12.2

#### *Measure instruments*

Three measure instruments were applied in this research: (1) anti-European sentiment, (2) political cynicism, and (3) national siege mentality. The responses of these self-report scales was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from: (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. This study integrates the two-step model building in structural equation model (SEM). In the first step, measurement models for all latent variables are estimated. Maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for testing validity of the instruments applied in the study, using the LISREL 8.52 program. CFA provides a powerful tool for evaluating the validity of hypotheses about a scale's structure. In the second model building step, the structural part of the SEM was estimated. These structural parts specified the relationships between the exogenous (independent) latent variables (i.e., political cynicism, and national

siege mentality) and endogenous (dependent) latent variables. The following fit indices were used in assessing model fits: Chi-square statistic, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) for which acceptable value is less than 0.07 (Steiger, 2007), SRMR (standardized version of the Root Mean Square Residual) whose threshold value is less than 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index) whose threshold values are greater than 0.95 (Sharma, Mukherjee, Kumar & Dillon, 2005). Although we report the Chi-square statistic, we did not expect them to indicate a good fit because chi-square is heavily influenced by sample size and is therefore an inappropriately strict test of model fit (Kline, 2011). However, the value of the normed version of the chi-square test statistic (chi-square/df) was used in structural equation model, indicating the goodness-of-fit (the normed version of the chi-square test in the range of 2.0 to 5.0 are acceptable, with lower values indicating better fit

*Anti-European sentiment.* The four-item scale was constructed on the basis of the scale of anti-western political orientation developed by Šram (2001, 2007). CFA yielded unifactorial solution indicating that a measurement model has overall fit (Chi-square=14.68 (2),  $p < 0.01$ ), RMSEA=0.07, SRMR=0.01, CFI=1.00, NNFI=0.99). The latent structure of anti-European sentiment was defined by the following indicators (factor loading for each individual indicator are enclosed in brackets): (1). The European Union will completely ruin our state sovereignty (0.86); (2). The EU will not bring any benefit to our country (0.81); (3). The EU will destroy our national identity (0.88); and (4). The EU will ruin our natural wealth (0.87).

*Political cynicism.* The four-item scale was constructed on the basis of conceptions of both political cynicism (Cappella & Janieson, 1997) and political mistrust and alienation (Mishler & Rose, 1997; Šram, 2009a). CFA yielded unifactorial solution indicating that a measurement model has overall fit (Chi-square=14.32 (2)=14.32,  $p < 0.01$ , RMSEA=0.07, SRMR=0.01, CFI=0.99, NNFI=0.98). The latent structure of political cynicism was defined by the following indicators: (1). Politicians care only about their own interests and benefits (0.70); (2). Our government does not take into account the interests of the people (0.79); (3). It is easy to bribe a majority of our politicians (0.83); (4). A great majority of our politicians are hypocrites (0.73).

*National siege mentality.* The four-item scale was constructed on the concept of siege mentality developed by Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992a, 1992b) and on the concept of national siege mentality developed by Šram (2009b). CFA yielded unifactorial solution, indicating that a measurement model has overall fit (Chi-square=4.64 (2),  $p > 0.05$ , RMSEA=0.03, SRMR=0.01, CFI=1.00, NNFI=0.99). The latent structure was defined by the following indicators: (1). Our existence is the end which justifies the means; (2). The whole world is against us; (3). Only demonstration of force will deter our enemies from attacking us; (4). When neighboring countries get in conflicts, we will often be blamed for the same.

Composite variables of anti-European sentiment, political cynicism, and national siege mentality were also computed. Since all the indicators contribute strongly to the measurements of the latent variables being constructed, calculation of composite variables were reasonably justified. Namely, one-factor models, obtained by the confirmatory factor analysis, minimizes measurement error in the indicators

contributing to each scale (Rowe, 2006). Descriptive statistics of the measures are presented in Table 2. Taken with the skewness and kurtosis statistics, these results indicate that the storage scores are normally distributed. As a rule of thumb, skewness and kurtosis values within the range from +2 to -2 are generally consider normal (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). Keeping in mind that the measures consisted of only four items, we can see that all the measures are internally consistent and reliable. The magnitude of interrelations among composite variables within the total sample might indicate the existence of the latent variable underlying all three measures.

*Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the measures (means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis, Cronbach's alphas) and correlations among them*

	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3
1 Anti-European sentiment	13.0	4.6	-0.22	-0.80	0.91	1.00		
2 Political cynicism	15.1	3.7	-0.53	-0.39	0.85	0.46***	1.00	
3 National siege mentality	10.8	3.6	0.17	-0.62	0.70	0.40***	0.18**	1.00

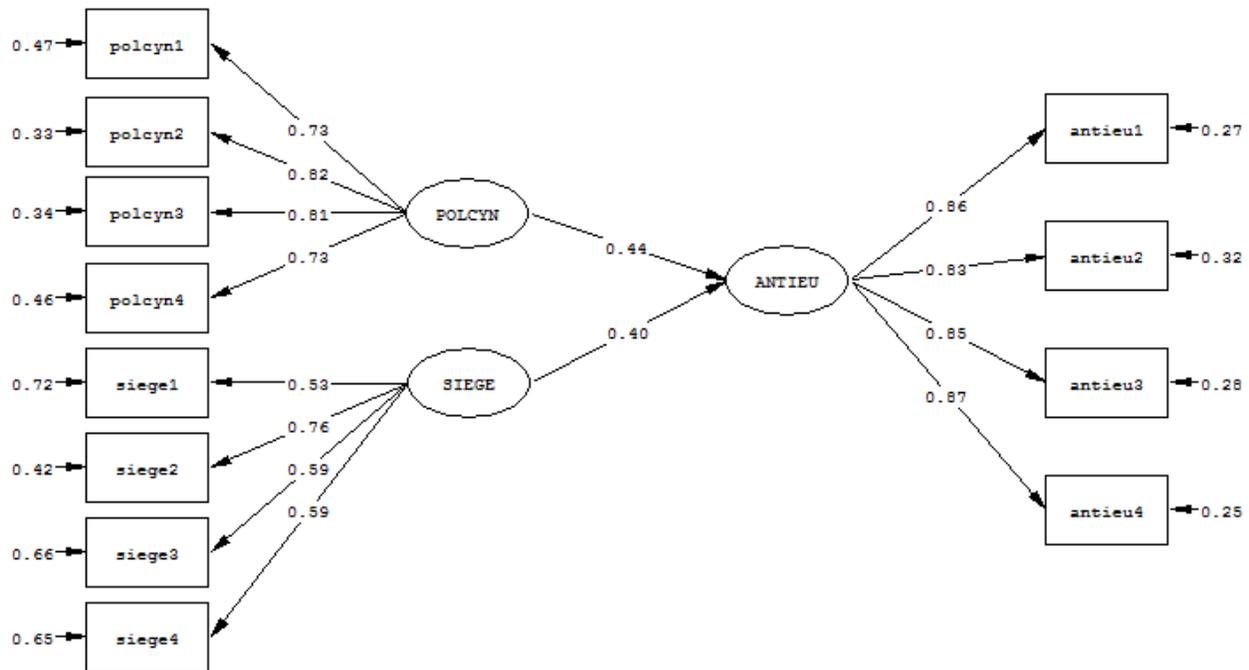
\*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structural models for predicting an anti-European sentiment was developed and evaluated by using full information maximum likelihood estimates, obtained from LISREL 8.52 program. Structural equation model was used to test the theoretical model of both political cynicism and national siege mentality, as sub-types of political mistrust and perceived threat would effect anti-European sentiment. Structural equation model (Figure 1) indicated good fit indices (Chi-square=183.25 (51),  $p<0.01$ , RMSEA=0.07, NNFI=0.97, CFI=0.97,

SRMR=0.05). The value of the normed version of chi-square test statistic is acceptable and indicates a good fit (chi-square/df=3.79). Both exogenous or independent variables political cynicism (0.44) and national siege mentality (0.40) have proved to be significant predictors of anti-European sentiment. About 43 per cent of the variance can be explained by the structural model.

