




ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Moral Principles and Norms of Legislators from the Perspective of Islamic Teachings

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT	
<div>Article History:</div> <div>Received: 02 April 2024</div> <div>Revised: 08 June 2024</div> <div>Accepted: 01 July 2024</div> <div>Key Words:</div> <div>Islamic Teachings</div> <div>Islamic Ethical Framework</div> <div>Professional Ethics</div> <div>Parliamentarians</div> <div>Moral Codes</div> <div>Ethics of Legislation</div> <div>DOI:</div> <div>https://doi.org/10.22034/imjpl.2024.10188</div> <div>This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</div> <div></div>		<div>SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: This article examines the moral principles and norms required by legislators, particularly parliamentarians, from the perspective of Islamic teachings, which is significant for crafting appropriate codes of conduct. It aims to differentiate the unique professional ethics requirements for parliamentarians within a religious democratic context like the Islamic Republic of Iran. Additionally, it identifies potential conflicts or synergies between Islamic ethics and global ethical standards.</div> <div>METHOD & FINDING: The approach includes a comparative analysis, looking at contemporary practices of ethical code development, alongside a focused review of Islamic religious texts and their interpretations regarding moral governance. Key findings suggest that trustworthiness, confidentiality, consultation, and adherence to the law stand out as crucial ethical obligations. Moreover, the article highlights the potential pitfalls of not adhering to these ethical standards, such as the loss of public trust and the erosion of the legislative body's effectiveness. The approach includes a comparative analysis, looking at contemporary practices of ethical code development, alongside a focused review of Islamic religious texts and their interpretations regarding moral governance. Key findings suggest that trustworthiness, confidentiality, consultation, and adherence to the law stand out as crucial ethical obligations. Moreover, the article highlights the potential pitfalls of not adhering to these ethical standards, such as the loss of public trust and the erosion of the legislative body's effectiveness.</div> <div>CONCLUSION: The development of a comprehensive moral framework for parliamentarians is not only a foundational step in enhancing the integrity of governance but also crucial for maintaining public trust and accountability. Islamic teachings provide a robust foundation for these ethical norms, emphasizing the importance of moral conduct in leadership roles. By adhering to these principles, legislators can ensure more effective governance and a greater alignment with the public's interests, which ultimately strengthens the overall democratic structure.</div>	
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Introduction

In contemporary governance, the integrity of legislators is paramount, not only in maintaining the efficacy of the legislative process but also in fostering public trust and confidence in political institutions. This is particularly significant in contexts where legislation and ethical governance are informed by religious principles, such as in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The role of ethical norms and codes of conduct for parliamentarians, underpinned by Islamic teachings, presents a unique intersection of religion and politics that merits comprehensive exploration.

The objective of this article is to examine the moral principles and ethical requirements that should guide legislators, focusing on the distinct context of a religious democratic system. This inquiry is essential as it explores how Islamic teachings can inform and shape the professional ethics of parliamentarians, providing a framework that can be adapted globally to enhance legislative practices.

This study addresses several core questions: What are the ethical expectations for parliamentarians as dictated by Islamic teachings? How do these expectations align with or differ from those in secular systems? And, crucially, what are the implications of

these ethical norms for public trust and the effectiveness of legislative bodies?

To answer these questions, the article will review historical precedents of ethical codes, analyze relevant Islamic texts, and draw parallels with contemporary ethical practices in governance. Through this multifaceted approach, the study aims to outline a set of ethical guidelines that uphold both the spiritual and practical requisites of legislative conduct, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of ethics in governance from an Islamic perspective. The exploration will not only highlight the importance of ethical governance but also propose ways in which Islamic ethical principles can provide a robust foundation for the development of codes of conduct for legislators worldwide, thereby enhancing transparency, accountability, and integrity in politics.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical basis of this study is anchored in the fields of ethics, religious studies, and political science, with a specific focus on the impact of Islamic teachings on the ethical standards expected of public officials. Islamic ethics, deeply ingrained in the Quran and Ḥadīth, provide detailed guidelines on moral behavior, highlighting qualities such as honesty,

integrity, and accountability, which are crucial for those in governance roles.

