



Commission for
Countering Extremism

Study into Extremism

Terms of Reference

September 2018

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WHAT QUESTIONS WILL WE ASK?

To what extent is there a shared public understanding of what extremism is?

What agreement is there on the boundaries of extremism?

What do the following indicators tell us about the scale of extremism?

- Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime
- Extremist events
- Segregation in local areas
- Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities
- Size and influence of extremist groups
- Extremist propaganda on social media and traditional media
- Link between extremism and terrorism
- Attitudes indicating sympathy to extremist ideas or behaviour

What are the objectives of different extremist ideologies?

What tactics do extremists use to achieve their objectives, including:

- to mainstream their views?
- to recruit people
- to respond to those opposing them?

What are the harms caused by extremist incidents?

What are the harms of extremism to women, young people, minorities and people countering extremism?

What are the wider harms on our democracy?

What is government and society's current response to extremism, how effective is it and what are the gaps?

How can we better support those countering extremism?

What could a positive, inclusive vision for our country look like?

WHERE WILL WE FIND ANSWERS?



FOREWORD FROM THE LEAD COMMISSIONER



Our country's rich diversity, fundamental freedoms and liberal democracy define us as a nation and are cause for celebration. We embrace different races, religions, sexualities and beliefs.

But a worrying picture is forming, which should concern all those that cherish these values. Many of those I have spoken to believe that extremism is increasing and are concerned about ideas and behaviours that undermine our values. Many people can describe the extremism they see on their streets and in their lives, and they want it to stop. They feel more needs to be done.

It is clear to me that the first step is addressing the absence of consensus, building the evidence on extremism and examining our current response to it.

To address this, my Commission will publish a wide-ranging study on all forms of extremism in Spring 2019. These Terms of Reference outline our approach, our questions and how we will answer them. The key themes I will be looking at are:

- The public's understanding of extremism
- The scale of extremism
- Extremists' tactics and objectives
- Harms caused by extremism
- The current response to extremism

These Terms of Reference set out how I will tackle the need for a holistic understanding of extremism and its consequences, whether to individuals, to our society or to our wider democracy.

We will shortly be issuing a public consultation as we are keen to provide the public with an opportunity to share their own experiences with us.

Likewise, we are keen for the government, academics, civil society groups, counter extremism activists and public bodies to have the opportunity to provide their analysis and insight as well as examples of good practice in delivering effective solutions.

It will naturally be limited in its scope by time and resource. Yet I know that providing greater clarity is the first stop on an important journey to build understanding of extremism in our country, with the aim of encouraging everyone – families, civil society, schools, government, statutory agencies, private companies and the public as a whole – to do more to challenge extremism.

My approach to this Study will be the same approach I have taken throughout my career: a robust defence of pluralism and human rights, gender equality, and our fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.

I believe although it is difficult, countering extremism also provides an opportunity. The opportunity to promote what a positive and inclusive vision for our society looks like in contrast to the hate and fear filled, discriminatory and homogenous society extremists seek to create. It is an opportunity we must take.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Khan'.

Sara Khan, Lead Commissioner for Countering Extremism

ABOUT THE COMMISSION FOR COUNTERING EXTREMISM

The independent Commission was established in March 2018 to help everyone do more to challenge all forms of extremism.

Our first year is being spent engaging widely, carrying out a Study into extremism in England and Wales, and establishing a robust and authoritative Commission. The Commission has been established to look at all forms of extremism, and we take this commitment seriously.

The evidence we are publishing alongside these Terms of Reference includes summaries of the wide engagement we have carried out, some of the academic evidence we have already identified, and initial public polling.¹

Scope of the Commission

Government policy is divided up into three distinct areas: countering terrorism,² countering extremism,³ and promoting integration.⁴ The Commission's remit has been set by the Government and outlined in our Charter as countering extremism. Many experts and practitioners however have told us that they are not clear on the benefits of this separation, more than two years after publication of the Counter Extremism Strategy.

