



The Values of the Medina Charter in Developing Islamic Political Ethics

Karimah Fauziah Panjaitan^{1*}, Reza Firmansyah², Rizki Achmad Rizaldi³, Syahril⁴

¹²³⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Email: fauziahkarimah13@gmail.com^{1*}, rezafirmansyah3738@gmail.com², aldikantampan@gmail.com³, syahril365@gmail.com⁴

Abstract

This study examines the constitutional values of the Charter of Medina and their relevance to the development of political ethics in a pluralistic society. The inquiry stems from the premise that the presence of political norms and institutions does not automatically produce governance that is just, accountable, and respectful of diversity. This research aims to analyze the construction of political values within the Charter of Medina, its constitutional character, and its contribution to the formation of political ethics. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study employs library research and descriptive-analytical methods grounded in historical and hermeneutic readings of the Charter of Medina and relevant academic literature. The findings demonstrate that the Charter of Medina establishes a normative framework linking political life to justice, legal order, respect for pluralism, collective responsibility, and the ethical management of power. These values not only regulate inter-community relations but also constrain power within normative boundaries through shared responsibility, mutual protection, and compliance with political agreements. Theoretically, while the Charter of Medina is not identical to modern constitutions or democracies, it possesses a constitutional character that serves as a reflective resource for constructing political ethics in pluralistic societies. This study contributes to Islamic political studies by demonstrating that the constitutional dimension of the Charter of Medina can be understood as a normative framework integrating law, power, diversity, and political morality.

Keywords: *Charter of Medina; Development; Islamic Political Ethics*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji nilai-nilai konstitusional Piagam Madinah dan relevansinya bagi pembangunan etika politik dalam masyarakat majemuk. Kajian ini berangkat dari persoalan bahwa keberadaan norma dan institusi politik tidak selalu menghasilkan praktik kekuasaan yang berkeadilan, bertanggung jawab, dan menghormati kemajemukan. Penelitian bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi nilai politik dalam Piagam Madinah, karakter konstitusionalnya, serta kontribusinya terhadap pembentukan etika politik. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan dan analisis deskriptif-analitis melalui pembacaan historis dan hermeneutis terhadap Piagam Madinah dan literatur akademik yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Piagam Madinah membentuk kerangka normatif yang menghubungkan kehidupan politik dengan keadilan, keteraturan hukum, penghormatan terhadap kemajemukan, tanggung jawab kolektif, dan pengelolaan kekuasaan secara etis. Nilai-nilai tersebut tidak hanya mengatur hubungan antarkomunitas, tetapi juga menempatkan kekuasaan dalam batas normatif melalui tanggung jawab, perlindungan bersama, dan kepatuhan terhadap

kesepakatan politik. Secara teoretis, Piagam Madinah tidak identik dengan konstitusi atau demokrasi modern, tetapi memiliki karakter konstitusional yang dapat menjadi sumber refleksi bagi pembangunan etika politik dalam masyarakat plural. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian politik Islam dengan menunjukkan bahwa dimensi konstitusional Piagam Madinah dapat dipahami sebagai kerangka normatif yang mempertautkan hukum, kekuasaan, kemajemukan, dan moralitas politik.

Kata Kunci: *Piagam Madinah; Pembangunan; Etika Politik Islam*

INTRODUCTION

The development of modern political systems does not always correspond with the development of political ethics capable of directing the exercise of power toward the public interest (Peterson, 2020). Institutional reform, democratization, and constitutional strengthening may establish more open political structures, but they do not necessarily guarantee justice, accountability, equality, and respect for differences in the exercise of political power. This challenge becomes increasingly complex in plural societies, where political interests, religious identities, and group demands interact within the same public sphere. Under such conditions, political ethics concerns not only compliance with legal norms but also the capacity of political power to restrain particular interests, respect the rights of other groups, and place the common good at the center of political action (Khair et al., 2024). Accordingly, a constitution should be understood not merely as an instrument for regulating political power but also as a source of values that establishes moral boundaries governing relationships among political authorities, citizens, and social groups.

