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PROFESSIONAL PAPER

Anticipated crime trends in Ukraine after the Russian-Ukrainian war: A comparative analysis of public expectations and expert forecasts

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ABSTRACT

Large-scale wars often leave criminogenic legacies that can reshape crime patterns once hostilities cease. This article compares public expectations and expert forecasts of anticipated post-war crime trends in Ukraine during the first three years after achieving sustainable peace. Furthermore, it integrates population expectations and expert judgement within an empirical framework that enables the direct comparison of perceived trajectories and drivers. The study draws on two anonymous surveys conducted in 2025 and administered online via Google Forms: a population survey of the general public (N = 1,704), as well as an expert survey of criminal justice practitioners and scholars (N = 125). Responses were processed using descriptive statistics to compare data on overall crime levels, offence categories, and perceived drivers of change. Both groups of respondents expected higher levels of overall crime, although the public showed greater concern: 86.3% of lay respondents expected an increase in crime, compared to 76.8% of experts. In terms of offence type, the strongest convergence was observed in the violence and weapons category. Respondents reported high projected growth in violent crime (public 74.3%; experts 72.8%), domestic violence (public 73.7%; experts 85.6%), and firearm-related offences in civilian life (public 78.7%; experts 88.8%). Compared to the general public, experts strongly anticipate an increase in

property offences (76.0% vs 50.7%) and hooliganism (70.4% vs 57.0%). Divergences between both groups of respondents emerged in several domains: public concern was higher for corruption-related offences (49.1% vs 36.0%), and cybercrime showed the sharpest split, with the public mostly expecting stability (63.4%) and experts forecasting an increase (53.6%). Perceived drivers of increased post-war crime include psychological trauma and increased weapon availability, along with an economic crisis, alcohol/drug abuse, and demobilisation: both groups of respondents also expect that former military personnel will be overrepresented among the offenders. The findings highlight domains of shared concern and disagreement, providing an empirical basis for the prioritisation of monitoring and future empirical research on Ukraine's early post-war transition. The study also underlines a limitation of survey-based forecasting: these instruments can identify the direction of expected change, but they cannot reliably estimate its magnitude.

Keywords: expert forecasts, post-conflict criminology, post-conflict transition, post-war crime, public perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflicts often leave a lasting imprint on a society's security environment. A consistent finding in criminological research is that many countries experience surges in violent crime, especially homicide, after the end of a war (Sobko et al., 2024). Evidence from Archer and Gartner's (1976) multi-country comparison suggests that most nations experienced a significant increase in post-war homicide rates, regardless of whether they won or lost the war, or whether their economies improved or deteriorated.

Several explanations are commonly offered for why violent crime can rise in the aftermath of armed conflict. One prominent line of argument points to a wartime "culture of violence": prolonged exposure to conflict may normalise aggressive behaviour and erode social restraints on the use of force (Bara et al.,

2021; Kortukova et al., 2023). As Steenkamp (2005) suggested, societies emerging from war may inherit a more permissive social climate in which violence becomes easier to justify, allowing criminal activity to persist even after formal hostilities end.

Other accounts emphasise the material and organisational legacies of war. Conflicts often leave behind large stocks of weapons and sizeable groups of demobilised veterans, creating conditions in which organised crime can take root and expand. Former combatants – especially those who struggle to reintegrate into civilian life – may be drawn into criminal networks or gangs, and the wider availability of firearms can directly fuel high rates of violent offending (Sobko, 2024). Post-war economic disruption can compound these risks: unemployment, loss of livelihoods, and weakened informal support systems may increase incentives to engage in illicit activities, from acquisitive crime to drug trafficking. In many settings, the immediate post-conflict period is also marked by fragile state capacity, which can give criminal groups the room to consolidate and extend their influence (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

