



Political Awareness Among Pashtoon Women in Loralai, Balochistan

¹Sajida Kakar

²Dr. Abdul Ghafoor

¹BS Student, Department of Political Science, University of Loralai.

²Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Loralai.

ezathkanlri@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores political awareness and participation among Pashtoon women in District Loralai, Balochistan. Using semi-structured interviews with 20 women from diverse backgrounds, the research investigates the factors that limit women’s engagement in politics and identifies potential strategies to improve their involvement. The findings reveal that women’s political awareness is severely restricted due to cultural and tribal norms, family restrictions, low literacy and education, limited access to political information, and misinterpretation of religious teachings. Even educated and politically aware women face significant barriers that prevent them from actively participating and spreading awareness. Based on participants’ suggestions, key measures to enhance political engagement include improving female education, organizing political awareness seminars, encouraging family support, providing space within political parties, strengthening government quota initiatives, and promoting mentorship programs. The study concludes that addressing social, cultural, educational, and institutional barriers is essential for empowering women in Loralai to participate meaningfully in political life, contributing to more inclusive and representative governance.

Keywords: Political participation, political motivation, political awareness, personal interest, religious alignment, political culture, civic education.

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Corresponding Authors*

Introduction

Political awareness means knowing how politics and government work, understanding your rights and responsibilities, and being able to think about and take part in decisions that affect your community and country. Political awareness is important for women's empowerment and participation in politics. It helps them understand their rights, take part in decisions, and influence policies that affect their lives. Many women, especially in rural areas, face challenges like illiteracy, poverty, and limited access to information, which reduce their political involvement. Education, media exposure, and awareness programs can help women become more active, while addressing cultural and structural barriers is necessary for them to fully exercise their political rights and contribute to democracy. Pashtun women in Balochistan face a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic challenges that shape their lives and roles within society. These women are often depicted through the lens of traditional roles and cultural expressions, such as the Landay (poetry), which serves as a medium for expressing their emotions and social commentary. Despite the constraints imposed by societal norms, Pashtoon women contribute significantly to various sectors, including livestock production, agriculture and face unique health challenges.

Background of the Study

Political awareness operates in the political information exchange between the individual and various sources of political messages communicated in the public space. It is commonly understood as an important asset, which determines people's engagement with politics and how political awareness might be a key asset, which determines participation and active citizenship. Although there is some degree of consensus, over how we should understand political awareness, there is a variety of conceptualizations of political awareness. Above all there are is an even greater variety in what cognitive information and other preconditions the political aware make use in analysis of information and participation decisions.

Importance of Political Awareness

Because an informed populace is better able to comprehend governance procedures, assess leaders, and actively participate in decision-making, political awareness is essential to bolstering democratic systems. People are better able to hold institutions responsible and maintain transparency when they are informed about political issues, policies, and their constitutional rights. This awareness also gives citizens the ability to speak out, advocate for

their needs, and influence policies that directly impact their lives, particularly for marginalized groups like Pashtoon women in Loralai. Ultimately, by creating a culture in which people participate in politics with consideration, political awareness fosters social responsibility, meaningful civic engagement, and the general growth and stability of society.

Women's Political Participation

Women have historically been underrepresented in political processes around the world, which has had a big impact on social development and policymaking. Women's capacity to express their needs, confront gender-based disparities, and support inclusive governance is diminished by low participation. Policies frequently neglect important issues like healthcare, education, economic empowerment, and violence prevention when women are not included in decision-making spaces. In addition to strengthening democratic systems, increasing women's political participation encourages accountability, transparency, and balanced representation. According to research, societies with higher levels of female political participation typically see more equitable development and better social outcomes. Therefore, creating just, progressive, and long-lasting political systems requires ensuring women's active and meaningful participation.

Pashtoon Women in Balochistan

The cultural, social, and economic obstacles that Pashtun women in Balochistan face limit their political consciousness and engagement. Their participation in political processes is frequently hampered by traditional gender norms, restricted mobility, and poor access to information and education. Socioeconomic limitations and reliance on male family members also limit women's access to political education and decision-making opportunities in the community.