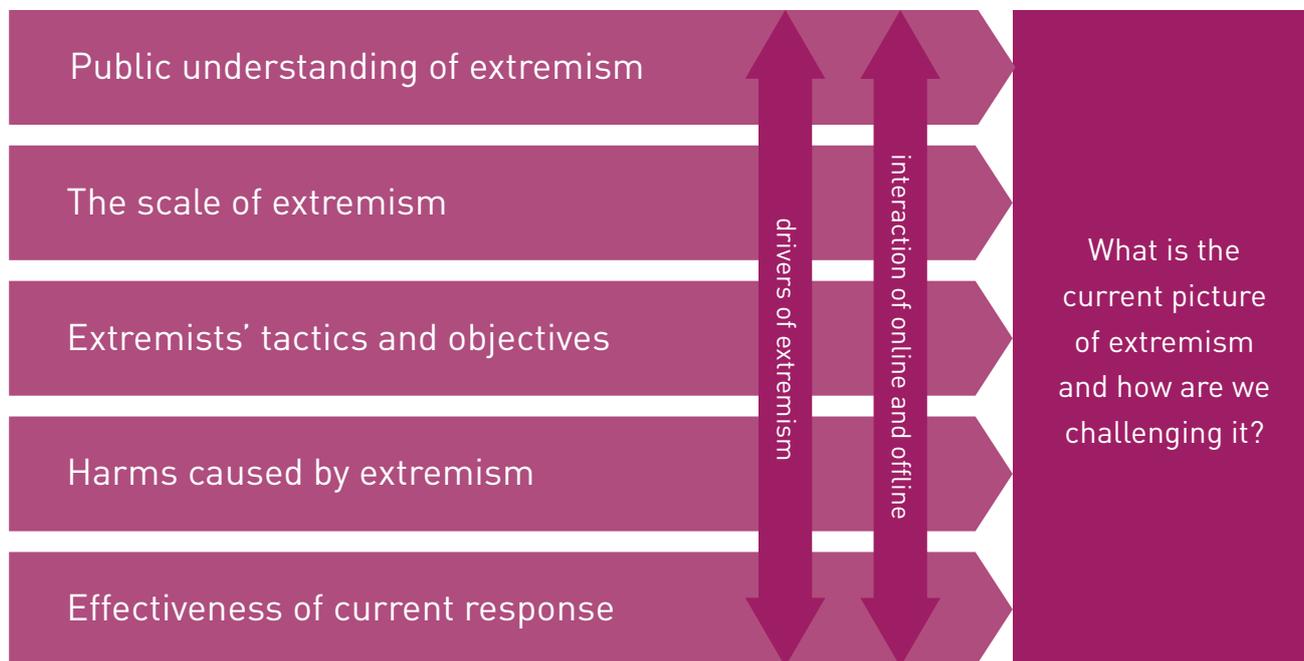
The Commission believes a holistic understanding of extremism is required, and we recognise that there are often grey areas of overlap between integration and extremism; and extremism and terrorism. We will look at these grey areas. We will also identify constructive lessons from the literature and evidence on current programmes to counter terrorism, such as Prevent,⁵ and to promote integration. As outlined in our Charter, we will not be reviewing the Government's Prevent Strategy or the proposed Integration Strategy.

The Commission's geographic remit covers extremism in England and Wales, in line with the Counter Extremism Strategy. Our extensive engagement to date has highlighted that while our focus on extremism is limited to England and Wales, we recognise international extremist influences, both online and offline, that can also directly and indirectly impact extremism in our country too. We will consider international evidence and best practice where relevant.

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1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,495 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th - 21st June 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). Key findings at Annex B.
 2. **CONTEST** Strategy (2018) and **Prevent** Strategy (2011)
 3. **Counter Extremism** Strategy (2015)
 4. **Integrated Communities** Strategy Consultation (2018)
 5. Examples include: Innes, M., Roberts, C. and Lowe, T. (2017). A disruptive influence? "Prevent-ing" problems and countering violent extremism Policy in Practice. *Law & Society Review*, 51(2): 252-281; Alam, Y. and Husband, C. (2013). Islamophobia, community cohesion and counter-terrorism policies in Britain. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 47(3): 235-252; Spalek, B and Weeks D. (2017). The role of communities in counterterrorism: Analyzing policy and exploring psychotherapeutic approaches within community settings. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(12): 991-1003.