Several studies have emphasised that the relationship between war and post-war violence is not uniform across contexts. Drawing on historical and cross-national evidence, Gartner and Kennedy (2018) argue that armed conflict is often – though not inevitably – followed by elevated levels of violence. In their account, the primary drivers are less likely to arise from the direct physical or psychological harm inflicted by war on individuals, and more likely to arise from the broader damage caused by war on social and economic institutions, the legitimacy of public authority, and intergroup relations in post-conflict societies. The central implication is that post-war settings frequently face an increased risk of violent and organised crime, rooted in the social and economic legacies of conflict (Holovkin et al., 2023). Recognising these patterns matter for both research and policy, because unchecked post-war crime can erode fragile peace settlements and undermine public safety in socie-

ties undergoing a transition (Haraschuk et al., 2020). Survey research is still used relatively infrequently as a tool for forecasting future changes in crime, especially when compared to approaches that rely on official statistics. As a result, the literature provides only limited evidence on the predictive validity of public opinion measures in this domain (Kostruba, 2023). Nevertheless, existing evidence suggests that public assessments often diverge from objective indicators. People tend to overestimate crime levels and assume that crime is rising even when official statistics show stability or decline (Gramlich, 2016; Bohdan et al., 2023). A common explanation is that perceptions are shaped less by direct personal experience and more by the broader information environment. News media, in particular, tend to disproportionately highlight salient and emotionally charged incidents, which can foster a sense that crime is widespread and intensify what is often described as “fear of crime” (Mastrorocco & Minale, 2018).

In contrast, expert assessments are typically grounded in systematic analyses and historical contexts. Criminologists and law-enforcement analysts draw on long-term trends, demographic changes, and other evidence-based indicators to evaluate current conditions or produce forecasts. Their projections, therefore, tend to be more calibrated and may run counter to prevailing public sentiment. For example, where data indicate a sustained downward trend, experts may anticipate continued stability at relatively low levels, even as public concern points toward an impending “crime wave”. There is also evidence that experts and lay respondents prioritise different sources of information when forming judgements about crime (Schneider, 2002).

In Ukraine, Russia’s full-scale invasion has generated multiple criminogenic pressures that are likely to persist after active hostilities cease, including the widespread circulation of firearms and explosives, war-related trauma among civilians and combatants, unemployment, and broader patterns of alcohol and drug abuse.

In this context, forecasting crime trends in the first post-war years is not only an academic exercise, but also a practical necessity. These forecasts can help identify domains where prevention should be prioritised, as well as areas where state oversight and control may need to be strengthened. At the same time, post-war crime forecasting is inherently difficult. Because war and its aftermath can restructure the conventional relationships between social phenomena – while also reshaping demographics and the legal environment – standard forecasting techniques such as extrapolation or computer-based modelling often perform poorly or become unreliable (Macías, 2024). Against this backdrop, expert elicitation becomes a particularly relevant forecasting strategy for periods of heightened uncertainty. Importantly, expert judgements can also be compared with public expectations derived from population surveys. Such comparisons allow researchers to identify points of convergence – areas where experts and lay respondents anticipate similar trajectories – that may provide the most reliable indicators of likely crime trends. Conversely, divergences are also informative: they can reveal blind spots, different informational priors, or contrasting understandings of risk among experts and the general public (Pysmenskyy, 2025; Kovalenko, 2025).

Despite this potential, criminological research rarely integrates population expectations and expert forecasts within a single empirical design, especially in the context of a large-scale interstate war and the complex recovery challenges it generates. This article addresses that gap by analysing two original surveys conducted in 2025: a public opinion survey and an expert survey of criminal justice professionals and scholars. Both instruments measured the expected changes in overall crime, as well as in specific offense categories during the first three years after the end of the war in Ukraine; both instruments also captured perceived drivers of post-war crime dynamics. By placing these datasets side by side, the study offers a comparative picture of how Ukrainians and professional experts envision early post-war crime lev-

els and where their expectations converge or diverge. The aim of this study is to assess and compare public expectations and expert forecasts regarding post-war crime trends in Ukraine during the first three years after the end of the war, focusing on (i) overall crime levels and (ii) offence-specific trajectories.

