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FOCUS GROUP REPORT



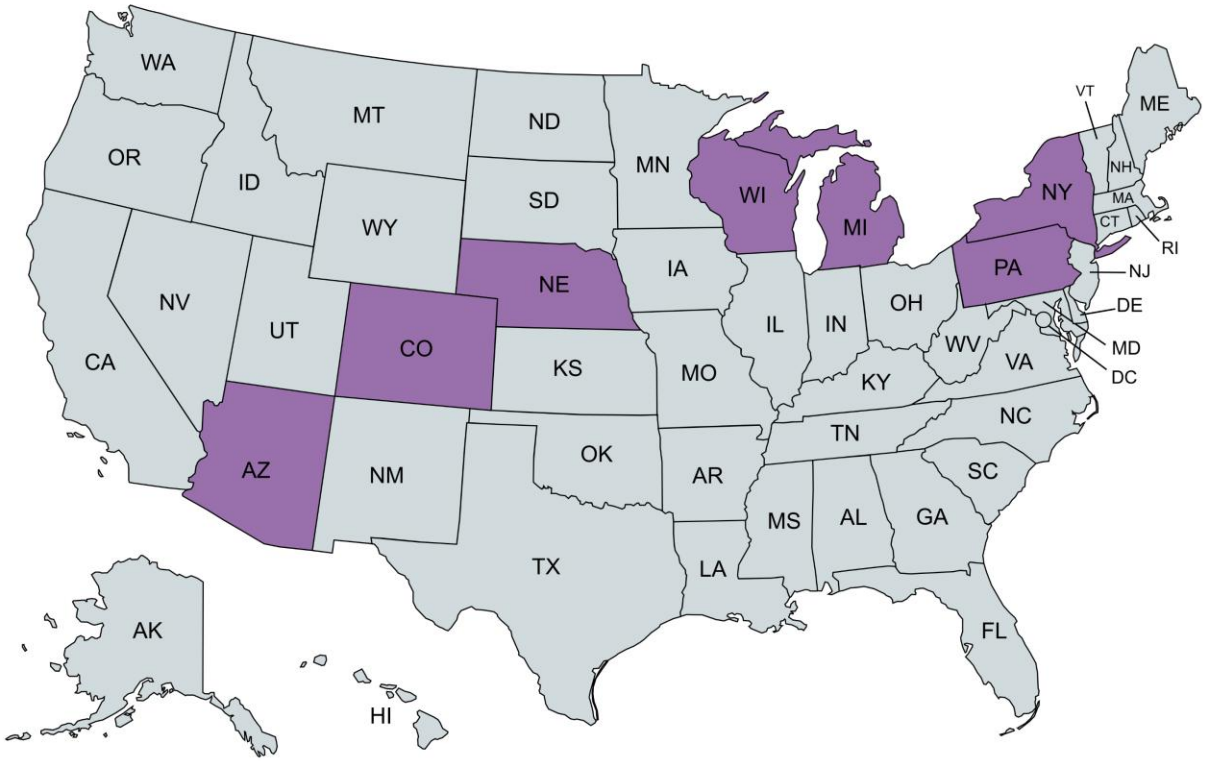
Monday, November 3, 2025

Americans and Political Dysfunction

GBAO

Methodology

On October 23, 2025, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with Democratic-leaning, Republican-leaning, and independent swing voters from battleground congressional districts* who believe the political system is dysfunctional and somewhat or somewhat not fixable.



- Group 1: Democratic-leaning voters from battleground congressional districts who think the system is dysfunctional
- Group 2: Republican-leaning voters from battleground congressional districts who think the system is dysfunctional
- Group 3: Independent swing voters from battleground congressional districts who think the system is dysfunctional

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*AZ-01, CO-08, MI-07, MI-10, NE-02, NY-17, PA-07, PA-08, PA-10, WI-01, WI-03

Key Takeaways

- By design, pessimism pervades, with many facing mounting economic and health care pressures.
- There are also profound worries about America's struggling culture and decency.
- In fact, it's hard for participants to agree on what "American values" even are or think of a recent time when things were going well.
- "No one is coming to save us," many – particularly Democrats – lament.
- Quite a few point to corporate special interests and social media as additional worsening, corrosive influences.
- People are hearing about the shutdown through the lens of subsidies and Medicaid cuts or just blame "both sides."