Namazi's (2023) study of Islamic politics demonstrates that the relationship between power, law, and social life has been a significant concern since the early formation of the Muslim community. In this context, the Medina Charter occupies an important position because it regulated the life of a community comprising groups with different religious, kinship, and political backgrounds (Namazi, 2023). Arjomand conceptualizes the Medina Charter as a socio-legal document associated with the formation of the *ummah*, the regulation of collective responsibilities, and the organization of intergroup relations within Medina. The Medina Charter was therefore not merely a historical record of the formation of the Muslim community but also a normative instrument governing shared obligations and political relations within a plural society (Fadzli et al., 2026). Other studies of the Medina Charter have likewise examined issues of citizenship, religious freedom, equality, rights, and mechanisms for resolving collective disputes (Wildan, 2023).

The Medina Charter can be understood as a historical source for examining the relationship between constitutional principles and the formation of political ethics. Provisions concerning collective responsibility, the protection of life, freedom of religious practice, obligations to maintain communal security, and conflict resolution demonstrate that political life was

not framed solely in terms of the acquisition and exercise of power but also in terms of responsibility toward the community (Wildan, 2023). The constitutional values embodied in the Medina Charter acquire ethical significance when political arrangements are directed toward maintaining justice, limiting group domination, and enabling diverse communities to coexist within a shared political order. Nevertheless, existing studies of the Medina Charter have more frequently focused on pluralism, citizenship, interreligious relations, or the historical formation of the Islamic state and society. The relationship between the constitutional values of the Medina Charter and the development of political ethics, therefore, warrants more focused examination.

The substantive provisions of the Medina Charter contain principles relevant to the formation of a civilized political order, particularly in relation to citizenship, politics, human rights, and the administration of justice within a society composed of diverse religious and social groups (Sadzali, 2024; Serjeant, 2022; Wang, 2024; Wildan, 2023). Studies of the legal principles embedded in the Medina Charter have also identified the *ummah*, consultation, the right to life, equality, and freedom of religion as components of its normative framework. These studies further demonstrate that the Medina Charter functioned as a constitutional instrument for regulating communal life through the recognition of religious diversity and competing political interests (Fadzli et al., 2026). However, existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined the Medina Charter within a framework of citizenship and political ethics in which its principles serve as a moral foundation for the exercise of political power.

Against this background, this study approaches the Medina Charter as a political-constitutional text that merits examination from the perspective of political ethics. The study focuses on the constitutional values of the Medina Charter and their role in shaping an ethical orientation for political life and civic conduct. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how these values can be understood as an ethical foundation for political practices that situate the exercise of power within a framework of social responsibility and the common good.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research to examine the Medina Charter as a textual and historical source. The primary source is the text of the Medina Charter, examined through historical literature and scholarly works that document the substance of its provisions and clauses. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and scholarly works relevant to the study. The collected literature was selected and analyzed using qualitative content analysis within a historical-hermeneutic approach (Mokrani, 2022). The findings were then organized

through descriptive-analytical analysis by relating textual evidence to its historical context to examine how the constitutional values of the Medina Charter can be understood as an ethical orientation for political life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Medina Charter in the Political Community

The Medina Charter emerged within the complex sociopolitical context of Medina following the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca. Medina, formerly known as Yathrib, was inhabited by groups with different social identities, political interests, and religious affiliations, particularly the Aws and Khazraj tribes and the Jewish communities of Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza. Relations among these groups were not always harmonious. Intertribal competition and conflict had existed prior to the arrival of Islam, creating social fragmentation that hindered the development of political stability. Under such circumstances, the formation of a new political community required more than religious leadership. It required an agreement capable of regulating intergroup relations while establishing shared rights, obligations, and responsibilities. These conditions provided an important context for the emergence of the Medina Charter as an instrument for regulating communal life (Blankinship, 2022).

The arrival of the Prophet Muhammad created a need to establish a political order capable of integrating groups with different social backgrounds and interests. In this context, the Medina Charter can be understood as a political agreement that regulated relations among communities while establishing shared responsibilities. Serjeant (2022) demonstrates that the charter contained provisions governing relations among the various groups living in Medina and defining their obligations toward the political community they collectively formed. Thus, the formation of the Medina Charter was not limited to the consolidation of the Muslim community but also involved the creation of a political framework that enabled different groups to coexist within a mutually agreed order. Political stability within this framework was not pursued through the homogenization of identities but through agreement on rights, obligations, security, and intergroup relations.