To operationalise this aim, the article addresses the following research questions: 1. Do members of the public and experts anticipate that the overall level of crime in Ukraine will increase, decrease, or remain stable during the early post-war period? 2. Which offence categories are most frequently expected to increase in the early post-war period, and to what extent do public expectations converge with expert forecasts?

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study draws on two complementary cross-sectional surveys conducted in 2025: (1) an expert survey and (2) a population survey. The design was intentionally comparative: rather than treating either group as a “benchmark,” the study uses both datasets to map areas of convergence and divergence in anticipated post-war crime dynamics during the first three years after the end of large-scale hostilities and the development of a sustainable peace settlement. In total, 1,829 respondents participated in the surveys (125 experts and 1,704 members of the public).

Expert survey

The expert questionnaire was structured into nine thematic blocks and included 19 questions. It was administered online between September 1 and September 16, 2025. Expert recruitment followed a purposive sampling strategy, targeting professionals with direct practice- or research-based competence in crime trends and their determinants. The sample included practitioners (e.g., criminal justice and law-enforcement professionals) and academics (e.g., criminolo-

gists and criminal-law scholars). Expert recruitment covered multiple regions (six oblasts), with the aim of reflecting variation in the regional context and war exposure.

Population survey

The population questionnaire contained 15 questions and the survey was conducted between August 14 and September 16, 2025. Participation was voluntary and based on self-selection via an online link distributed via the social media accounts of the researchers (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Threads), as well as a popular Ukrainian Telegram channel (“Адвокат права”), which served as one of the key dissemination platforms.

Given this recruitment strategy, the population survey should be treated as a non-probability (non-random) sample. Consequently, any representativeness assessment is conditional and interpretive, rather than definitive.

Measures and harmonisation

Both instruments captured expectations about (a) overall crime trends in the early post-war period and (b) expected changes across offence categories, alongside items capturing perceived drivers or contextual factors shaping those expectations. To enable direct comparison, results are reported primarily as direction-of-change distributions (increase/ no change/ decrease). In the case of the expert instrument, which included an explicit “difficult to answer/uncertain” option, these responses were reported descriptively and treated carefully in cross-group comparisons to avoid forcing non-directional answers into directional categories.

A small number of questionnaires included multiple selections for items designed as single-choice. Consistent with data-quality rules, such cases were treated as registration errors and were excluded from further analysis of the relevant indicator (and from subsequent calculations for that indicator), to pre-

serve measurement integrity and comparability across items.

Data collection, ethics, and transparency

Both surveys were administered online via Google Forms and participation was anonymous and voluntary. The analytic dataset did not include any personal information that could violate the anonymity of the participant. The study focuses on expectations and perceptions; it does not request disclosure of sensitive operational details or personal victimisation histories.

Analytical strategy

The primary analysis is descriptive, reporting percentages for each response category to provide an interpretable picture of perceived post-war crime dynamics. Comparative analysis was implemented through direct contrasts of distributions between the public and expert samples.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

1. The population survey was based on voluntary participation and online dissemination, which may over-represent respondents who are more digitally connected, politically attentive, or motivated to engage with public issues. For this reason, the results should be treated as indicative of expectations among participating respondents, rather than as population-wide estimates. The expert survey also relied on purposive recruitment: although this approach is suitable for capturing informed professional judgements, it does not provide a probabilistic representation of all expert communities.
2. Any conventional margin-of-error logic is tied to probability sampling. In a self-selected online survey, such figures, if reported, should be understood only as rough estimates, rather than formal confidence intervals. The main value of the study lies in identi-

fying patterns and comparing distributions between the two samples, rather than producing precise population-level inferences.

3. The study measures expectations, not observed post-war crime rates. These expectations can be influenced by media environments, recent salient events, and professional or personal heuristics. As a result, the findings describe perceived risk trajectories and areas of agreement or disagreement, rather than predicting that these trajectories will inevitably occur.
4. Given that the study examines expectations and expert forecasts regarding a post-war situation that has not yet occurred, the research design is intentionally exploratory and is therefore based on research questions, rather than formal hypotheses.

