



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF  
**ARTS AND HUMAN SCIENCE (AJAHS)**

ISSN: 2832-451X (ONLINE)

**VOLUME 3 ISSUE 4 (2024)**



PUBLISHED BY  
**E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA**

## Somalia's Political Elite Settlement: The Role of the Parliament

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### Article Information

**Received:** October 28, 2024

**Accepted:** November 25, 2024

**Published:** December 21, 2024

### Keywords

*Parliament, Political Elite,  
Settlement, Somalia*

### ABSTRACT

The transitional Federal Government ended in 2012, and Somalia people expected that the political elite could reach a political agreement on the provisional federal constitutional review process, resource sharing, fiscal policy, universal suffrage, and the capital city's status. Unfortunately, all efforts have ended unsuccessfully and hopelessly. However, significant impediments remain as a result of the lack of political settlement between the federal government (FGS) and the federal member states (FMS), resulting in a lack of means for resolving political impasses because the National Consultative Council's decision does not include a vote if the political deadlock emerges, as well as the absent role of parliament due to government interference and intertwining members of parliament and the council of ministers. Since 1991, Somalia has witnessed a lack of political agreement that plunged the country into the worst civil war, and terrorism, that claimed thousands of Somalis' lives and induced displacement and refugees. Twenty (20) reconciliations for the Somalia faction aimed to solve the deadly conflict and revive the state, have not been produced in good upshot due to the absence of a third-party guarantee of the agreement and a lack of political will. This research paper is going to shed light on the long-standing lack of political settlement among leaders of the federal government and federal member states (FMS) that has been undermining state-building, the fight against al-Shabaab, the federal constitutional review process, holding for a free and fair election, and economic growth since 2013. The paper investigates how the role of parliament could contribute to political settlement among the federal government and federal member states (FMS) and the main challenges that the National Consultative Council (NCC), which includes the leaders of the federal government of Somalia (FGS), and federal member states (FMS) have faced since 2013. The study used mixed methods by combining literature studies, including an academic papers and policy documents, and qualitative methods with face-to-face interviews with key informants, including high-ranking officials, politicians, civil society, academics, youth, and women.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the military regime in 1991, Somalia has experienced prolonged inter-clan conflicts, terrorism, humanitarian crises, and state failure (Menkhaus, 2003; Webersik, 2014).

In efforts to establish a political settlement and reconciliation in Somalia, the international community has held more than twenty (20) reconciliation conferences for warring factions, but these attempts ended in failure and dispiriting due to the lack of a third party that guaranteed peace and reconciliation (Elmi, 2010).

The political landscape of Somalia experienced many leadership changes (Menkhaus, 2018). Clan militia leaders and warlord conflict spanning from 1991 until 2005. In 2006, a significant transformation took place with the emergence of a new political leadership comprised of politicians from both the Transitional Federal Government and Islamic movements.

Presently, the National Consultative Council (NCC) comprises the Somali federal government as president and prime minister, alongside with the presidents of five (5) federal member states (FMS), including Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Galmudug, Puntland, and the Southwest, as well as the mayor of Banadir region, where a small group dominates politics.

A political settlement emerged in 1990 that Mushtaq

Khan had developed and scholars widely used it in African academic research and donor programs (Behuria *et al.*, 2017).

Mushtaq H. Khan (2010) defined political settlement as "a social order based on political compromise between powerful groups in society that sets the context for institutional and other policies". And the Department for International Development (DFID) (2009) defined political settlement as "the forging of a common understanding, usually between political elites, that their best interests or beliefs through acquiescence to a framework for administering political power". This provides an opportunity for the powerful elites to gain the benefit and avert further conflict.

Furthermore, the parliament is crucial for obtaining legitimacy. An inclusive political settlement requires a social contract between the state and society that could bring legitimacy (John & Putzel, 2009). In addition, political settlement requires a combination of power distribution and institutions to sustain because the political elites seek acceptable power sharing; if not, they dismantle the system of process (Khan, 2010).

In past decades, the federal government of Somalia and federal state members, known as the National Consultative Council (NCC) have failed to reach a political settlement over the provisional federal constitutional review process,

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resource sharing, fiscal policy, power allocation, universal suffrage, and completion of federalism, and the status of the capital.