This character demonstrates that the Medina Charter possessed both constitutional and normative dimensions. The charter did not merely regulate political relations formally but also provided guidance on how members of the political community should treat one another. The concept of the *ummah*, for example, did not refer exclusively to religious unity but was also associated with the formation of a political community bound by agreement, reciprocal responsibility, and mutual protection (Denny, 1977). In this sense, unity was not constructed through the elimination of differences but through the establishment of a shared commitment to common norms. This shift is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that political life can be

organized through a form of solidarity that transcends genealogical and tribal ties. The Medina Charter thus marked a transition from solidarity based primarily on kinship toward political solidarity founded on agreement and shared responsibility (Sadzali, 2024).

This dimension is also evident in the relationship between the *Muhajirin* and the *Anshar* and in their relations with other groups in Medina. The *Muhajirin* brought different social and economic backgrounds after leaving Mecca, whereas the *Anshar* possessed social structures and interests that had developed within the context of Medina. Integrating these two groups required the formation of a new form of solidarity that did not depend solely on blood or tribal ties. The Medina Charter provided a normative framework for these relations by placing different groups within a network of shared obligations and mutual protection. Accordingly, the function of the charter extended beyond regulating relations between Muslims and non-Muslims; it also encompassed the internal consolidation of the community and the establishment of a broader foundation for political solidarity. From the perspective of political ethics, this transformation demonstrates that unity acquires substantive meaning when it is translated into a willingness to assume shared responsibility in political life (Wright, 2017).

On this basis, the Medina Charter can be positioned as a conceptual foundation for examining the development of political ethics (Hidayat & Suwanto, 2020). The political ethics derived from these values concerns not only the personal morality of political leaders but also the relationships among political power, law, society, and diverse social groups. Politics is understood as a sphere of shared responsibility that requires justice in the exercise of power, respect for differences, adherence to collective agreements, and an orientation toward the common good. This framework provides the basis for further examining the actualization of the values embodied in the Medina Charter in political life and their relationship to the formation of political ethics in the contemporary context (Arjomand, 2009).

The Medina Charter and the Constitutional Foundations of Political Ethics

Understanding the Medina Charter as a constitutional document requires caution in applying the concept of a modern constitution. In contemporary usage, a constitution generally refers to a set of fundamental norms governing the organization of political power, relations between the state and society, and principles that establish limits on the exercise of power. The Medina Charter did not possess the same institutional structure as a modern state constitution. Nevertheless, its substantive provisions exhibit constitutional characteristics through the regulation of intergroup relations, rights and obligations, leadership, conflict resolution, collective security, and adherence to political agreements. The significance of the Medina Charter

therefore lies not primarily in its formal similarity to modern constitutions but in its capacity to establish basic rules for political life within a plural society (Muhtaddin Rahayu, 2026).

These constitutional characteristics are evident in the way the Medina Charter regulated relations among groups with different social and religious identities. The charter did not merely recognize the existence of these groups but also placed them within a framework of mutually agreed rights and obligations. Such arrangements indicate that political order was constructed through norms binding on multiple parties rather than solely through the dominance of one group over another. Muhtaddin Rahayu (2026) demonstrates that the Medina Charter contains several elements that can be examined within a constitutional framework, particularly with regard to the regulation of sociopolitical relations and the distribution of responsibilities among communities. From the perspective of political ethics, this characteristic is significant because it demonstrates that political power acquires moral limits when its exercise is subject to rules established through collective agreement.

The constitutional dimension of the Medina Charter is also reflected in the existence of political authority with the power to resolve disputes. The Prophet Muhammad occupied a central position in resolving conflicts and making decisions concerning communal life. This position indicates that political leadership requires an authority capable of maintaining the validity of shared agreements when disputes arise among groups. The principle of obedience to God and the Messenger in Qur'an 4:59 provides a normative basis for recognizing legitimate authority in political life. Such authority, however, cannot be separated from the responsibility to uphold justice and maintain social order. Accordingly, the leadership structure reflected in the Medina Charter can be understood as a relationship between authority and responsibility rather than simply between ruler and ruled. This is where its constitutional character becomes directly relevant to political ethics: political power acquires normative significance when it is directed toward maintaining social order and serving the common good (Hidayat & Suwanto, 2020).