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By Design, People Largely Feel Pessimistic About The Country

Moderator: Fill in the blank again for me. [BLANK] is going [well/not well] in the country today

"I feel like the system is **set up to keep those that are poor, poor, and those that are rich, rich**, and that middle-class that my parents grew up with is just... It's pretty much gone, either you've got it or you don't, so there's really no middle ground. And I think it's been an evolution since before COVID, but we're in the disaster zone right now." – AZ man, weak Democrat

"**Political discourse isn't going well in the country right now,** and that's extremely troubling, because there's a lot of serious problems that need to be figured out, and they're only going to be figured out if we work together on it." – MI man, independent lean Republican

"**It seems very unfortunate that our government can't keep itself running. It's just unfathomable to me.** It just doesn't even make sense. And now to hear our state, or I'm sure across the country, might be losing food stamps and that's a very valid asset for a lot of families. That's worrisome." – WI woman, weak Republican

"I literally drew a blank [on anything going well]. I cannot think of much going well right now." – NE woman, independent

"I think when it comes to **funding being taken away from education,** them wanting to get rid of the Department of Ed, grants getting cut throughout colleges and institutions across the country, **it's really disheartening, seeing families getting ripped away from their homes and their loved ones** in broad daylight in front of cameras and just all over the country, military being brought into US cities to terrorize people. The list goes on." – NY man, independent lean Democrat



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Economic And Health Care Pressures Loom Large

"I just **don't know how much longer you can sustain a country** running how we are. I mean you can't just keep printing money…it's scary." – PA woman, weak Republican

"**People are struggling just to survive, to pay their bills, to buy groceries,** it's ridiculous. The cost of living is ridiculous. There are people who work regular 9:00 to 5:00 jobs and they're living in their cars, they can't buy food, and they still don't qualify for assistance." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"We're **just trying to survive**. We can't make drastic life decisions when it comes to even purchasing beyond what we need to survive. I would like a new place to live. I would like new vehicles, but I work, I work, I work, but my rent just went up, my mortgage just went up." – MI man, weak Republican

"Just since I purchased my house in May of '24, my property taxes have already increased. They've raised my water by 40%, the city that I live in. And now, Consumers is raising the gas and electric rates, as of November 1st, which I think they already charge an outrageous amount. But w**e're paying and paying more and more, and we're not getting any more service."** – MI woman, independent lean Republican



"**It's scary seeing the price of houses right now**, the affordability of homes, the cost of living going up so much and wages not following that." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"I literally got notified today that, '**hey, your SNAP benefits are going to be paused November 1st.**' That's money that I rely on for nutrition, and I need that in order to eat the food that is going to keep me healthy." – MI man, independent lean Democrat

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Basic Friendliness, Values, Civil Rights, Faith Are All Viewed As Worryingly In Decline

"That whole mentality with having **God and faith in your life**, we need to pass that on to our younger generation, our children so they can pass it on to theirs. **There's too many things that are going haywire and getting in the way of young people even being able to think about that** because they're so busy trying to get ahead and make money." – WI woman, weak Republican

"We're **taking steps back, we're losing rights**.…I have multiple transgender friends that don't feel safe, and they feel like everyone hates them just for the current political climate we're going in.…And the current climate we're heading, it doesn't look like it's changing, they're following their Project 2025. So the farther we go down this, the more rights we're going to lose." – MI man, weak Democrat

"**The political dialogue is not going very well**, and it's made me realize that it really hasn't, in years. It's, quite frankly, not that new. And it's time to do something, I just don't know what it is." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

"I just think people need to know that two things can be true and **you can not agree with somebody and still be friends and still get along** and still work to a common end goal. And I just think that's not what's being fed to us." – PA woman, weak Republican

"We are more of a Christian nation, that comes to mind, like having faith. **A lot of people in power say that they are [Christian], but they're not acting in a way that would be that.**" – WI woman, weak Republican

"When you've got a president who can say and do anything that he wants and believes he's above the law, and then everybody else is also thinking that, and then people go on social media and say horrendous things towards one another– **our government is fostering this clusterfuckery.**" – AZ man, weak Democrat





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To Find A Time When Things Went Well, Many Look Back Years, Or Even Decades

Moderator: Anyone able to think of a time when you felt good about where the country was headed?