Regional Context (Loralai)

The social environment of Loralai, a major district in Balochistan, is shaped by strong tribal structures, ingrained traditional values, and restricted access to high-quality education. Together, these elements affect women's political consciousness and frequently limit their ability to participate in public and political life. Loralai is a crucial area for researching gendered political awareness because of the socioeconomic difficulties, cultural norms, and conservative expectations that further contribute to women's low levels of political engagement in the region.

According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics District Loralai in Balochistan has a population of around 400,000–450,000 people, with Pashtoons forming the majority ethnic group. Women make up nearly 48–49% of the population, meaning there are approximately 190,000–210,000 Pashtoon women living in Loralai.



Map of Loralai District

Problem Statement

Pashtoon women in Loralai, Balochistan, face significant challenges in accessing education and political information, which limits their understanding of governance, civic rights, and responsibilities. Cultural and traditional norms further restrict their active participation in political and social decision-making processes. Although media and social networks have the potential to enhance political awareness, they are not fully accessible or effectively utilized by many women in the region. Consequently, the level of political knowledge and civic engagement among Pashtun women remains largely unexplored, leading to underrepresentation in local and national politics. This gap underscores the need for research to understand their political awareness and identify ways to empower their participation in governance.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it sheds light on the level of political awareness among Pashtoon women in Loralai, which is crucial for empowering them to participate actively in civic and political life. The findings can guide policymakers and government institutions in formulating gender-inclusive policies and programs that encourage women's engagement in governance. Academically, the research fills a gap by providing empirical evidence on political awareness

among Pashtun women, contributing to the broader literature on gender, politics, and civic participation in Pakistan. Additionally, the study can inform NGOs and civil society organizations in designing interventions to overcome social and cultural barriers, while offering insights on how education and media can be leveraged to enhance political knowledge and participation among women.

Research Questions

1. How aware are Pashtoon women in Loralai about politics?
2. What things affect their political knowledge and involvement?
3. What stops them from taking part in politics, and how can it be improved?

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to Pashtoon women in Loralai, Balochistan, so the findings may not represent women from other regions or ethnic groups. Time and resource constraints may restrict the number of participants, which could affect the generalizability of the results. Cultural sensitivities may prevent some women from openly discussing their political views, limiting the depth of data collected. Additionally, the study focuses specifically on political awareness and participation, without examining broader socio-economic or psychological factors. Access to remote areas and varying literacy levels may also limit the range of participants and the type of information gathered.

Literature Review

Political Awareness and Civic Engagement

William A. Galston's *Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education* (2001) argues that despite rising educational attainment in the U.S., political knowledge has remained steady. He emphasizes that democracy depends on political literacy, which fosters consistent views, trust in institutions, and civic participation. Galston highlights civic education, especially programs encouraging discussion, critical thinking, and service learning, as key to bridging the gap between schooling and engagement. He notes that participation functions as a positional good, meaning relative advantages matter more than absolute levels of education. Ultimately, he concludes that the quality and content of civic education, not its quantity, are crucial for strengthening democracy (Galston, 2001).

In *Voice and Equality* (1995), Verba, Scholzman, and Brady show that political participation in the U.S. is shaped by social and economic inequality. Their central concern is the

“participation gap,” where affluent and educated citizens wield more influence, while marginalized groups face barriers to engagement. This imbalance produces an “unequal democracy,” with policy outcomes reflecting elite preferences. The authors argue that civic institutions and organizations are crucial for reducing inequality by fostering participation and civic skills, thereby strengthening democratic representation (Verba, 1996).

Women’s Political Participation

In *Rising Tide*, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris show how modernization and cultural change have reshaped gender roles and women’s political engagement. Economic growth and postindustrial values foster support for equality, eroding traditional norms and empowering women through education and work. While the participation gap between men and women is narrowing in developed democracies, cultural and religious barriers still limit women’s leadership globally. The authors conclude that lasting gender equality in politics requires both cultural transformation and institutional reform (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Role of Education

In *Democratic Phoenix* (2002), Pippa Norris shows that while traditional participation like voting and party membership is declining, new forms of activism, advocacy, volunteering, social movements, and online engagement, are rising. Driven by generational change, education, and post-materialist values, these trends make politics more inclusive and networked but challenge institutions reliant on old models. Norris concludes that embracing non-traditional participation can strengthen democracy and reduce inequalities in access to civic life (Norris, 2002).