1. Islamic Ethical Framework

Islamic teachings provide a comprehensive set of ethical guidelines emphasizing moral responsibilities, particularly for those holding public office. The Quran and Hadīth specify behaviors that promote trust and justice, essential in public administration and governance. Figures such as Imam Ali are often referenced for their insights into leadership and governance, offering a historical perspective that enriches the understanding of modern ethical considerations.

2. Islamic Teachings

Islamic teachings encompass the principles, values, and guidelines derived from the Quran, Hadīth (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and His successors), and Islamic jurisprudence. These teachings provide a comprehensive framework for personal conduct, social interactions, and governance. In the context of professional ethics, Islamic teachings emphasize justice, honesty, accountability, and the welfare of society (Kamali, 2008, p. 84).

3. Professional Ethics

Professional ethics refers to the set of moral principles and standards that govern the behavior and decision-making of individuals in their professional roles. For

parliamentarians, professional ethics involves adhering to principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and respect for the rule of law. These ethical standards ensure that public officials act in the best interest of their constituents and maintain public trust (Cooper, 2012, p. 85).

4. Moral Codes

Moral codes are systems of principles and values that guide individuals in distinguishing right from wrong. These codes are often shaped by cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. In the context of Islamic teachings, moral codes are deeply rooted in concepts such as justice (The Quran, 4:135), compassion (The Quran, 21:107), honesty (The Quran, 49:11-12), and respect for human dignity (The Quran, 17:70) as demonstrated in classical and contemporary Islamic ethical scholarship (Trapnell, 2013, p. 16; Kamali, 2019, p. 45; Ramadan, 2017, p. 89).

5. Ethics of Legislation

The ethics of legislation encompasses the moral principles that govern the creation, amendment, and implementation of laws. This framework demands that laws be:

1. Just and Equitable: Ensuring fairness across all societal groups (Rawls, 1971, p. 60).

2. Public-Interest Oriented:
Prioritizing collective welfare over partisan or private interests (Habermas, 1996, p. 107).
3. Inclusive: Deliberately addressing the needs of vulnerable populations (Young, 2000, p. 23).

Literature Review

Previous studies have explored various aspects of ethical governance, particularly focusing on secular and religious frameworks. Research on ethical codes for public officials highlights the role of transparency, accountability, and moral integrity in governance. Scholars such as Thompson (1995), and Heywood (2017) have contributed significantly to the discourse on legislative ethics, emphasizing the necessity of well-defined ethical guidelines to mitigate corruption and enhance public trust. Studies on Islamic ethics have examined how religious doctrines shape governance, particularly in predominantly Muslim nations such as Anṣārī (2006) and Osman (2019), but have often lacked a comparative perspective integrating secular ethics.

This study distinguishes itself by offering a comprehensive comparison between Islamic and secular ethical frameworks, demonstrating how Islamic teachings can complement and enhance existing legislative ethics. Unlike previous research that primarily focuses on either Islamic or secular

systems, this study bridges the gap by analyzing their intersections and divergences. Moreover, it provides practical recommendations for implementing ethical codes in diverse governmental contexts, ensuring that legislative bodies uphold both religious and universal ethical principles.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to explore the ethical obligations of parliamentarians, especially through the lens of Islamic teachings. It integrates several research methodologies, including textual and doctrinal analysis, comparative analysis, case study review, historical contextualization, and an interdisciplinary approach. By combining these methods, the research provides a comprehensive view of ethical governance in legislative contexts, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the frameworks that shape parliamentary conduct.

The textual and doctrinal analysis examines Islamic religious texts, such as the Quran, and Ḥadīth, to extract fundamental moral principles relevant to governance. Comparative analysis juxtaposes these ethical standards with those in secular systems, identifying commonalities and differences that can inform broader professional ethics. Additionally, case studies in regions where Islamic ethics play a central role,

such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, assess the practical application and challenges of implementing ethical norms in governance. Historical contextualization further enriches the study by tracing the evolution of legislative ethics from classical Islamic teachings to modern applications. The interdisciplinary approach, incorporating political philosophy, religious studies, and ethics, ensures a well-rounded analysis that contributes both theoretical insights and practical guidelines for developing ethical codes that enhance integrity, transparency, and public trust in legislative institutions.