"I would say **the late '90s, even early 2000s, I wouldn't say there was as much of a divide.** And even obviously with 9/11, obviously, that was a horrific event, but it did seem like the country all came together." – NE woman, independent

"Unfortunately, it takes tragedy to bring us together sometimes. People might think **our best time was during or post-World War II, but the Great Depression was right before that**. Unfortunately, it took a time of tragedy to make us realize what is so good about the country." – MI man, weak Republican

"I felt really, really proud **when Obama was president**, that, oh my gosh, acceptance finally of a Black man as our leader, and it just seemed like we were on this trajectory where, oh my gosh, we're becoming progressive, women's rights, gay marriage. It just felt like it was just going on that way, all the way up. And then, all of a sudden, it's like, no, back down again." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"**I felt good about [the country] when I was a kid in high school, studying civics**, and we learned in civics that a congressman couldn't even take a lunch with someone. They couldn't take anything from anyone, and that's how it was. And we felt like that was pretty awesome, that we had nice honest people working in Washington." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

"Going back 20-some years ago, **maybe back to 9/11, I think as a country we got more united.** But just, I'd say, over the last 10 or 15 years, politically, it just seems very, very divisive." – PA man, weak Republican

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"American Values" Seem Not Clearly Defined, With Answers Ranging From Christianity To Hot Dogs





Moderator: What would you say our national values are?

"I feel like if you chop off the far, far left and far, far right, we still all believe in **life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness** for everyone around us." – PA man, weak Democrat

"The American people have always been the most **charitable people**, with the aid that we provide, whether it be through a natural disaster, a political thing, as some type of a group that is disenfranchised in some way." – AZ man, independent lean Republican

"And we've got to kind of turn the culture around and **celebrate American culture–apple pie, hot dogs,** stuff like that." – PA woman, weak Republican

"With the country being so divisive right now, **it's hard to say in general together what our values are**….I think in many cases, we want the same thing, but there's intense disagreement about how to go about getting there." – AZ woman, weak Democrat

"I would just say **freedom of speech** is the biggest one. As much as people say you can't say anything, some of these things that happened in this country you couldn't get away with in other countries." – PA man, weak Republican

"**It should be diversity,** because give us your poor, give us your huddled masses, so forth. I mean, I think that's a pretty clear directive over what the founding fathers wanted, and I feel that diversity should be honored, and I feel that there's people that are not honoring that right now." – MI man, independent lean Democrat

"**When I was a kid, the American flag was an important symbol. Now, when I see it, it's become, for me, a negative signal**. If I see somebody with a flag in front of their house, it doesn't sit well with me, and that's ridiculous." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"**Fair wages.** We put in hard work, get compensated justly." – MI man, weak Republican

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Democracy Is Seen As Very Much Under Threat, Though Examples Range Broadly

Moderator: How much do you feel democracy in the US is under threat, or at risk?

"I think **we've seen a lot of ways that the law system hasn't been as strong as we might've thought it was** through Trump's presidency and the way he's used executive orders and other things. And I think we found a lot more holes in the system than I thought there were personally. I thought there were more checks and balances than have shown themselves." – PA man, weak Democrat

"Well, first of all, again, **we're in a government shutdown. So how does that look to all the other countries** in Europe, Russia, China? United States is weak. They can't even run their country. They can't even keep it running. All they're doing is arguing between both sides. So how does that make us look as a superpower?" – WI woman, weak Republican

"**January 6th was something that was terrifying to see.** Absolutely terrifying, and I don't know that we've ever experienced that before, but those things are happening now, and I do believe that that is a threat to democracy. I do believe that that's scary." – CO woman, independent lean Democrat



"I think unambiguously, **democracy is under threat.** It's going to take a while to see the impact of the taxes and the other economic policies. It will definitely get worse, whether it will teeter and fall, can't say." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"I think that **anyone who would now try to speak out to defend the little people, they would be villainized** and they would be persecuted to the fullest extent of the law." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"I think the **gerrymandering that's been going on has been ridiculous,** and I think, overall, the Supreme Court pondering the fact that they're possibly revoking the Civil Rights Act, I think that should scare every American." – MI man, independent lean Democrat

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Democrats And Dem-leaning Independents Seem Despondent, And Blame Trump And Republican "Yes Men"

"When you see your elected leader villainizing or arresting or pressing charges against political opponents and cleaning house to **surround themselves with all yes-men** that would never dare to oppose their decisions, **it's scary to see** the damage that that can do to a government that's supposed to represent the people when both sides of the coin aren't being represented." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"**I don't feel hopeful**. I think to myself, oh my god, we're only not even less than a year in this shitshow, and I'm afraid of what's going to happen in the next three years. I seriously am truly afraid, and I don't know what to do. So, it's really just...Yeah, I don't know." – AZ man, weak Democrat





"**[America's best days are] completely behind us** and I don't know when we'll see them again. I know it won't be anytime soon." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"**I don't have the answer.** I'm with [the Democrats], I don't know what to do. But I think what they're trying to say is, "We can't let them get away with this." And I think the question is, like happens often in history, who blinks first?" – NY man, independent lean Democrat