Overall, these limitations do not diminish the core contribution of the manuscript – mapping where expert and public assessments converge or diverge – but they suggest that the results are best used to inform prioritisation, monitoring, and hypothesis generation, rather than for the exact prediction of rates of post-war crimes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public expectations of post-war crime trends

According to the population survey, most respondents expect an increase in the overall crime level in Ukraine during the first three years after the end of the war. Specifically, 59.5% of respondents indicated that crime would increase significantly, and a further 26.8% anticipated a moderate increase. At the same time, 10.3% of the respondents expected crime levels to remain at approximately the same level as currently observed (during wartime). Only a small proportion of respondents anticipated a decrease in crime (1.5% moderate decrease; 0.3% significant decrease). The option “difficult to answer” was selected by 1.1% of participants, and 0.5% of open-ended responses were coded as “other”.

In addition to the overall assessment, respondents were asked to evaluate expected post-war trends

Table 1

Public expectations of post-war crime trends by offence type (based on the population survey)

Offence category	Increase (%)	No change (%)	Decrease (%)	Multiple responses excluded (%)*
Violent crimes (intentional homicide, bodily injuries, battery and torture)	74.3	20.4	3.3	2.0
Domestic violence (physical, psychological, economic, sexual)	73.7	21.0	4.0	1.2
Hooliganism	57.0	36.5	5.0	1.5
Firearm-related offences in civilian life	78.7	15.8	4.0	1.5
Property offences (theft, robbery, armed robbery, vehicle theft)	50.7	42.2	5.4	1.7
Corruption-related offences (embezzlement, abuse of office, bribery)	49.2	40.2	8.0	2.6
Misuse of humanitarian aid/charitable assistance (profit-driven)	38.2	43.2	15.9	2.7
Cybercrime (hacking, online fraud, personal data theft)	23.4	63.4	11.0	2.2
Drug-related offences (illegal circulation, trafficking)	51.8	41.5	4.6	2.1
Offences under alcohol/drug intoxication	73.7	20.9	3.5	1.9
Juvenile delinquency	23.2	60.9	13.7	2.2
Organised crime	55.9	35.9	6.6	1.6

*Note: "Multiple responses excluded" indicates questionnaires in which respondents selected more than one answer option. As each item was designed as single-choice, these cases were treated as registration errors and excluded from the indicator and all subsequent calculations.

across specific offence types during the first three years after the end of the war. The distribution of responses is summarised in Table 1, which reports the proportions of respondents who expected an increase, no change, or a decrease in different crime categories. In general, the population survey indicates that expectations of post-war increase in crime dominate across most offence types. Respondents predicted a clear increase in firearm-related offences in civilian life (78.7%), violent crimes (74.3%), offences committed under alcohol/drug intoxication (73.7%), and domestic violence (73.7%). A mixed response was observed regarding property offences (50.7% increase; 42.2% no change) and corruption-related offences (49.2% increase; 40.2% no change). On the other hand, stable expectations were reported for cybercrime (63.4% no change) and juvenile delinquency (60.9% no change). Misuse of humanitarian aid showed the most balanced pattern, with 43.2% reporting no change, 38.2% reporting a slight increase, and 15.9% reporting a decrease: based on the respondents in the present study, this offense category is ex-

pected to show the highest reported decrease after the end of the war (15.9%).

The following subsection presents the corresponding expert forecasts for the same post-war period, enabling a direct comparison between public expectations and expert assessments.