Professional Ethics Requirements for Representatives

Given the fundamental difference between the Islamic Republic of Iran's religious democratic system—which is rooted in *Wilāyah al-Faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist) (Khomeini, 1971)—and secular political systems where religion plays no formal role (OECD, 2021), the code of conduct for Iranian parliamentarians must be carefully designed to reflect this unique hybrid governance structure. While comparative research suggests the utility of adopting evidence-based anti-corruption measures from secular democracies (IPU, 2020, p. 33), Islamic political ethics require the integration of Quranic principles such as *ʿAdl* (justice) (The Quran 4:58),

and *Amanah* (trusteeship) (The Quran 4:135), into parliamentary standards (Sachedina, 2001, p. 72).

This dual approach ensures ethical guidelines align with both democratic accountability and Shi'a jurisprudential values (Motahhari, 1985). As Anṣārī (2006) demonstrates in his analysis of Iran's post-revolutionary Majlis, codifying ethics is only an initial step; sustained institutionalization through mechanisms like the Article 90 Commission and religious-legal oversight bodies remains critical for enforcement (p. 167).

This paper will explore the moral obligations and potential ethical challenges faced by representatives in the context of the Islamic Republic's parliamentary system. By examining these requirements, we aim to lay the groundwork for the creation of a comprehensive ethical framework for parliamentarians in Iran. Although this study focuses on the Iranian Majlis, the insights derived from this code could apply to parliamentarians globally.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a key moral obligation for members of parliament, defined here as the careful management of state resources and finances. It involves safeguarding public funds and avoiding personal misuse of government property, such as using

government cars, offices, or employees for personal gain or political campaigns. Such actions, including bribery and financial misconduct, are clear violations of trust, which undermine the integrity of parliamentarians and the political system.

Beyond the protection of public resources, trustworthiness is vital because it directly impacts public confidence in the government. Parliamentarians, elected by the people, are tasked with ensuring the proper functioning of the government, and their ethical behavior is essential in maintaining public trust. Any financial misconduct by representatives can severely damage the relationship between citizens and their government, leading to a loss of trust in parliamentary institutions (Mohīti Ardakan, 2024, p.55).

In Islamic teachings, trustworthiness is one of the highest moral principles, emphasized by figures such as Amir al-Mu'minin and Imam Sadiq. The Prophet's sayings and the teachings of early Islamic leaders stress that those in positions of authority, including parliamentarians, are responsible for maintaining trust in all matters involving public property, dignity, and the people's welfare (Ṣadūq, 2006, p. 52).

For MPs, trustworthiness extends beyond managing state property. It also involves the ethical use of their influence. Abuse of power, such as

nepotism or using one's political position for personal advantage, is a significant breach of trust. For example, recommending relatives for government jobs or using one's position to resolve personal matters, like pressuring the police to release a relative, is an abuse of power and undermines the parliamentarian's ethical standing.

Islamic teachings underscore the importance of maintaining ethical conduct in all areas, as illustrated by Imam Ali's letters to his governors, warning them against betraying public trust (Sharīf al-Raḍī, letter No. 53). Even seemingly benign actions, such as using an MP's office for a neighbor's complaint, can be problematic if they fall outside the scope of parliamentary duties. Although these actions may not have immediate negative consequences, they raise ethical concerns and must be carefully considered.

While trustworthiness is a cornerstone of ethical governance, its application in modern political systems is often complicated by competing interests. For instance, MPs may face pressure from lobbyists or party leaders, which can conflict with their duty to act in the public's best interest. A deeper examination of these challenges, supported by case studies from different countries, would provide a more nuanced understanding of how

trustworthiness can be maintained in complex political environments.

Consultation

An important ethical responsibility of parliamentarians is to seek consultation from knowledgeable individuals on various matters. While consultation is beneficial for everyone, for parliamentarians, it is not only a moral virtue but a duty. Given their influential role in decision-making, seeking expert advice is essential for making well-informed choices.