This study is important for the political settlement among Somalia leaders, and how to complete the federal constitution review, resource and power sharing, and holding for universal suffrage. And the role of the parliament in political elite settlement, which could lead to legitimacy and inclusivity because it represents the entire Somali society. It is generally believed that the lack of political settlement among the leaders' federal government and federal member states (FMS) deepens the completion of the constitution, fiscal policy, power sharing, and the holding of a free and fair election. Additionally, Somalia's political settlement has been fragile and relies on international community support (Hagmann, 2016).

The previous scholarship has tended to argue that the failure of Somalia's reconciliation is a lack of political will and foreign interference (Elmi, 2010). Clan politics and patrimonialism in Somalia still pose challenges to the reconciliation and state revival of Somalia in the past three decades.

As well as the struggle for power and resources among the clans, which obstructs achieving durable peace and reconciliation (Michaelson, 1993).

The study will contribute to scholarly debate in the field of Somalia reconciliation and political settlement, which has been at the center of Somalia research since the military government's collapse in 1991.

The objective of this paper is to address the role of parliament in the political elite settlement, including the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states (FMS), because the lack of political consensus perpetuates the achievement of a political settlement on issues of completion of federal constitutional review, consolation federalism, universal suffrage, power and resource sharing, and fiscal policy. How the parliament can play a significant role in the approval of the informal agreement that the National Consultative Council (NCC) obtained. In addition, the main challenges which the leaders of the federal government of Somalia and federal member states (FMS) face subsequent to the approval of federal constitution.

### **Purpose Statement**

Stabilization for the war-torn nation requires political elite settlement to attain durable peace agreement and a functional state. Political settlement is vital for state-building, and the balance of power between political leaders through political agreement (OECD, 2011).

Somalia's political settlement for National Consultative Council leaders could lead to achievements in the completion of the provisional federal constitution, the defeating terrorists, the attainment of a free and fair election, and power and resource distribution between states and the federal government.

Somalia has been experiencing political stalemate

between the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal state members (FSM) in the past decade, which hampers key priority issues for state-building, political development, and the achievement of the functional state. Additionally, the lack of political agreement slows and paralyzes the deepening of federalism, universal elections, and the unity of the country, and the country still depends on foreign aid and external security.

This research paper will investigate how the role of the parliament contributes to the legitimation and institutionalization of political elite settlements that the National Consultative Council (NCC) would reach. Because the parliament has responsibility for the approval and amendment of draft legislation that the executive has presented before it (The Federal Republic of Somalia, 2012). And it seeks to address the main challenges hindering the political concessions of the National Consultative Council leaders since 2013.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a qualitative research method of data collection. I conducted deep face-to-face interviews with twelve (12) key informants, including politicians, high-ranking officials of the government, academics, youth, and women. I selected interviewees with expertise in Somali politics and their practice of at least ten (10) years in the government field. Furthermore, the study used a wide range of existing academic literature and government policies on Somalia's reconciliation and political settlement since the collapse of the government in 1991.

### **Overview of Somalia's Political Settlement**

Since the collapse of the military regime in 1991, the country has plunged into protracted civil war, terrorism, state collapse, drought, and famine (Menkhaus, 2016).

The dozens of reconciliations aimed at restoring peace and reviving the state have collapsed (Sahnoun, 1994). And the main reasons for the failure of reconciliation are the lack of political will and the absence of a third party that guarantees the protection of warring groups (Elmi, 2010). The ownership of resources, territory, clan allegiance, and power struggle induce the conflict in Somalia (Eklow & Krampe, 2019).

As Professor Afyare Elmi stated, "From the beginning of the civil conflict in 1990, no group could win the civil war by destroying its rivals militarily, and so negotiations and a political settlement have been the only means of resolving the conflict".

The Somali political elite has changed over the past 30 years. Following the collapse of the government in 1991, clan militia leaders and warlords took over the country's politics. In 2005, the Islamic movement and Transitional Federal government leaders emerged.