The principle of the supremacy of rules constitutes another dimension that reinforces the constitutional character of the Medina Charter. The agreement embodied in the charter functioned as a common normative framework governing conduct and relations among groups. When disputes arose, their resolution was not left solely to group power or mechanisms of retaliation but was placed within the framework of recognized authority and previously agreed provisions. This principle resonates with Qur'an 5:8, which emphasizes the obligation to uphold justice, including when dealing with parties toward whom one may have different relationships or positions. From the perspective of political ethics, the supremacy of rules is significant because it constrains the tendency of political power to act according to particular

interests. Political life therefore requires not only leaders who possess authority but also rules that direct the exercise of that authority within the bounds of justice (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

A comparison with modern constitutions reveals fundamental differences in institutional structures and conceptions of the state. The Medina Charter did not establish a bureaucracy, parliament, judiciary, or system of separated powers comparable to those found in contemporary constitutional states. Directly equating it with a modern constitution could therefore obscure its historical context. Nevertheless, several functions performed by the charter exhibit constitutional characteristics, particularly in establishing fundamental norms for political relations, distributing responsibilities, regulating collective security, and providing a framework for conflict resolution. Fadzli et al. (2026) examine the Medina Charter in comparison with the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly in relation to principles of coexistence within a plural society. Such a comparison suggests that constitutional values need not be assessed solely according to similarities in institutional structures but can also be examined through the functions performed by fundamental norms in shaping shared political life.

The constitutional character of the Medina Charter becomes further evident when it is examined through the principles of social protection and the common good. Provisions concerning the protection of life, the protection of groups, freedom of religious practice, and collective responsibility for security demonstrate that political rules were not intended merely to organize power. They were also designed to preserve conditions under which people could live safely and with dignity. From the perspective of Islamic political thought, this orientation can be associated with the concept of *al-maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*, referring to the public interest as an important objective in the organization of political life. The constitutional values of the Medina Charter thus possess an ethical dimension because political rules are connected to the protection of human beings and the welfare of the community. In this sense, a constitution is not merely an instrument for limiting political power but also a means of directing power toward broader social purposes (Murdan, 2019).

Another important aspect concerns the relationship between political agreement and the legitimacy of political authority. The Medina Charter emerged through an agreement involving various groups within the Medinan community. Their willingness to accept common norms demonstrate that political stability depends not only on the capacity of political leadership but also on acceptance of rules that bind all parties. Serjeant (2022) regards the Medina Charter as an important document in the formation of a political order governing relations among the various communities in Medina. Viewed through the framework of political ethics, this agreement demonstrates that the legitimacy of political authority has a relational dimension: political leaders exercise authority, while members of the community possess rights

and obligations established through shared agreement. This relationship creates a political order in which trust, *amanah* (trustworthiness), justice, and respect for agreements constitute important elements in the continuity of governance.

Thus, the constitutional character of the Medina Charter lies not primarily in its resemblance to the institutional design of modern state constitutions but in its function as a fundamental normative framework governing power relations and communal life within a plural society. The charter brings together several key elements, including the regulation of political authority, adherence to collective agreements, protection of rights, justice, collective responsibility, and an orientation toward the common good. These elements constitute an ethical foundation for the exercise of political power by placing political action within the boundaries of normative obligations and moral responsibility. From this perspective, the Medina Charter can be understood as an important historical source for examining the relationship between constitutionalism and political ethics in the Islamic tradition, while also providing a basis for exploring how these values shape a model of political life grounded in justice, inclusion, and responsibility.