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Republicans Cite Some Misinformation And Seem Conspiracy Theory Adjacent

"I think that maybe **some of the elected officials are getting more benefits**, no pun intended, than we are from [Obamacare]. 'Obama doesn't care,' is what I call it." – PA woman, weak Republican

"I really think this **whole thing is being orchestrated to deflect from other issues**... Why is everything so expensive? The economy, the inflation. What else is going on in the stock market that we don't know about?... I think it's just one big orchestra and a bunch of BS. And we're just the puppets." –WI woman, weak Republican

"Unfortunately, **we just found out there actually was a lot of censoring of social media recently in the past years.** And that could have led to some of the issues where only certain messages were getting out and some were being suppressed." – MI man, weak Republican

"I've read and heard that there's two things [the shutdown is about]. The $50 billion in rural taxpayer funding that they want reinstated, and then also the **taxpayer-funded Medicare benefits for illegal immigrants.**" – AZ man, independent lean Republican

"**What else is being agreed to behind closed doors** that maybe is being shielded out of the public eye with this [shutdown] distraction?...Go and follow the money. So what company is behind it? Because I really think greed is the underlying thing behind a lot of this." – PA woman, weak Republican



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Social Media Is Seen As Adding To The Cultural Coarseness, Isolation, And An Uncertainty About What's True

"**Social media has allowed people to basically blast off what's going on in their mind** instantly. And that's even when it comes to our officials. And unfortunately, that leads to a lot of issues. You don't get the president coming on TV once a week or doing radio addresses anymore." – MI man, weak Republican

"I think **everything is extremely amplified [because of] social media**, just how we're getting fed information. And that, in itself, does scare me as well, because I'm sure a lot of people, you read an article, you don't know what is real, what's not, what's biased, what's not." – NE woman, independent

"Everything is wrong. **Social media, it used to be good. Now, I completely hate it,** I hate it for my kids…They go through so much stuff. Trump has brought all the scared-ass people out there emboldened; they say and do stuff that they normally wouldn't have said." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"I think **social media** does have a lot of play in it. If you go on Reels and watch something, you just get all similar Reels and I think it tends to get people worked up about things and just **gets them in an angry state**." – PA man, weak Republican

"The problem is that we're all fed into our ecosystems, and social media have different quotes from different sites that don't really mean a lot. **It's hard to find real news**." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

"Nobody wants to work. Or if they want to work, they think they should get $30 an hour and they're 18 years old. So **where does that mentality come from? Social media. I don't have to do anything, but let's give everybody everything**." – WI woman, weak Republican

"**It falls to the younger generation to get off their fucking phones, get rid of social media,** which has definitely caused more problems than it's solved, and it has not brought us together. I think it's the main reason that we're divisive and it's the main reason why there's so much misinformation. But it will fall to the younger generation. – NY man, independent lean Democrat

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Corporate Influence In Politics Further Weakens Our Government, Filled Instead With People "Looking Out For Themselves"

"As of right now, **we really don't have a democracy. Corporations are more in control** or just a single person with greed. It's about the ultra-wealthy getting more wealthy and companies succeeding and putting their values first, and not really looking at the smaller people or our environment." – MI man, weak Democrat

"I think **if you got rid of lobbyists** and you didn't allow people, corporations or even the police to back certain people, [it would help a lot]. People need to stand alone and be accountable for themselves and really be transparent." – PA woman, weak Republican

"Really hoping [Citizens United] gets overturned at some point…I think **we're just seeing more and more money into the government from corporations**, and we're going to see more and more until, generally speaking, people are fed up with it enough that there's something that happens that ends up with more pressure put on government officials." – PA man, weak Democrat

"**Political giving, the lobbying arms in this country, need to be stopped**…I think Citizens United really took away from Americans and recognized corporations as people, and I find that very disturbing." – MI man, independent lean Democrat

"[Our leaders are] not statesmen, they're not public servants, **they're not there to serve us. They come out with a bigger bank account than they went in with.** And how much do they care? And sometimes I wonder if they're really representing those people in their district." – PA woman, weak Republican



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Many Feel Helpless And Fear "No One Is Coming To Save Us"

"**I've felt pretty helpless during all of this,** aside from voting. But this morning, I heard part of a press conference with Karoline Leavitt, and she mentioned the marketplace and that she or the President thinks that the Democrats want the marketplace to help illegal aliens get health care…It's so distressing when they put out messages like she did to the whole country like that, which I believe is completely inaccurate." – AZ woman, weak Democrat