In Islamic teachings, *Shura* (consultation) is highlighted as a key characteristic of believers. The Quran in Surah *Shura* describes believers as those who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, and whose affairs are decided by mutual consultation ([The Quran, 42:38](#)). Additionally, many *Ḥadīths* emphasize the importance of consultation. Imam Hassan Mojtaba states that any group that consults is guided to the path of growth and guidance ([Sobhani, 2001, p. 154](#)). This teaching is reinforced by the advice of Amir al-Mu'minin, who urged his governor Malik Ashtar to consult with scholars and wise individuals to make the best decisions in governance ([Sharīf al-Raḍī, letter No. 53](#)). Such consultations are vital because they allow leaders to draw on the wisdom and experience of experts,

ensuring that decisions are well-guided and conducive to growth. In contrast, relying on one's own unchecked opinions can lead to destruction, as Imam Ali warns, "Whoever relies on their own opinion alone will be destroyed" ([Ibn Abi al-Ḥadīd, 2005, p. 500](#)).

Among various public officials, parliamentarians bear a unique responsibility that requires frequent consultation. Unlike other government roles, which are more specialized, parliamentarians must make decisions on a wide range of national issues political, economic, military, and cultural. Given the breadth of their legislative and supervisory duties, no matter how knowledgeable an MP may be, they cannot possess all the information required to make fully informed decisions. Therefore, consulting experts and specialists is critical for MPs to fulfill their responsibilities effectively and in the best interest of the public.

Although consultation is a key principle in Islamic governance, its practical implementation can be challenging. For example, in times of crisis, the need for swift decision-making may conflict with the time-consuming nature of consultation. Additionally, in some political systems, consultation may be limited by bureaucratic structures or political hierarchies.

Keeping Secrets and Confidential Information

Although sessions of the Majlis (Iran's parliament) and its specialized commissions are typically open to the public, there are times when certain meetings are held privately, and MPs are required to keep the details of these sessions confidential. This confidentiality is necessary because parliamentarians often need access to sensitive and classified information to make informed decisions. For example, when determining the country's defense budget, MPs must be aware of national security threats. Similarly, in addressing economic issues, MPs must have access to confidential financial data, such as the country's assets and liabilities. Therefore, the ability to maintain secrecy about such information is a critical part of a parliamentarian's duties (Preston & Sampford, 2012, p. 31).

Despite the importance of confidentiality, many instances of classified information being disclosed to the media are reported, even though MPs are well aware of the legal and criminal consequences of such actions. Before closed-door sessions, parliamentarians are generally reminded of the need to keep this information private. However, some MPs, often driven by political motives, deliberately leak confidential details to the media. These leaks can occur as a means to attack political rivals,

influence public opinion, or gain leverage in media coverage.

This practice of leaking confidential information has become so common that it poses a serious concern for the government, especially for agencies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has declared that it will no longer share sensitive information with parliamentarians due to the frequent breaches of confidentiality. This ongoing issue has led to a breakdown in trust between government officials and members of parliament, highlighting the challenges of maintaining confidentiality within the legislative process (Ibid, p.38).

Seriousness and Perseverance

Success in any field, particularly in government roles such as parliamentary representation, demands high levels of seriousness and perseverance. Elected parliamentarians represent the hopes and expectations of their constituents, and although it is impossible to satisfy all demands, making earnest and sustained efforts is a fundamental responsibility of every MP (Ibid, p. 42). Given that terms in parliament are typically fixed to a few years—four years in many countries including Iran—every moment of service counts, demanding MPs focus solely on their legislative duties.

The lack of direct monitoring of parliamentary activities emphasizes the

need for MPs to be self-disciplined and manage their schedules effectively. Historical figures like Imam Ali have stressed the importance of not relying on ineffective or indifferent staff, which underscores the necessity for representatives and their teams to embody diligence and dedication.

While some individual traits like diligence and perseverance develop through personal growth, institutional reforms can systematically strengthen parliamentary accountability. Comparative research demonstrates that conflict-of-interest regulations—such as prohibitions on MPs holding concurrent employment—help ensure dedicated focus on legislative duties (OECD, 2021, p. 47). For example:

1. France's *Décret sur le cumul des mandats* (2017) bars parliamentarians from occupying multiple public offices, reducing divided loyalties (François, 2020).
2. U.S. Senate Rule XII mandates attendance, with unexcused absences triggering salary deductions (U.S. Senate Ethics Manual, 2023, §5.2).