WHAT WILL BE IN THE STUDY?

The Study will be published in Spring 2019. It will help everyone do more to challenge extremism by building public understanding of its harms and impact. It will also inform our recommendations to the Home Secretary about the future role and work programme of the Commission.



Our work so far has led us to identify five themes for the Study. In identifying the five themes, and the questions and methodologies set out in these Terms of Reference, we have drawn on a range of evidence and perspectives through our engagement and the scoping phase of the Study. This includes:

- the Commission's engagement with over 300 experts and activists and visits to 12 local areas
- workshops and roundtable discussions with practitioners, thinktanks, academics, human rights, secular and religious groups and officials from the UK and Welsh governments⁶
- a short YouGov poll of 1,495 people across the country⁷
- an initial review of existing literature, including academic literature, thinktank reports and government data, which is ongoing⁸

We have also consulted the Commission's Expert Group on the Terms of Reference. We have not explicitly drawn on any classified information at this stage.

We have set ourselves questions from across the full range of issues to do with extremism, so that we can provide reliable and usable answers by Spring 2019.

Many of the questions we face are complex, without easy or simple answers. We will put in place the research and engagement needed for this longer-term approach.

The Study itself will be structured around the five themes and further consider two cross-cutting issues, and draw on the evidence we collect as described in the methodology as well as existing evidence identified by the Commission. It will be published on the Commission's website.

6. Annex A, Engagement Summary

7. Annex C, Polling Data

8. Annex D, Literature Review

Definitions of Extremism

Government's Counter Extremism Strategy, 2015:

'Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our shared values. These include democracy and the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs. We also consider calling for the death of our armed forces either in the UK or overseas to be extremism.'

The Manchester Commission, set up after the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, defined '*hateful extremism*' as:

'Both ideas and behaviours that are hateful towards specific 'others' and designed to undermine social cohesion.'⁹

The Police, meanwhile, have defined 'domestic extremism' as relating to:

'the activity of groups or individuals who commit or plan serious criminal activity motivated by a political or ideological viewpoint.'¹⁰

JM Berger's definition in his book 'Extremism' begins:

'Extremism refers to the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group.'¹¹

Justice Haddon-Cave's judgement in the case of Shakeel Begg and the BBC set out ten 'extremist Islamic positions' distinct from 'mainstream' positions in contemporary Britain.¹²

Former Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner and head of CT policing Sir Mark Rowley recently described "four components" of a common strategy used by Islamist and far right extremists:

1. 'Extremists reach into communities through sophisticated propaganda
2. Extremists create intolerance and isolation by exploiting grievances
3. Extremists reinforce this sense of isolation by generating distrust of state institutions
4. Extremists offer warped parallel alternatives that undermine our values of tolerance and diversity'¹³

Alex Schmid's 2013 definition says that extremist groups tend to have a programme that includes many of the following elements:

- 'Anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian
- Fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising, single-minded black-or-white thinkers
- Rejecting the rule of law while adhering to an ends-justify-means philosophy
- Aiming to realise their goals by any means, including, when the opportunity offers itself, the use of massive political violence against opponents'¹⁴

9. 'A Shared Future' Report p 21

10. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/national_domestic_extremism_and#incoming-504973 ; NOMS MAPPA Guidance 2012 has another working definition on p 119

11. Berger, J.M. (2018) 'Extremism'

12. Approved judgement 28/10/2016 p 27-29

13. Rowley, M. (Feb 2018) Extremism and Terrorism: The need for a whole society response

14. Schmid, A. (2013) Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review

WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?

What is the Public's Understanding of Extremism?