Actualizing the Values of the Medina Charter in the Formation of Democratic Political Ethics

The values embodied in the Medina Charter acquire broader significance when examined in the context of contemporary political life. The charter emerged from the need to regulate a Medinan society composed of groups with different tribal and religious backgrounds. Accordingly, provisions concerning justice, unity, religious freedom, collective responsibility, and the resolution of disputes through agreement functioned not only as mechanisms for regulating social life during the time of the Prophet Muhammad but also reflected an ethical orientation toward the conduct of political affairs (Dedi Ardiansyah & Basuki, 2023). Its contemporary relevance does not lie in transferring the political structure of Medina into a modern political system but in the possibility of actualizing its underlying values through political practices that place the exercise of power within a framework of moral responsibility.

Justice (*al-'adl*) is one of the central values in this construction of political ethics. The regulation of intergroup relations in the Medina Charter demonstrates recognition of the rights and obligations of different communities within a shared political order. This principle has implications for how political power should be exercised. Power does not derive its legitimacy merely from being held by a dominant group; rather, it must be directed toward fair treatment of all parties within the political community. In the contemporary context, this value can provide an ethical basis for rejecting discrimination, abuse of authority, and policies that disproportionately benefit particular groups. Justice in the Medina Charter can therefore be understood

as a principle connecting political legitimacy with responsibility toward the public interest.

The value of consultation (*shūrā*) provides another dimension of democratic political ethics. The Qur'an presents consultation as a characteristic of collective life in Qur'an 42:38, while Qur'an 3:159 emphasizes the importance of consultation in decision-making. In the context of the Medina Charter, this principle can be understood through the process of reaching agreements that bound different communities within a shared political order. Consultation does not merely mean gathering opinions; it entails an ethical obligation to listen to others, consider divergent interests, and avoid the unilateral exercise of power. Ali (2020) associates this value with the importance of dialogue and respect for differences in political life. Accordingly, political ethics rooted in *shūrā* requires openness to criticism and participation while positioning dialogue as a mechanism for managing disagreement.

Unity (*ukhuwwah*) in the Medina Charter likewise has important implications for political life within a plural society. The charter established a political community in which different groups could maintain their respective identities while sharing responsibility for the security and continuity of Medina. This arrangement demonstrates that unity need not be constructed through the elimination of differences. Rather, unity can emerge from the willingness of different groups to accept common norms and recognize collective interests. In contemporary politics, this principle can be translated into a political ethic that rejects the exploitation of identity differences as an instrument for mobilizing conflict. Political actors may hold different preferences, interests, and orientations, but such differences should remain within a framework of shared political life that preserves social cohesion.

The management of diversity in the Medina Charter further demonstrates the importance of religious freedom and recognition of pluralism. The presence of Jewish communities within the framework of the agreement indicates that differences in religious belief did not, in themselves, constitute grounds for denying the rights of other groups in political life. This principle is relevant to the development of an inclusive political ethic, particularly in societies characterized by religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. In this context, tolerance is not merely a passive attitude toward differences but a willingness to recognize the rights of other groups as members of the political community. Respect for diversity thus becomes part of political responsibility because the stability of a plural society depends on the capacity of political actors to manage differences without turning them into sources of exclusion.

In addition to justice, consultation, unity, and respect for diversity, the Medina Charter embodies the principle of collective responsibility. Provisions concerning security and defense indicate that the continuity of the community

was not solely the responsibility of its leadership but also of the groups bound by the political agreement. This principle broadens the meaning of political participation. Politics concerns not only the competition for or exercise of power but also the willingness of members of society to contribute to the preservation of collective interests. In the contemporary context, this orientation can be reflected in citizens' involvement in social organizations, public forums, political processes, and various forms of civic participation. Muhammad (2025) identifies social responsibility as an important dimension in interpreting the values of the Medina Charter. From the perspective of political ethics, such participation is meaningful when directed toward the public interest rather than merely electoral or group interests.

Taken together, these values demonstrate the relationship between the Medina Charter and the formation of democratic political ethics. Freedom, equality, justice, participation, respect for differences, and collective responsibility intersect with several principles that have developed within constitutional democracy. This relationship, however, does not mean that the Medina Charter is identical to modern democracy. Rather, a certain degree of value correspondence can be identified, particularly regarding the importance of public participation, the regulation of political action through norms, the protection of different groups, and an orientation toward the common good. Accordingly, political education grounded in the values of the Medina Charter can be understood as a process of cultivating ethical dispositions: the capacity to engage in dialogue, accept differences, respect rules, take responsibility for political choices, and place the public interest above particular interests.