Expert forecasts of post-war crime trends

In the expert survey, most respondents expected the overall crime level in Ukraine to increase during the first three years after the end of the war. In total, 76.8% forecasted an increase in crime, including 45.6% who anticipated a significant increase and 31.2% who expected a moderate increase. Only a small minority predicted a decline in crime levels (5.6% in total: 4.8% moderate decrease and 0.8% significant decrease). In addition, 8.0% of respondents believed that crime levels would remain approximately similar to those at the wartime level, while 8.8% selected the "difficult to answer" option. One additional response (0.8%) was recorded as "other", typically framed as a condi-

Table 2

Expert forecasts of post-war crime trends by offence type (based on the expert survey)

Offence category	Increase (%)	No change (%)	Decrease (%)	Difficult to answer/Uncertain (%)	Other/open-ended
Violent crimes (intentional homicide, bodily injuries, battery and torture)	72.8	14.4	2.4	8.8	1.6
Domestic violence (physical, psychological, economic, sexual)	85.6	7.2	2.4	4.8	0.0
Hooliganism	70.4	18.4	0.0	10.4	0.8
Firearm-related offences in civilian life	88.8	7.2	0.8	2.4	0.8
Property offences (theft, robbery, armed robbery, vehicle theft)	76.0	18.4	0.8	3.2	1.6
Corruption-related offences (embezzlement, abuse of office, bribery)	36.0	44.8	7.2	9.6	2.4
Misuse of humanitarian aid/charitable assistance (profit-driven)	31.2	44.0	15.2	9.6	0.0
Cybercrime (hacking, online fraud, personal data theft)	53.6	40.0	0.8	4.0	1.6
Drug-related offences (illegal circulation, trafficking)	50.4	43.2	1.6	4.0	0.8
Juvenile delinquency (offences committed by minors)	36.8	53.6	3.2	6.4	0.0
Organised crime	58.4	30.4	2.4	8.0	0.8

tional forecast, rather than a clear directional change. Beyond the general assessment of overall crime levels, experts were also invited to provide more detailed judgements on expected post-war trends across specific categories of criminal offences during the first three years after the end of the war. The distribution of responses by offence type is summarised in Table 2, which reports the proportions of experts who expected an increase, no change, or a decrease, as well as uncertainty and open-ended responses where applicable.

Overall, experts most frequently predicted an increase in firearm-related offences (88.8%), domestic violence (85.6%), property offences (76.0%), violent crime (72.8%), and hooliganism (70.4%). Conversely, expectations of stability were most frequently reported in relation to juvenile delinquency (53.6%

no change), corruption-related offences (44.8% no change), misuse of humanitarian aid (44.0% no change), and drug-related offences (43.2% no change). Cybercrime was also characterised by a sizeable proportion of stable expectations (40.0%), although a majority of experts still anticipated an increase (53.6%). Uncertainty was highest for hooliganism (10.4%), as well as for corruption-related and humanitarian-aid misuse offences (both 9.6%).

The next subsection compares the expert forecasts with population expectations to identify areas of convergence and divergence across offence types.

Comparative patterns between public expectations and expert forecasts

A direct comparison of the population survey and the expert survey shows convergence on the general direction of post-war change, but also highlights clear differences in intensity and the distribution of non-directional responses. In both samples, most respondents expected overall crime levels to increase during the first three years after the end of the war. However, the proportion of respondents who anticipate an increase in crime was higher in the population survey (86.3%) than in the expert survey (76.8%). The public selected the “significant increase” option more often (59.5%) than the experts (45.6%), while the experts chose the “moderate increase” option more frequently (31.2%) than the public (26.8%). Expectations of a decline in crime were uncommon in both samples, but were more frequent among experts (5.6%) than among the public (1.8%). Experts also selected “difficult to answer” considerably more often than the public (8.8% vs 1.1%), whereas “other” responses were rare in both surveys (0.8% expert; 0.5% public). At the level of offence type (Tables 1 and 2), several categories display close alignment between the two samples. For violent crime, the expected increase is almost identical (public 74.3%; experts 72.8%). Drug-related offences also show near-equivalence (public 51.8%; experts 50.4%), with a similar proportion of expectations of stability (public 41.5%; experts 43.2%). Likewise, expectations regarding organised crime expectations are comparable, with a small difference in the predicted increase (public 55.9%; experts 58.4%). In these categories, the population and expert distributions are broadly consistent in the balance between expectations of an increase and stability, although experts also reported uncertainty (e.g., 8.0% for organised crime; 4.0% for drug offences). The largest proportion of “significant increase” expectations were reported in the weapon-related and interpersonal violence domains, but experts were more likely to select the “significant increase” option than the public. Firearm-related offenses show a