Figure 1: Structural equation model of the effects of political cynicism and national siege mentality on

*anti-European sentiment*

The results of structural equation modeling confirmed the hypothesis that political cynicism and national siege mentality have significant effects on the internalization of anti-European sentiment. Taking into account the political-psychological meaning of attitudinal constructs investigated and its established relationships, we can conclude that there is, at least to a certain degree, the existence of an underlying similar political cognitive, and motivational processes. Distrust in politicians and government as a whole, perceiving politicians as immoral and corrupt (Schyns & Koop, 2007) who violate "prescriptive standards for their behavior" (Schwartz, 1974, p. 189), perceived negative and hostile intentions of other nations and states against one's nation, and mental readiness to use force to deter enemies from their attack (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992a) are underlying anti-European sentiments. This political-attitudinal construct encompasses the existence of perceived threat to national sovereignty, to national identity, and to national ecological system, posed by the European Union, and the expression of a strong doubt that the country can get any benefit from the EU in general. A somewhat deeper insight into political-psychological meaning of political cynicism, national siege mentality, and anti-European sentiment may allow these attitudinal constructs be treated as a mixture of cognitive and affective evaluations, consisting of specific political conviction.

Anti-European sentiment manifests the diverse nature of hostility toward European integration, perceiving the EU as a threat to nation's values, culture, and identity (Crepsy & Verschueren, 2009; Krouwel & Abst, 2007), and indicating the existence of national threat perception. It is obvious that EU as a "supranational polity that exerts political authority over its citizens" and as a "part of system of multilevel governance that encompasses national politics" (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, p. 436) may be the source of national threat perception. Such perceived national threats that correspond to an attitudinal

dimension toward the EU reflect an emotional response toward the EU (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbass & de Vreese, 2011). The EU poses political, cultural, and economic threat that generate overall implicit or explicit hostility toward European integration (McLaren, 2002, 2004; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh, 2001).

Since political cynicism is the concept often equated with political distrust (Citrin & Luks, 2001; Koch, 2003; Pattyn, Van Hiel, Dhont & Onraet, 2012), it is reasonable to place it within the realm of political distrust concepts, based on the perceived immorality and perceived incompetence of the political actors. However, political cynicism entails more negative connotation and emotions (Eisinger, 2000) and consists of anger and disgust with politics, where anger and hostility is the "endemic part of the political psyche" (Dekker & Meijerink, 2012, p. 33), political cynicism can surely be the threat to democracy, undermining, as Goldfarb (1991) says, the capacity to think about society's strength and weaknesses.

Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992b) argue that siege mentality as a belief in the cognitive repertoire is a result of perceived experiences and of educational, cultural, political, and social mechanisms that maintain it. Very often it happens that the nations that had been in war conflicts fixate on the past fear. This fear is grounded on the remembered threats in the past and past memorized experiences (Bar-Tal, 2001). Certainly the war conflicts between Croats and Serbs, led on the territory of Croatia for its independence during the end of 90s, implied that the conflicts that inflicted "severe negative experiences such as threat, stress, pain, exhaustion, grief, traumas, misery, hardship, and cost, both in life and material terms. ....In this cognitive-affective repertoire, societal beliefs are the basic components of collective memories and ethos of conflict" (Bar-Tal, 2007, p. 1434). The presence and development of siege mentality, generated from such a past fear and war traumas, became a kind of central societal belief that "provide the prism through which society members will view the world and relate to it. This prism not only organizes society's cognitive outlook or directs intentional forms of action, but also sets its collective emotional orientation" (Bar-Tal, 2001, p. 606). It is hardly possible to overlook that personal hostility, collective enmity, and political distrust toward other nations are underlying national siege mentality and perception of threat.