1. What do people understand by 'extremism' and 'extremist'?

- a. To what extent is there a shared public understanding of what extremism is?
- b. What agreement is there on the boundaries of extremism?

Throughout our engagement, we have found people are able to describe what extremist activities, attitudes and behaviours look like; and talk about the harms they believe these are causing.¹⁵ Yet there is no definition of extremism in law in the UK. There are a wide number of different definitions used across government and academia, indicating differences of views (see box).

For our Study, we want those providing evidence to consider the definitions we have provided but to use their own perceptions on what they consider to be extremism.

Our Study will look at the wide range of different perceptions of extremist behaviours and ideas, and identify commonalities and consistent themes, as well as areas of contention. We will propose a consensus over the boundaries of extremist attitudes and behaviours.

Scale of extremism?

2. What do the following indicators tell us about the scale of extremism?

- a. Extremism-related criminal offending e.g. hate crime
- b. Extremist events
- c. Segregation in local areas
- d. Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities
- e. Size and influence of extremist groups
- f. Extremist propaganda on social media and traditional media
- g. Link between extremism and terrorism
- h. Attitudes indicating sympathy with extremist ideas or behaviour

Victims, academics, local councils, civil society groups and government have all described extremism-driven incidents and events occurring in the real world. Many of them believed that extremism is getting worse. In our YouGov survey 73% of people we asked said they were worried about 'rising levels of extremism in the UK'.¹⁶

15. Annex A, Engagement Summary

16. Annex B, Polling Data

The academic literature we reviewed does not provide detailed evidence on the scale of extremism.¹⁷ Experts have proposed a range of indicators of the extent of extremism, such as the levels of hate crime, either in local areas or nationally. But there is a lack of understanding about the relationship between these proxy indicators and extremism. In addition, our understanding of the relationship between online and offline extremist behaviour is nascent.¹⁸

We will look at these suggested indicators to analyse whether they increase our understanding of the scale of extremism in local areas across England and Wales.

Extremists' tactics and objectives

3. What are the objectives of different extremist ideologies?

4. What evolving tactics do extremists and their leaders use to achieve their objectives, including:

- a. to mainstream their views?
- b. to recruit people to their cause?
- c. to respond to those opposing them?

While many people use terms like 'Islamist' or 'Far Right', experts agree that more can be done to demonstrate the ideas and ideologies that sit behind these terms, and indeed those that relate to other forms of extremism.¹⁹ The tactics of groups widely regarded as extremist such as Hizb ut-Tahrir,²⁰ and Britain First²¹, or proscribed organisations that promote extremist world views like National Action²² and Al-Muhajiroun²³, evolve over time and so it is important to understand their core objectives to effectively counter their actions.

Tactics we have heard about have included creating an intimidatory environment that dissuades activists from countering extremists publicly; or using anti-racist or pro-free speech arguments to shut down debate. We believe that by clearly setting out how these tactics link to objectives and the ideologies underpinning them, we will provide people with the confidence to respond and debate more effectively.

17. Studies do not include significant empirical evidence on scale. Online-based studies approach the issue more closely Goodwin, M.J. and Harris, G. (2013). Rallying intolerance in the valleys: Explaining support for the extreme right in Wales. *British Politics*, 8(4): 433-456.

18. Müller, K., Schwarz, C. (2017) *Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime*

19. Schmid, A. (2013) *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*; Knight, S., Woodward, K. and Lancaster, G.L. (2017). Violent versus nonviolent actors: An empirical study of different types of extremism. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 4(4), p.230-248.

20. Hizb-ut-Tahir has been identified as extremist by the **Conservative** Party and the **Labour** Party, and is among six groups identified as 'racist or fascist' in the National Union of Students' 'No Platform' Policy'. The **Telegraph**, the **Mirror** and the **Independent**, among others, have called Hizb-ut-Tahir extremist.