However, the actualization of the values of the Medina Charter cannot be achieved through a purely textual application without considering its historical context. The charter emerged in a seventh-century society with social structures, forms of authority, and political configurations that differed substantially from those of modern states. Its interpretation must therefore distinguish between normative principles and their historical forms of implementation. Djazuli (2003) emphasizes the importance of understanding the development of Islamic political thought in relation to changing social and political conditions. Such an approach prevents the Medina Charter from being treated as an institutional blueprint that must be replicated literally. Instead, attention should be directed toward the values underlying its provisions and their possible application under different political conditions (Nasution, 2025).

These historical limitations also become evident when the Medina Charter is compared with modern constitutional systems. The charter did not incorporate an institutional separation of powers among legislative, executive, and judicial branches as developed in modern states. The political authority of the Prophet Muhammad was distinctive because it combined religious, social, and political dimensions within a single form of leadership. Sjadzali (2008)

demonstrates that the political structure of the early Islamic period cannot simply be equated with modern systems of government. This distinction is important to avoid anachronistic interpretations of the charter. Its constitutional value is more productively examined as a set of principles capable of providing ethical orientation for modern institutions rather than as an institutional blueprint to be implemented in its entirety.

Another issue concerns the possibility of using the Medina Charter to justify particular political constructions ideologically. When a historical document is treated as a definitive political model, attention to its historical context and normative purposes may be diminished. Mastura (2025) emphasizes the importance of a substantive reading of the charter's values, particularly justice, consultation, and shared responsibility. Such an approach allows the Medina Charter to serve as a source of ethical reflection without disregarding its historical complexity. From this perspective, what should be retained is not the political form of the seventh century but the moral orientation underlying the formation of a shared political order.

Reinterpretation is important because contemporary political challenges take forms that differ from those encountered by the Medinan community. Polarization, identity politics, the spread of misleading information, low levels of political literacy, and competing interests in the public sphere require ethical capacities that cannot be developed through formal rules alone. The principles of consultation, justice, respect for differences, and collective responsibility can provide a normative framework for addressing these challenges, provided that they are applied through contextual interpretation. Shihab (2013) emphasizes the importance of understanding Islamic values contextually so that their normative messages can remain in dialogue with changing times. Thus, actualizing the Medina Charter does not mean reviving the political structure of the past but translating its fundamental values into contemporary questions of political ethics.

Ultimately, the relevance of the values of the Medina Charter lies not in the claim that the document provides a completed model of modern democracy but in its illustration of how a plural society can be organized through agreement, justice, responsibility, respect for differences, and the regulation of political power through shared norms. These values provide a foundation for developing a political ethic that understands power as a trust (*amanah*), participation as a responsibility, differences as a reality to be managed, and the public interest as the orientation of communal life. Through a contextual reading, the Medina Charter can therefore serve as a source of reflection for developing democratic political ethics without disregarding the historical distance between the Medinan community and contemporary political systems. This position brings together the constitutional dimension of the Medina Charter and the ethical demands of modern political life.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing discussion, the Medina Charter can be understood as a normative framework that connects the regulation of political life with justice, the rule of law, respect for pluralism, collective responsibility, and the ethical exercise of political power. These values do not function as isolated moral principles but constitute an integrated political order in which intergroup relations, rights and obligations, dispute resolution, and collective security are governed by mutually binding agreements. From this perspective, the constitutional character of the Medina Charter lies not merely in its function of regulating a plural society but also in its capacity to place political power and communal life within normative boundaries oriented toward justice, responsibility, and the common good. Accordingly, the Medina Charter should not be directly equated with modern constitutions or democracy. Rather, its underlying values provide a normative foundation for understanding the development of political ethics in plural societies, particularly by reinforcing the relationship among law, political power, freedom, equality, and social responsibility. The principal contribution of the Medina Charter to political thought therefore lies in its conception of political life as inseparable from the moral demands placed upon the exercise of power. Read contextually, its values remain relevant as a source of reflection for developing a political ethic grounded in justice, inclusion, and responsibility.

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