The current federal government emerged as result of the Somalia National Peace Conference in Djibouti in 2000, and the subsequent reconciliation conference in Kenya, these conferences led to the formation of the Transitional

Federal administration. (TFG) in 2004.

At the conclusion of the Transitional Federal Government, Somalia implemented a federal provisional constitution in 2012 (Menkhaus, 2018). Present political leaders, including the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states leaders (FMS), emerged in 2013 whose duties include completing the provisional constitution, fighting against terrorist groups, holding popular elections, and consolidating federalism. However, leaders failed to attain a consensus on these national priorities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I interviewed twelve (12) key informants, including politicians, high-ranking government officials, academics, youth, and women, by using structured interviews and qualitative research methods. The main objective of this study is to find out what makes it hard for Somalia's federal government and its member states to come to an agreement on political issues like finalizing the process of reviewing the federal constitution, ensuring everyone has the right to vote, sharing resources and power, a fiscal federalism. And it also seeks to explore the role of the parliament in the political settlement of the leaders of the National Consultative Council.

### Gender of the Respondents

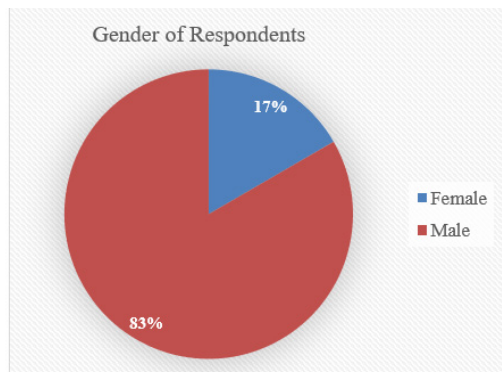


Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents

This figure shown here indicates that 83 percent of the respondents are male, while only 17 percent are female.

### The main challenges underline the political elite settlement

Since the formation of the Somalia federal government in 2012, the government's priority has been to establish broad consensus on key issues, including the finalizing of the Somalia federal constitution, and resource allocation, and holding universal suffrage. But all national issues remain without success.

Therefore, interviewees enumerated the four main barriers to attaining a political agreement on national priorities, like finalizing the review process of the provisional constitution, holding a one-person and one vote, and power and resource sharing, as follows:

This figure indicates that the main challenges that the

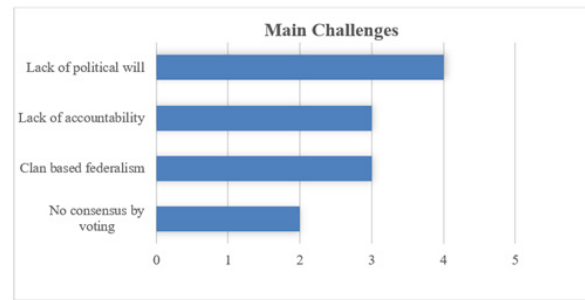


Figure 2: Challenges underline the political elite settlement

National Consultative Council (NCC) has been facing in reaching political settlement since 2013 are lack of political will, absence of accountability, clan-based federalism, and no consensus by voting.

### Lack of Political Will

The majority of respondents stated that the lack of political will of leaders in the National Consultative Council (NCC) poses challenges to political consensus. And added to that, the absence of political agreement no longer exists after the collapse of Somalia's government in 1991.

Since 2013, there has been a lack of collaboration, and persistently strained relations has characterized the relationship between the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states (FMS) (Reuters, 2013; Hassan Sheikh: There is no, 2023). And this indicates the lack of political commitment and personal interest through clan political identity. Furthermore, Somalia's political elite culture remains a major obstacle to the country's revival and is the main cause of its state of failure (Baadiyow, 2020).

The lack of interstate commission is main obstacle for political agreement, because Article 111F of the Constitution stipulates the approval interstate commission law and establishment intergovernmental commission which facilitate intergovernmental coordination and resolve administrative and political conflicts.

Respondents indicated that the model justice agreement, fisheries management, national revenue sharing, and management of natural resources (Petroleum and Mineral) that the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and the federal member states (FMS) reached remain on paper due to a lack of political will.

Although there has been little progress on the sharing of natural resources in areas like petroleum and fisheries because the parliament passed the petroleum law albeit some states reject the petroleum law (Somalia: Puntland rejects, 2020).