Such measures institutionalize accountability where personal ethics may vary, aligning with Mansbridge's (2003) theory of "gyroscopic representation"—where rules compensate for individual shortcomings (p. 515).

Fulfilling Election Promises by MPs

Fulfilling election promises is a critical aspect of a parliamentarian's duty, as these commitments are often the basis on which they are elected (Preston & Sampford, 2012, p. 63). During election campaigns, voters assess candidates based on their historical performance and the promises they make. While a candidate's past actions are tangible and can be evaluated, their future promises are less certain and can be exploited by some who make unrealistic commitments to gain authority.

Once elected, MPs face the challenge of addressing the promises they made. Some of these promises may exceed the actual powers of a parliamentarian and should not have been made initially. However, others fall within their responsibilities and can be fulfilled if there is sufficient will and effort. The core ethical question is whether MPs are morally obligated to fulfill these promises. This question becomes complicated due to the nature of some promises and the practical limitations of parliamentary power.

In Islamic teachings, fulfilling promises is heavily emphasized as a sign of virtue and good character. The Holy Quran praises those who keep their promises, and traditions indicate severe repercussions for those who fail to do so (Sharīf al-Raḍī, Sayings No. 36). However, some promises made during elections may be

unrealistic, akin to promising someone else's property, which is neither ethical nor practical. For instance, promising legislative changes without having the requisite authority or pledging public resources to impractical projects can be misleading (Thompson, 1995, p. 55).

Moreover, many election promises might not align with the broader public interest or prudent fiscal management. The ethical dilemma arises when the fulfillment of certain promises could lead to wasteful expenditure or when they conflict with the greater needs of the community. MPs must balance the need to uphold their commitments with the imperative to act in the best interest of the public (Ibid, p. 49).

Given these challenges, it is crucial for candidates to thoroughly research and consider the feasibility and implications of their promises before making them. This foresight can prevent future conflicts between personal electoral commitments and the broader duties of governance, ensuring that public resources are used wisely and in alignment with community priorities (Ibid, p. 53).

Courage and Determination

Courage and determination are essential virtues for members of parliament, as they frequently face challenges that test their resolve. The

process of voting on significant legislative proposals often exposes representatives to intense pressures, including personal attacks, threats against family members, and even risks to their own safety. Such pressures underscore the need for MPs to possess a strong moral backbone before they even consider running for office.

The role of courage in governance is not only about facing personal threats but also involves standing up against corruption and undue influences from various quarters. MPs often need to challenge the misconduct of executive officials or resist demands from local or party leaders that conflict with public interests. The effectiveness of a parliamentarian hinges significantly on their ability to maintain integrity and push forward with decisions they believe in, even at the risk of electoral defeat or public criticism (Bosaliki, 2011, p. 55).

Islamic teachings place a high value on courage and determination, especially for leaders. The Quran instructs the Prophet Muhammad to remain steadfast in his mission despite opposition and criticism. Imam Ali, echoing these teachings, emphasized the importance of resolve in governance, advising his governors to be decisive and not to shy away from confrontations when necessary (Ibn Abi al-Ḥadīd, 2005, p. 97). He praised individuals like Malik Ashtar for their unwavering courage in critical situations, highlighting that true

leadership involves being alert and proactive in the face of adversity.

Prioritizing National Interests in Parliamentary Decision-Making

Parliamentarians, though elected from specific regions or cities, must prioritize national interests over local or partisan concerns in their legislative roles. This means that while representatives may seek to address local needs, such actions should align with and not contradict broader national priorities. Similarly, adherence to party lines is appropriate only when these do not conflict with the public good. The decision to support party programs should be guided by their alignment with national interests, rather than by party loyalty alone (Allen, 2018, p. 45; Demmke, 2012, p. 120 see also OECD, 2021, chap. 4).