"Hopefully, we don't have a situation where we have a big tragedy that brings us together again. **If we could just come together without the tragedy, that'd be great. But unfortunately that's not in our history**." – MI man, weak Republican

"It also seems like **there's no leader that is emerging or rising from the ashes to save us** from…the shitshow that we're in. And so, that's where, for me, I lose a lot of the hope, because I just see the villain everywhere, but there's no one that's coming to save us...other than Jesus personally." – PA woman, weak Democrat



"I don't want to be such a pessimist, but **it just seems like such a mountain to climb.** It's so difficult to get people to agree on things that I think that it's... Yeah, I mean, inevitably, we have to come to some conclusion, but I don't know. It seems really scary." – CO woman, independent lean Democrat

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Charisma And An Ability To Unite, Rather Than Policy Agendas, Are What People Hope For In A Savior

"**There's so much divisiveness amongst people, and I truly believe the reason for that is who our current leader is.** I think he generates divisiveness among people, and that is not productive for reaching solutions." – AZ woman, weak Democrat

"I just think a **united joint front, instead of these polarizing radicalizing statements.** I think our leaders should be demonstrating to people that, 'hey, I don't agree with them, but I can be civil and we can have a conversation.' And it should be a very united front." – PA woman, weak Republican



"Zohran Mamdani, the New York candidate, who's **focused on affordability** and combating some of the actual symptoms of what's happening with Trump's America versus, we see more broad-scale economy-focused Democrats, who aren't very locked into day-to-day for middle-class and lower-class Americans." – PA man, weak Democrat

"**We need somebody that has our back,** America's back." – MI woman, independent lean Republican

"I feel like in previous elections, you had a good choice, whether you are Democrat or Republican or independent, that **you had decent human beings who were in those offices, and that's gone now**." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"Teddy Roosevelt was a loudmouth too and very brusque. But **I think we need more advocacy** and I think that's what [Trump's] trying to provide." – PA woman, weak Republican

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Some Search For Solutions To The Challenges America Faces, And Come Up Empty Handed

"You hear a lot of just a disconnect between both sides and them villainizing each other and saying they can't come to agreements, and I honestly **find myself just getting confused about what's actually going on and what the solution actually should be** for what we're facing. So it's just something that's been at the forefront of my thoughts when I listen to the news." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"**Politics have become such a dimension of our personality** and it's just a group thing, and it's just no one wants to give up. I don't know who's worse." – PA woman, weak Republican



"[The solution] is a tough one to answer. I think that's where **everybody's getting stuck, trying to figure out the solution**." – NE woman, independent

"**I don't know what the solution is**. I don't." – PA woman, weak Republican



"Some new form of government? I don't know, **I have no solution.** It just seems like nobody's coming together to provide logical solutions." – MI woman, independent lean Republican

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The Shutdown Is Blamed On Both Sides, With Many Either Unsure Or Citing Health Care Costs As The Motivator

Moderator: Why is there a shutdown? What's it about?

"The shutdown's because the **Democrats don't believe in taking away Medicaid from millions of people**, and that's really what it comes down to is a fundamental shift, and people are going to be hurting, so they're trying to make a stand and holding the government accountable saying, 'these people are going to be hurting and people's premiums will go up,' that's why." – AZ man, weak Democrat

"**Both [sides are responsible]**. I can't say, come on, because there's a couple of Republicans that could tip the scale too." – PA woman, weak Republican

"I'm almost 60 years old, and in my lifetime, we've had numerous government shutdowns. This happens almost every term. It happened 17 days during the Obama administration. It happened during the Biden administration. They figured it out, but **it's a political ploy.**" – AZ man, independent lean Republican

"I think **they're both standing in the way and just painting it on each other**, saying, yeah, well, this side's holding it up. Well, the Democrats, like the Republicans, we have the continuing resolution, they could open things back up, but the Democrats don't want to vote for it. But there's probably some hardline stuff in there that they wouldn't vote for. And it's a giant blame game to point at each other." – PA man, weak Republican

"Both sides are **not willing [to compromise]**. I mean, you have a situation, where I've seen that the Democrats are on the floor, and then the Republicans aren't even in Congress right now." – MI man, independent lean Democrat

"I'm honestly **not super caught up** [on the shutdown]." – PA man, weak Democrat

"I think **they're both equally responsible** [for the shutdown]. It's like kids." – MI woman, independent lean Republican

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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds; Mike Podhorzer; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups October 23, 2025 with with Americans in battleground congressional districts (AZ-01, CO-08, MI-07, MI-10, NE-02, NY-17, PA-07, PA-08, PA-10, WI-01, WI-03) who believe the political system is dysfunctional.

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