In December 2022, the federal government and states reached another agreement regarding power sharing, and in May 2023, there was a second agreement about electoral models including universal suffrage, a single election schedule, and abolition of the prime minister, and the adoption of presidential system. However, the Puntland state was not part (VOA of Africa, 2023).

In addition, the agreements require the parliamentary approval and concession of all states. The interviewees said that federal and state leaders use political patronage, patrimonialism, cronyism, and clientelism to maintain power at the expense of the nation.

Professor Ken Menkhaus said, “The patronage system operates in Somalia’s political system and it helps political leaders to gain their support from clan elders and their clan constituencies”.

Several participants stated that the leaders of federal and states prioritize power consolidation and prolonged tenure through the manipulation of clan identity politics and patrimonialism rather than focusing on the unity of the country, the interests of their constituents, and the efficient delivery of services to local populations.

The federal member states seek power to influence the national indirect election, national decision-making, and the nomination of high-ranking positions in the federal government. In contrast, federal leaders promote the consideration of power within the federal government by emphasizing national identity, while federal member states seek to strengthen the power of states through clan identity and devolution of service delivery.

#### **Lack of Rule of Law and Accountability**

The participants in the study agreed that the absence of the rule of law and accountability are major setbacks and obstacles to reaching consensus. They added that Somalia’s political elites do not respect the laws and constantly breach agreements due to the absence of rule of law and other public accountability like elections. Indeed, the election is a vital tool of accountability for the citizens to vote the bad leaders out of office.

Professor Francis Fukuyama defined the rule of law as a “set of rules of behavior reflecting a broad consensus within society that are binding on even the most politically powerful actors in a given society, whether kings, presidents, or prime ministers”.

The majority of respondents asserted that Somalia’s institutional accountability, including parliament and judiciary, is very weak because the country is extremely fragile and unstable due to prolonged civil war, a lack of state capacity, nepotism, clientelism, and a political patronage system.

Furthermore, Somalia’s parliament’s oversight is waning, resulting in intertwining between parliament and executive, government intervention, personal interests, and clan political identity. In addition, the lack of checks and scrutiny on the executive, and the erosion of the rule of law undermine the legitimacy of democratic systems in many developing countries (Fukuyama, 2011). Somalia’s political system is informal and depends on clan-power sharing as well as the political elite’s bargaining to hold the country together (Menkhaus, 2018).

Professor Francis Fukuyama stated, “Clientelism hampers good democratic practice, and it contributes to the political elite’s disbandment of democratic accountability”. Clientelism is widespread in underdeveloped nations and

has a significant impact on political accountability and public service delivery (Larreguy *et al.*, 2015). Fukuyama stated that clientelism means ‘the rich, powerful politicians purchase the support of the people’.

Political elites’ disregard for the rule of law and accountability has resulted in chronic political instability, and as well as the citizens are unable to hold the government accountable for its policies and actions (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2021). Indeed, a mobilized society can monitor the state and contribute to politics (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The political elite’s lack of public accountability stems from Somalia’s clannish, political, and regional polarization.

#### **Clan-Based Federalism**

Somalia adopted federalism as a political system according to the provisional federal constitution approved in 2012. Some interviewees revealed that Somalia’s federalism is based on clan identity, and the elites embraced the federalism as a lucrative project to enrich themselves from seaports, airports, and foreign aid and benefit from their absolute power.

Professor Ken Menkhaus said: “The power clan divided the country into federal states, each of which benefits seaport customs and other opportunities”.

Some of the participants in the research argued that patrimonialism and the domination of small groups create grievances in each state in the country, and they consider the federal government a threat to their state interest. And regional leaders seek the ultimate power, such as to maintain foreign ties with neighboring countries and Gulf States. As well as the articles of the 53 and 54 federal constitutions are the key contentious issues that pose a challenge to reaching a political settlement. Furthermore, Somalia’s political elite do not understand the notion of federalism (Elmi, 2014).