21. Britain First was banned by **Facebook** in March 2018 for repeatedly violating rules against inciting hatred, and the former Home Secretary last year said: "Britain First is an extremist organisation that seeks to divide communities through its use of hateful narratives that spread lies and stoke tensions". The **Independent**, **Metro**, and **Channel4**, among others, have called Britain First extremist.

22. A proscribed terrorist organisation.

23. A proscribed terrorist organisation.

Harms Caused by Extremism

5. What are the harms caused by extremist incidents (such as those mentioned in question 2)?
6. What are the harms of extremism to women, young people, minorities and people countering extremism?
7. What are the wider harms and impact on our democracy and its institutions?

We want to provide a clear picture of the harm extremism is causing across the country, the different forms it takes and the extent extremist ideas or behaviours are contributing to the problems we see.

The current academic evidence is limited. It cites the breakdown of community cohesion including reduced trust in institutions such as police and councils, social exclusion and isolation as harms.²⁴ Justification of violence is also one of our greatest concerns. People are inspired by extremist propaganda to commit violence in many forms, such as the murder of Ahmadi Muslim Asad Shah, the murder of Jo Cox MP by Thomas Mair and Darren Osborne's attack on Muslims at Finsbury Park.²⁵ The Government sets out a range of harms in the Counter Extremism Strategy.

There are other victims of extremism. We heard about mixed-faith couples whose wedding days were disrupted by religious hardliners; gay people forced to choose between living their lives as they want and their faith, and suffering abuse as a result; and the abuse faced by people countering extremism affecting their emotional and psychological well-being.²⁶ Experts tell us those who are already marginalised or vulnerable, for example Black, Asian and minority ethnic women, are more likely to become victims of extremism.²⁷

Local councils told us how extremists' demonstrations impact city centres, and lead to economic harm.²⁸ Extremism resulting in reduced integration and civic engagement may impact wider social capital and economic prosperity.²⁹

We must also understand what harm extremists can cause to our democracy, freedoms and state institutions, as they create and exploit rising distrust.³⁰ Human rights groups worry about the effect that extremists have on freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief and wider equality principles.

24. Aly, A., Taylor, E. and Karnovsky, S. (2014). Moral disengagement and building resilience to violent extremism: An education intervention. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37(4): 369-385.; Aldrich, D.P. (2014). First steps towards hearts and minds? USAID's countering violent extremism policies in Africa. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(3): 523-546.

25. Tanveer Ahmed sentencing [remarks](#); Thomas Mair sentencing [remarks](#); Darren Osborne sentencing [remarks](#)

26. Annex A Engagement Summary

27. [The Casey Review](#)

28. Annex A Engagement Summary

29. [The Casey Review](#)

30. Polls include [Eurobarometer](#) (filter results for United Kingdom) and Edelman Trust Barometer, showing [historic lows in 2017, which remain in 2018](#).

Our Current Response

8. **What is the government and civil society's current response to extremism, how effective is it and what are the gaps?**
9. **How can we better support those countering extremism?**
10. **What could a positive, inclusive vision for our country look like?**

Alongside a better understanding of the problems we face, we must also judge whether the significant effort currently going into responding to extremism is sufficient and effective. This response is currently driven at a national level by the Government's Counter Extremism Strategy.

The academic literature and expert opinion both recognise the importance of partnership between civil society and government.³¹ Yet some community groups feel they get little recognition and have access only to short-term funding to support them. Many of these individuals and groups told us about the unrecognised personal cost of this work, particularly those working in minority communities.³²

We were pleased to see local councils share innovative responses and best practice through the LGA's Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism.³³ The Home Office-funded Community Coordinators were frequently praised by civil society and local government.

Still, the public feel that more needs to be done – nearly half (49%) of those we have initially polled believe 'much more' needs to be done to tackle extremism, with 78% overall believing more needed to be done. We have also seen examples where local and national government are not intervening where they could.³⁴

People have also shared concerns about the way extremism is talked about in the media as well as possible side-effects of national policies. Some were worried by the possible impact the previously proposed Counter-Extremism Bill would have had on freedom of expression, a view stated publicly by Sara Khan at the time.³⁵ We also want to learn the lessons from previous and existing counter terrorism policies, including those under Prevent.³⁶

31. Scrivens, R. and Perry, B. (2017). Resisting the right: Countering right-wing extremism in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 59(4): 534-558.