The analysis of the contents and political-psychological meaning of the investigated attitudinal constructs revealed that all of them encompass both political distrust and perceived threat. Thus, political cynicism indicates political distrust toward politicians and perceived threat posed by the domestic political system that is to a very small degree responsive to voters' concerns (Citrin & Luks, 2000; Erber & Lau, 1990; Newton, 2006). National siege mentality indicates political distrust toward other nation-states and perceived national security threat posed by the outside enemies. Anti-European sentiment indicates implicitly political distrust toward the European integration processes/institutions and perceived cultural and economic threat. What all three political attitudinal constructs have in common is an underlying political hostility that can be developed and socialized on an individual and at a collective level. Namely, political distrust and perceived threat against a collective can also represent a personal political distrust and threat (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007). For instance, Croatian citizens may express a collective political distrust toward the EU integrations and view the EU as a collective cultural and economic threat against its nation, on one hand, and a personal distrust towards the values of EU and express threat against his/her personal values and beliefs, on the other.

The intercorrelations among the composite variables of political cynicism, national siege mentality, and anti-European sentiment were of such a magnitude (see Table 3) that it indicated the existence of latent variable underlying all three composite measures. Exploratory factor analysis, using principal components, extracted one component explaining 56.67 per cent of the variance. The factor loadings ranged between 0.66 and 0.85. Factor analysis revealed underlying latent variables in the samples investigated. This factorially extracted variable was labeled political distrust and threat perception. We can see that such a distrust-threat perception underlies political hostility toward both domestic and foreign actors of polity. In other words, anti-European sentiment may be treated as a component of a broader hostile political attitudinal pattern that indicates the existence of a certain type of political alienation or even as a pattern of a potentially conservative or extreme ideology (Abrams, 2012; Jost and Napier, 2012; Malka, Soto, Inzlicht & Lelkes, 2014). Thus, an anti-European sentiment cannot be explained and understood not only within the realms of economic cost/benefit calculations, war legacies in former Yugoslavia, and the roles of political parties generating an anti-European sentiment, but also within the distrust-threat model of political hostility, as we suggest in this paper. Cognitive and motivational processes underlying the distrust-threat model of political hostility, whose component is anti-European sentiment, serves to reduce uncertainty and anxiety about both the individual and collective future. In other words, a distrust-threat model of political hostility predicted that the psychological appeal of attitudes, comprising the structure of anti-European sentiment, is strengthened whenever there's a need to reduce collective uncertainty; political distrust and threats are elevated (Jost and Napier, 2012). In this way anti-European sentiment might be considered the consequence of "self-protective, defensive motivational needs for control and security" (Duckitt, 2001, p.85), showing a model of cognitive (perceived threat) and motivational (epistemic and existential needs for security) underpinning of this political orientation that can be associated with political conservatism or ideological extremity (Abrams, 2012; Jost, Napier, Thorisdottir, Gosling, Palfai & Ostafin, 2007) or with historical revisionism and political re-evaluation of former communist (totalitarian) regime that conferred existential security (Šram, 2015). In short, anti-European sentiment can be treated, just like an ideological pattern, as "motivated social cognition" (Jost and Amodio, 2012, p. 57) that holds the needs to manage political distrust and perceived threats to the self, to the group, and to the system and nation, posed by internal and external political actors and forces. There is no need to emphasize that such a distrust-threat perception underlying political hostility have negative effects on community, democracy, security, economic prosperity, society (Putnam, 1995; Sullivan and Transue, 1999; Zeineddine and Pratto, 2014), and even on the people's mental health (Swami and Furnham, 2014; Sullivan, Landau, Rothsching and Keefer, 2014). We speculate that similar distrust-threat models of political hostility, of which an anti-European sentiment is just a part, would be obtained in other former communist countries.

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