Education empowers women in Balochistan by giving them knowledge, confidence, and skills to engage in politics, vote, and take leadership roles. It helps challenge traditional gender roles and encourages civic participation. However, social, cultural, and institutional barriers still restrict women’s involvement, as male-dominated structures limit access to leadership. The study concludes that while education is vital for political empowerment, supportive policies and structural reforms are equally necessary for lasting change (Yaseenzai & Malik, 2024).

The Role of Education and Media

Education, media, and social networks enhance women’s political awareness, confidence, and civic participation. Social media allows women to organize, share ideas, and challenge

traditional roles, but visibility online does not guarantee lasting influence. Tufekci notes that while networked protests enable quick mobilization and broad participation, they often lack structure, risking suppression and neglect of women's issues. Sustainable empowerment requires not just technology but long-term organization, leadership, and strategies to address structural inequalities (Tufekci, 2017).

Barriers to Political Participation

The article shows that despite reserved seats, women in Pakistan face barriers in politics, often lacking respect, resources, and real influence. Interviews reveal they need training, party support, and access to funds to contribute effectively. Reserved quotas alone are insufficient, true empowerment requires leadership roles, supportive policies, and structural reforms. With proper training and opportunities, women can become strong political leaders (Khan & Naqvi, 2019).

Pashtoon Women and Cultural Constraints

Ahmad and Bilal studied political reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, finding that measures like reserved seats increased women's awareness and civic engagement. However, reforms alone have not led to full participation in leadership or decision-making. The authors argue that lasting empowerment requires not just structural reforms but also education, skill-building, and removal of socio-cultural barriers to help women move from awareness to real political influence (Bilal & Ahmad, 2018).

In *The Struggle for Pakistan* (2015), Ayesha Jalal explores how the interplay of Islam, democracy, and politics has shaped South Asia, especially Pakistan. She argues that elites' use of Islamic identity to secure legitimacy has weakened pluralism and democratic institutions. While diverse interpretations of Islam could support democracy, they are often tied to authoritarian goals. Jalal also notes that religion and politics have restricted women's access to education, public life, and political participation, intertwining gender inequality with broader struggles over citizenship and rights (Ray, 2015).

The article *Episteme and Experiences about Pashtunwali* explores Pashtoon women's perspectives on the traditional code of conduct in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Interviews with 39 women reveal their active role in preserving cultural identity through stories, food, clothing, and teaching social norms. While education and awareness help them reinterpret traditions, strict cultural norms restrict their autonomy and mobility. The study concludes that Pashtun

women balance honoring tradition with seeking greater freedom, highlighting both resilience and the need for social reforms (Ali, 2021).

Gap in the Literature

Although several studies have explored women's political participation in Pakistan, most focus on urban areas or broader provincial contexts, leaving the political awareness of Pashtoon women in district Loralai largely unexamined. Existing research seldom provides localized, empirical evidence on how tribal norms, cultural practices, and social structures uniquely shape women's political understanding in this region. Furthermore, while some studies identify general barriers to women's political engagement, they rarely examine the specific role of education and media in influencing political knowledge among Pashtoon women. The absence of comprehensive research that combines cultural, social, and educational factors, along with a lack of qualitative insights from women themselves, creates a significant gap that this study seeks to address.

Main Argument

The study argues that Pashtoon women in Loralai have low political awareness mainly due to cultural restrictions, limited education, and poor access to information, but improving education and media exposure can significantly enhance their political participation.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

Political socialization theory

Their research highlighted how crucial political socialization, the process by which people pick up political norms and values, is to preserving this civic culture. These democratic views are passed down through the generations with the aid of the media, education, and family. Democracies are more resilient and effective when citizens trust institutions and feel competent to participate, claim Almond and Verba (1963). Accordingly, their theory connects the stability and general operation of democratic systems to the political education of individuals (Almond & Verba, 1963).