#### **It is Hard to Reach Consensus by Voting**

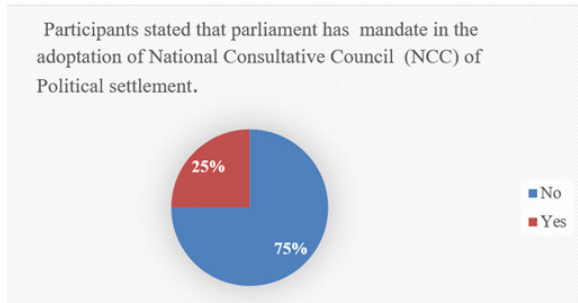
The deputy secretary general of parliament said the lack of effective mechanism, such as voting, to resolve impasses has kept the National Consultative Council (NCC) leaders in disagreement since 2013. The long-running disagreement between the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal state members (FSM) delayed the national priorities of the nation, such as fighting against terrorists and achieving a functional government with the capability of providing basic goods, constraining violence, and maintaining law and order.

Somalia has five federal states: Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Galmudug, Puntland, and Southwest, and each state has veto authority. The disagreement and opposition of a single state could induce a stalemate, which has already happened when Jubaland and Puntland refused the process of indirect election in 2021.

#### **The Role of Parliament for Reaching Political Settlement**

Participants in the study highlighted two aspects of

the parliament's role in the political elite settlement: parliamentary constitutional mandate, and parliamentary institutional capacity and behavior.



**Figure 3.** Parliamentary Constitutional Mandate

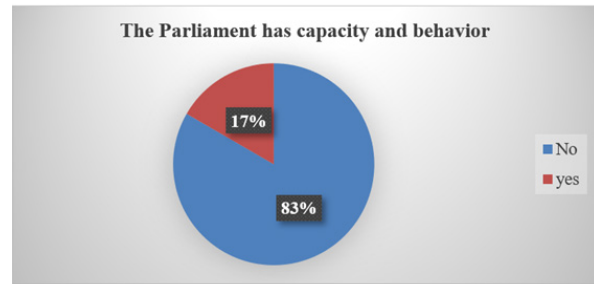
### Parliamentary Constitutional Mandate

This figure indicates that the 75% of respondents stated that the parliament has no mandate to approve the all agreements of the National Consultative Council (NCC) due to the process of its election, while 25% asserted that the parliament has constitutional mandate and more inclusive than the National Consultative Council (NCC). Interviewees said parliament has a constitutional mandate, legitimacy, and is more inclusive than the National Consultative Council (NCC). The parliament is a vital pillar of Somalia's political institutions because its responsibilities include the election and impeachment of the president, giving a vote of confidence to the prime minister and his ministers, and conducting a vote of no confidence in the prime minister.

In addition, the parliament has oversight function to scrutinize how the government and its institutions use their power and available resources to meet citizens' aspirations.

It is stipulated in Article 61 of the provisional constitution that the national interest guides the duties and functions of the parliament, and the legislature represents its constituents regardless of their political and party connections. Additionally, parliament is responsible for passing, amending, and reviewing the draft legislation that the government introduce before parliament, according to articles 63 and 69 of Somalia's provisional constitution. Article 80 of the federal constitution provides a mandate to parliament to initiate draft legislation, except for the budgetary draft legislation. As a result, parliament has the power to introduce bills relevant to national priorities, including federalism, fiscal federalism, and electoral legislation.

Some interviewees said the parliament is more inclusive than the National Consultative Council, which consists of a few people from the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal members states (FMS). The National Consultative Council lacks the tools to resolve the impasse, whereas parliament has a mechanism of vote. The parliament can play a critical role in state-building and democratization by maintaining accountability and oversight and representing the citizens and their aspirations.



**Figure 4.** Institutional Capacity and Behavior

### The Parliamentary Institutional Capacity and Behavior

The data shown in this figure indicates that 83% of the respondents believed that the parliament lacks the capacity and behavior to endorse the political settlements that the National Consultative Council (NCC) made. In contrast, 17% of the respondents asserted that the parliament does possess the capacity to approve these agreements.

The majority of respondents agreed that lack of parliamentary capacity, personal interests, and the absence of political parties undermine the parliament's ability to settle political elite disputes.