The emphasis on prioritizing national interests is a critical ethical standard, highlighted as one of the six core principles in the professional code of conduct of the French Parliament. This principle is not only a guideline in secular governance but is also deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Islamic principles instruct government officials to base their decisions on what benefits the majority of the population. Amir al-Mu'minin's advice to Malik Ashtar underscores this: he stresses that the most virtuous actions are those that promote truth, justice, and the greater

happiness of society. Actions should focus on the overall well-being of the public, suggesting that the displeasure of a few can be overlooked if it results in the satisfaction and benefit of the many. Decisions should always aim for the most extensive positive impact and enduring outcomes, ensuring that the interests of the entire nation are considered and served (Sharīf al-Raḍī, letter No. 53).

Honesty

Honesty and truthfulness are foundational moral virtues required of parliamentarians. Lying is seen as a significant ethical failing among members of parliament, to the extent that Hojjatul Islam Shojaei, the deputy head of the Board for Monitoring the Behavior of Members of the Islamic Council, cites it as the most prevalent moral issue within the ranks of MPs.

Truthfulness is universally recognized as a crucial moral trait and holds a particularly revered place within Islamic teachings. According to a saying from Amir al-Mu'minin, truthfulness is the correctness of everything and lying is the ruin of everything (Sharīf al-Raḍī, sayings No. 53). This emphasizes that dishonesty can undermine an individual's integrity and effectiveness in any role, including governance. Parliament's key function, as the primary democratic body elected by the populace, is to foster public trust

in government. MPs play a critical role in this by being transparent and truthful, as any deceit on their part can significantly erode trust among the citizenry.

Honesty for parliamentarians extends beyond simply avoiding lies. It involves a commitment to accuracy and reliability in all communications. MPs must ensure that statements, notes, and reports they release to the media or public contain only verified information. Given their influential positions, they must avoid spreading misinformation. This commitment to fact-checking is vital, as public and media scrutiny is high, and officials who disseminate false or unverified information face significant criticism (Preston & Sampford, 2012, p.46).

Conclusion

This study has investigated the ethical principles and moral norms essential for guiding parliamentarians, emphasizing the role of Islamic teachings. The significance of professional ethics within legislative contexts is crucial, directly influencing governance's integrity, transparency, and public trust. Through an in-depth analysis of Islamic moral frameworks, this research has outlined vital ethical expectations for parliamentarians, such as trustworthiness, justice, honesty, accountability, and strict adherence to the rule of law.

The research highlights the distinct influence of Islamic ethics on the behavior of public officials, especially within the framework of a religious democratic system like the Islamic Republic of Iran. Aligning legislative ethics with Islamic teachings encourages parliamentarians to maintain high integrity levels and commit to serving the public with sincerity, fairness, and responsibility. Moreover, the study illustrates that these ethical principles are applicable not only in Islamic contexts but also as valuable guidelines for global legislators, providing an alternative or supplement to secular ethical codes.

A critical discovery of this study is the paramount importance of sustaining public trust in legislative institutions. When parliamentarians neglect ethical standards, it can have profound consequences, undermining the entire political system's legitimacy. Therefore, establishing and enforcing comprehensive ethical codes rooted in both religious teachings and international standards is vital for the functionality and credibility of legislative bodies.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on ethics in governance by advocating that Islamic ethical principles form a robust foundation for developing ethical codes for parliamentarians. By integrating these principles into the legislative process, we

aim to enhance transparency, combat corruption, and improve the accountability of elected officials, thereby strengthening democratic governance's pillars and preserving public trust in their elected leaders.

To integrate Islamic ethical codes into legislative frameworks, governments could establish ethical oversight committees composed of religious scholars, legal experts, and civil society representatives. These committees would monitor the ethical conduct of parliamentarians and guide aligning legislative decisions with Islamic principles. Additionally, training programs on Islamic ethics could be introduced for MPs, focusing on practical applications of trustworthiness, consultation, and justice in governance.

We anticipate that ongoing research and dialogue will further refine and implement these ethical frameworks in parliamentary practices globally, ensuring that parliamentarians truly act as stewards of justice, fairness, and the public good.

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Conflict of Interest

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