Agents of Political Socialization

Several Institutions and Experiences Contribute to this Process

1. Family

In their seminal work *The Political Character of Adolescence* (1974), Jennings and Niemi investigated the transmission of political beliefs and values from parents to children. The

family is an important source of political socialization, especially when it comes to forming party identification and fundamental political orientations, according to surveys conducted among American high school students and their parents. They also found that this influence is not absolute; as adolescents can reject or reinterpret their parents' political beliefs as they develop their own. Their study demonstrated that family communication styles and the larger social environment both have an impact on the dynamic and interactive process of political socialization. Peer groups, historical background, and educational experiences are some of the elements that influence how young people develop politically. According to Jennings and Niemi (1974), political beliefs are shaped by early socialization, but they can change as people are exposed to new information and experiences. This suggests that political learning is a continuous and flexible process (Jennings & Ehman, 1976).

2. Education

Easton and Dennis (1969) examined how children acquire political knowledge and loyalty to authority in their book *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*. They maintained that political socialization starts in early childhood and that through interactions with parents, schools, and the media, children gradually learn about political symbols, institutions, and roles. A sense of political legitimacy, the conviction that political institutions are suitable and worthy of support, is cultivated through this early education. According to their research, children initially form individualized opinions about authority and frequently see political leaders like presidents as symbolic parents. Later, they move towards a more abstract comprehension of political systems. According to Easton and Dennis (1969), this process of development is essential to the stability of democratic systems because it produces citizens who respect institutions and understand how to engage with them in a responsible man (Easton and Dennis, 1969).

3. Peer Groups

In her paper *not are you Parents' Political Socialization: Introduction for a New Generation*, Sapiro (2004) revisited conventional theories of political socialization in the context of social and technological transformation. She maintained that previous theories, which mostly concentrated on the effects of family and education, were no longer sufficient to explain how people in contemporary societies develop their political opinions. Rather, she stressed that political education is now ongoing, interactive, and influenced by a variety of life experiences,

such as exposure to the media, peer networks, and world events. Sapiro (2004) reviewed traditional theories of political socialization in light of social and technological change in her paper Not Your Parents' Political Socialization: Introduction for a New Generation. She insisted that earlier theories, which primarily focused on the influence of education and family, were insufficient to explain how people form political opinions in modern societies. Instead, she emphasized that political education is now continuous, participatory, and impacted by a range of life experiences, including media exposure, peer networks, and global events (Sapiro, 2004).

4. Mass Media and Social Media

In his study on Media and Civic Socialization of Youth, McLeod (2000) looked at how the media shapes young people's civic engagement and political knowledge. He maintained that exposure to the media, including newspapers, television, and more recently, digital platforms, is a key factor in political socialization since it informs people about public issues, political leaders, and political processes. By increasing youth access to and visibility of politics, the media can promote civic engagement and awareness. However, McLeod also pointed out that critical thinking abilities, education, and family discussions are some of the factors that affect media influence. Young audiences are more likely to form well-informed political opinions and a greater sense of civic duty when they actively engage with media content. Therefore, the study highlighted that media are interactive tools that help shape young people's understanding and participation in political life, rather than merely serving as information transmitters (McLeod, 2000).

5. Religion, Political Parties, and Major Events

Dalton (2014) examined how citizens' political attitudes and behaviors have changed in contemporary democracies in his book Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies. He maintained that increased access to information, social change, and education levels have led to a rise in "cognitive mobilization," which means that people are making political decisions based more on their own judgement and less on conventional indicators like party loyalty. A more critical, independent, and involved electorate has resulted from this change. Dalton also emphasized how modern citizens frequently value involvement in activities other than voting, like advocacy, activism, and issue-based movements. According to him, this change is a reflection of a shift towards post-

materialist ideals, in which people value democratic participation and self-expression over established authority. All things considered, his writings depict a shifting political culture where people are more knowledgeable, independent, and varied in their political engagement (Dalton & Welzel, 2014).