The parliament has oversight tools, including committee inquiries, questions for the government for oral questions, interpellations, and questions for written responses (House of the People, 2022). However, the parliament's utilization of this tool is ineffective and failed to prioritize the interest of citizens.

The director of outreach and dialogue of the parliament said the parliament's poor legitimacy diminishes their influence in political leaders' agreement. Furthermore, vote-buying, intimidation, political patronage, and clientelism and power abuse marred parliamentary indirect elections in 2016 and 2021.

A majority of respondents indicated that bribery and government intervention in parliament, along with the intertwining of government and legislature, remain factors contributing to the dysfunction of the legislature. Some interviewees asserted that the parliament has become a rubber stamp that governments use to advance their interests at the expense of the national interest.

The participants revealed that the process of joining to the Somalia parliament requires the consent of federal member-states leaders and also the consent of the federal government. Furthermore, the legislators necessitate to appease them to secure their reelection even at the expense of national and constituency interests.

Some interviewees stated that group interest, political behavior, clan political identity, lack of engagement in the constituencies, and dual citizenship hamper the parliament role in political elite settlement. The completion of constitutional federal review is vital for the security, state-building, political and economic development, and a free and fair election.

## CONCLUSION

More than dozens of conference peace negotiations and political settlements to end the bloody civil war have failed since 1991 due to a lack of political agreement, and another group could preserve the agreement.

In 2012, after adapting Somalia's provisional constitution, the tasks and duties of new political leaders included the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states (FMS) had to finalize Somalia's provisional constitution process, allocation of power, resource sharing, fiscal federalism, and holding on-person and one-vote-election.

Nevertheless, the absence of political commitments over national goals is a contributing factor to the enduring of these obligations and tasks. The political agreement is vital for the revival of the Somalia's state, security, political stability, and economic and political progress.

The study found that a lack of political will, rule of law and accountability, clan-based federal system, and deadlock-solving procedures have been impairing the political elite settlement of National Consultative Council (NCC) leaders.

It is clear that clan politics, patrimonialism, personal and group interests, as well as individual and clan power consolidation pose a significant challenge to the agreement of political leaders. In addition, the Somali political actors adopted federalism as a lucrative project and enriched themselves.

The research paper found the parliament has constitutional power, and the legislature is a foundation for political institutions, which allows it to contribute to the political leader's settlement. The parliament is more inclusive than the National Consultative Council leaders, in which a small group dominates, and has no mechanism like voting to solve their political stalemate.

The personal gain, the lack of political parties, clan politics, favoritism, buying votes, and not lack election race weakened the role of parliament in the political elite settlement.

Absence of oversight, institutional capacity, constituency engagement, government interference, and executive-legislature intertwining paralyze the parliament's functions to contribute to state-building, political development and elite settlement.

## Recommendation

Based on the research, the study submits the following recommendations:

1. Since 1991, Somalia has endured a series of problems, including a brutal civil war, terrorism, recurring droughts and famines, widespread displacement, and prolonged state failure. In this context, it is imperative for the present political actors of the National Consultative Council to prioritize adherence to legal frameworks, constitutional principles, and political settlement while refraining from engaging in self-serving pursuits and frivolous conflicts;

2. The National Consultative Council has to establish the interstate commission to coordinate intergovernmental

efforts, resolve political and administrative conflicts, and prioritize national agendas;

3. Political agreement and state-building depend on political will, so National Consultative Council leaders must use simple majority voting and present informal agreements to parliament for approval;

4. The federal government should cease interfering with, bribing, and patronizing the legislators, and it should engage in campaigning and other legal engagement with the legislature in a positive manner;

5. Parliament has a constitutional mandate, is more inclusive than the National Consultative Council, and represents the entire population, regardless of its legitimacy; therefore, it must play its role as a veto holder in political settlement approval through its functions;

6. Somalia's federal provisional constitution has been never-ending and has become a lucrative project for successive governments since 2013. The federal and state governments must fund the review of Somalia's provisional constitution through the utilization of Somalia funds; and

7. Somalia faces challenges in state-building and political development due to mistrust, grievances, and lack of reconciliation. Leaders must foster reconciliation, implement transitional justice, restore confidence, and apply social justice principles.

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