32. Annex A Engagement Summary

33. [Luton and Leeds councils are co-chairing a local authority network across England and Wales to provide support, and to develop and share good practice, on countering extremism](#)

34. [Commission blog on Sheikh Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman; Report into allegations concerning Birmingham Schools arising from the 'Trojan Horse' letter](#) p13, 52, 95

35. [Evidence to the JCHR on the proposed Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill](#)
[Sara Khan Inspire interview](#)

36. Ragazzi, F. (2016). Suspect community or suspect category? The impact of counter-terrorism as 'policed multiculturalism'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(5): 724-741.

Saeed, T. and Johnson, D. (2016). Intelligence, global terrorism and higher education: Neutralising threats or alienating allies? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(1): 37-51.

Abbas, T. and Awan, I. (2015). Limits of UK counterterrorism policy and its implications for Islamophobia and far right extremism. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 4(3):16-29.

Challenging extremism has long been recognised as requiring a positive and inclusive alternative vision. A vision that gives all of us who don't like the extremism we see something to rally around. We want evidence of what these positive and inclusive alternatives could be.

Cross Cutting Issues

As we seek to answer the questions above, we will consider two issues that cut across all the themes we have identified. These are:

- **Drivers of extremism.** We will consider evidence on the issue of drivers. There is however widespread academic disagreement over the drivers and causes of extremism. It is also the case that the majority of people who share what are assumed to be drivers do not go on to engage in extremist activities or behaviour.
- **Interaction between online and offline spaces.** There is no doubt that the internet and its associated technologies have changed our world, mostly for the better. But there are concerns being raised about the unintended or negative consequences of these technologies and how they may be affecting extremism, or being used to spread extremist ideas and behaviours.³⁷

37. Neumann P.R. (2013) Options and strategies for countering online radicalisation in the United States. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36(6): 431-459.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology is set out as a guide to how we will gather information from different sources, and allow those who want to contribute to the Study to understand how best to do so. We have selected these methods based on expert consultation, the timescale of six months and the Commission's annual spending limit of £1.75 million.

Public

Polling/Attitudinal Survey - We will commission a nationally representative survey to gauge the public's views on extremist ideas and behaviour.

Call for Evidence - We will launch a public call for evidence in Autumn 2018. We will encourage evidence from individuals via an online form on the harms of extremism and its scale. This will be able to be given confidentially.

Speaking to Victims - We want to hear from victims on the harms they have suffered due to extremism. We will reach out to victims and seek their testimony via meetings, small group events and the call for evidence. We will be sensitive to victims' needs in discussing their experiences and protect their identity.

Community Engagement - We will run events for the public in different areas of the country to allow us to gauge public views on the harms of extremism and how we can have a better public conversation about it.

Local Government, Civil Society and Academics

Continued Engagement - The Commission and Lead Commissioner will continue to engage widely in the next six months, building on the successful engagement so far. This will include structured discussions with experts in specific fields, including women's rights, human rights and young people.

Existing Literature Review - We will continue to review existing literature on extremism, including academic literature, articles, thinktank reports and government data. We will also invite expert evidence through the public call.

Research Papers - We will commission research papers on a number of themes, including the Far Right and Islamism as well as bespoke analysis to support other questions as required.

Speaking to Counter-extremists - We will seek the expertise of counter-extremists on the harms of extremism and our response to it via meetings, small group events and a survey. We want to understand how counter-extremists can better be supported, and what a positive, inclusive vision could look like.

Government

Information Sharing under the Commission's Charter - Under the Commission's Charter, the Government committed to sharing reasonable, relevant information where security allows. We will write to central government as well as regulatory bodies. The commission will abide by security guidelines and will not publish any information without the agreement of the data owner.

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