Research Methodology

For primary data the researcher has adopted the method of semi-structure interview by interviewing 20 Pashtoon woman in district Loralai. Semi-structured interviews with chosen participants from various backgrounds within the district has carried out in order to gather primary data. This approach gave participants the freedom to freely and thoroughly express their opinions while providing flexibility to explore important themes. Investigating delicate and culturally embedded topics, like tribal ties and the impact of religion on political behavior, is a good fit for semi-structured interviews. They make it possible to ask insightful questions that can reveal the underlying meanings and motives of political participation. Total 20 Semi-structured interviews were conducted, including, educated Women, uneducated woman and Political activist women. These interviews helped to understand the deeper meanings behind people's political choices. For example, why they follow tribal decisions, or how religious guidance constraints their awareness. While secondary included research articles, books, media reports, policy statements and social media reports.

Research Design

The research design is the overall strategy chosen to integrate different components of the study. It ensures that the research problem is addressed logically and effectively. For this research thesis, qualitative method is used. The qualitative part included interviews with local elders, religious leaders, and young people to capture their views and experiences in detail. This combination allowed the researcher to not only measure participation but also understand the deeper reasons behind it.

Population of the Study

The population in research means the entire group of people relevant to the study. For this research, the population included Pashtoon women of district Loralai who were above the age 18 years.

Sampling

Purposive (Judgmental) sampling is used in the study to choose participants who are most likely to offer rich, pertinent, and varied information. In purposive sampling the researcher knows whom should I interview, in my case I already knew the participants whom I was interviewing. Because the objective was to better understand the phenomenon within its unique cultural and social context rather than extrapolating results to the entire population, this non-random sampling technique is justified. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed in one stage. Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis, which means identifying common themes, then groups, then analysis.

Data Analysis/Results

Awareness of Pashtoon Women about Politics

Many respondents including Shazia, Naseebah and Samai says that women's political awareness and participation in district Loralai remain limited in many regions due to a combination of social, cultural, and educational barriers. Only a small proportion of women have access to reliable political information or opportunities to develop political understanding, which reduces their confidence and interest in participating in political activities. In many households, women's voting choices are heavily influenced or even decided by family elders, usually male members, reflecting deeply rooted cultural norms that discourage women from forming or expressing independent political opinions. These expectations often reinforce the idea that politics is a domain meant primarily for men. Furthermore, low literacy rates among women make it difficult for them to read political materials, understand party agendas, or evaluate candidates critically, which limits their ability to make informed decisions. Restricted mobility, limited exposure to public spaces, and lack of representation in political institutions further weaken their participation. As a result, these interconnected social and educational challenges collectively contribute to women's reduced visibility and influence in political life. The very sad thing was that the educated and politically aware women were too much less and they had no chance to participate in politics and spread the awareness among the women (Shazia, Sahiba, & Samai, 2025).

Factors Affecting Political Knowledge and Involvement of Pashtoon Women

1. Cultural and Tribal Restrictions

In District Loralai, cultural and tribal traditions in Pashtun society play a major role in limiting women's political awareness. Strong cultural norms restrict women's mobility and discourage them from participating in public or political activities. Many respondents mentioned issues such as "parents not allow," "cultural issues," "strict region," and the belief that "Pashtun society dislikes women's political participation." These deep-rooted traditions create an environment where women rarely receive opportunities to engage with political processes (khan, bibi, bibi, & shabozai, 2025).

2. Family Restrictions

Family restrictions in District Loralai also strongly influence women's lack of political awareness. Many girls repeatedly emphasized that their families do not give them permission to take part in political discussions or activities. Families often fear social criticism from the community or believe that politics is not suitable for women. This protective but limiting mindset prevents women from developing their own political opinions or gaining exposure to political events (shazia & arfa, 2025).

3. Low Education and Lack of Access to Information

Low literacy rates in District Loralai are another major factor behind women's limited political understanding. Women with little or no education cannot read newspapers, understand political debates, or follow political news. Their exposure to seminars, workshops, and other formal learning channels is also very limited. Without basic education and access to reliable information, it becomes difficult for women to develop political awareness or make informed decisions (Zulikha, & Shugufta, 2025).

4. Religious Pressure and Misinterpretation

Some respondents in District Loralai also pointed to religious pressure as a barrier to women's political awareness. They explained that certain religious individuals or groups discourage women from taking part in political roles by misinterpreting religious teachings. This creates an environment where women feel that participating in politics may conflict with religious expectations, further reducing their involvement and awareness (Muzdalfa, shagufta, shagufta, Haseena, & zulikha, 2025).

Political Awareness Improvement Strategies among Pashtoon Women

Education

Mostly, all the respondents said that education is one of the strongest tools for increasing women's political awareness in District Loralai. When girls have access to quality schooling and higher literacy levels, they can better understand political issues, read newspapers, and form their own opinions. Education builds confidence and helps women participate more actively in discussions and decision-making. Improving educational opportunities for girls is therefore essential for strengthening their role in politics (khan, bibi, bibi, & shabozai, 2025).

Family Support

Family support is also crucial for women's political participation in District Loralai. When families, especially male members, encourage women to discuss political topics, vote independently, and take part in decision-making, women feel more confident and empowered. A supportive family environment helps women develop awareness and reduces the cultural pressure that usually restricts their involvement in political activities (kakara & bibi, 2025).

Space in Political Parties

Women in District Loralai need greater representation and meaningful space within political parties. Many women feel excluded from party activities, leadership roles, or decision-making processes. By giving women more opportunities to attend meetings, take part in campaigns, and hold positions within party structures, political parties can help increase women's visibility and influence. This inclusion is necessary for ensuring stronger female participation in politics (Anosha, samena, gull, & malaika, 2025).

Government Initiatives in the Quota System

Government initiatives, especially the quota system, play an important role in promoting women's political participation in District Loralai. The quota system ensures reserved seats for women in local and national political bodies, giving them a platform to represent their communities. Strengthening and properly implementing these quotas can help more women enter politics, gain experience, and become politically active (khan & kalsoom, 2025).

Political Party Seminars

Regular seminars organized by political parties can also help improve women's political awareness in District Loralai. These seminars can teach women about voting rights, political processes, party agendas, and leadership skills. When political parties actively involve women

through workshops and awareness programs, they create opportunities for women to learn, engage, and confidently participate in political life (Gull & Malaika, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored political awareness among Pashtoon women in District Loralai, Balochistan, using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that women's political awareness and participation remain very limited due to a combination of cultural, social, educational, and religious barriers. Deep-rooted cultural and tribal traditions, family restrictions, low literacy, lack of access to political information, and misinterpretation of religious teachings were identified as the main factors contributing to women's limited involvement in politics. The research also highlighted that even the few educated and politically aware women face significant challenges in participating actively and spreading awareness among others. Despite these challenges, the study identified practical pathways for improvement. Women themselves emphasized the importance of education, family support, political party engagement, government initiatives such as quotas, and seminars or awareness programs to enhance their political knowledge and participation.

In a nutshell, the findings suggest that improving women's political awareness in Loralai requires a multifaceted approach that addresses social and cultural norms, promotes educational opportunities, strengthens family and community support, and actively includes women in political institutions. By implementing these strategies, women can become more informed, empowered, and active participants in the political life of District Loralai, contributing to more inclusive and representative governance.

Recommendations

- **Promote Girls' Education** Increase access to quality education for girls in Loralai to improve literacy and political awareness. Educated women are more likely to understand political issues and participate confidently.
- **Conduct Political Awareness Seminars:** Organize regular seminars, workshops, and awareness programs in schools, colleges, universities, and community centers to educate women about political processes, rights, and responsibilities.
- **Encourage Family Support:** Engage families, especially male members, to support women's political participation, including discussing politics at home, attending political gatherings safely, and making independent voting decisions.

- Increase Representation in Political Parties: Ensure women have meaningful space and leadership opportunities within political parties to enhance their visibility and influence in decision-making.
- Strengthen Government Quota Systems: Properly implement and monitor the quota system to guarantee reserved seats for women in local and national political bodies, providing them with formal political platforms.
- Provide Access to Political Information: Improve women's access to newspapers, online political content, and other information sources to help them make informed decisions.
- Address Cultural and Religious Barriers: Promote community awareness programs that challenge restrictive cultural norms and clarify misconceptions about religion regarding women's political participation.
- Develop Mentorship and Networking Programs: Establish networks and mentorship programs where politically aware women can guide, train, and encourage other women to engage in politics.

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