high projected increase in both surveys (public 78.7%; experts 88.8%). Domestic violence also ranks high in both, with a higher proportion of experts reporting an increase (85.6%) than the public (73.7%). Hooliganism shows a similar pattern (expert 70.4%; public 57.0%), with experts reporting no decrease (0.0%) and the public anticipating a modest decrease (5.0%). Responses related to property offences reveal a large gap in expectations: experts strongly favour an increase (76.0%), while the public is divided between increase (50.7%) and stability (42.2%).

Several offence types show the opposite pattern, where a higher proportion of the public reported high increase expectations or stronger stability expectations than experts. For corruption-related offences, the public predicted an increase (49.2%) more often than the experts (36.0%), while the experts more frequently predicted stability (44.8%). A similar, though smaller, difference was observed regarding misuse of humanitarian aid: 38.2% of the public reported expectations of an increase compared to 31.2% of experts, while expectations of stability were nearly the same (public 43.2%; experts 44.0%). Cybercrime is the most divergent category: a large proportion of the public anticipates stability (63.4%) and a smaller proportion expects an increase (23.4%), whereas experts forecasted an increase (53.6%) more often than stability (40.0%). Juvenile delinquency also differed in distribution: the public emphasised stability (60.9%) with a small proportion reporting a notable decrease (13.7%), while experts reported higher expectations of increase (36.8%) and a much smaller expectation of a decrease (3.2%).

Finally, these comparisons should be interpreted in light of minor design differences between the two instruments. In the population survey, a small share of questionnaires contained multiple selections, despite the single-choice format, and were, thus, excluded at the item level (Table 1). In the expert survey, item-level results explicitly included “difficult to answer/uncertain” and occasional open-ended responses (Table 2). After considering these features, Tables 1 and 2 provide a clear empirical basis for identifying

offence categories where public and expert expectations converge (e.g., violent, drug-related, organised crime), as well as where they diverge most distinctly (notably cybercrime, property offences, and juvenile delinquency).

Shared expectations of rising post-war crime

Taken together, the two surveys point in the same general direction: both the public and experts expect overall crime in Ukraine to increase in the first three years post-war. A large proportion of respondents in both samples associated this expectation to psychological trauma and wider weapon availability. Psychological trauma was selected by 92.8% of the public and 79.2% of experts, while weapon circulation was chosen by 82% of the public and 68% of experts. Economic strain was also frequently mentioned, especially by the public (public 85.6%; experts 47.2%), as well as alcohol and drug abuse (public 73.8%; experts 53.6%). Demobilisation is viewed as an important factor by both groups at similar levels (public 66.3%; experts 68.8%). Finally, there is strong agreement that former military personnel may be over-represented among offenders in the early post-war period (public 83.9%; experts 83.2%).

At the level of offence type, the strongest consensus related to violence. Both groups of respondents expect an increase in violent offences, including domestic violence, as well as in incidents involving firearms in civilian life. This pattern is consistent with a post-war environment where stress and interpersonal tensions remain high, and weapon availability can increase both the likelihood of escalation and the severity of harm (Tomljenović, 2024). The alignment on domestic violence is also consistent with the idea that post-war strain may become concentrated within households, where violence is often hidden and sensitive to broader social instability (Godziewicz, 2024).

Beyond these core violence domains, the surveys highlight different secondary concerns. Lay respondents were more likely to link post-war increase in

crime to alcohol- and drug-related offending, suggesting a behavioural pathway from stress and insecurity to everyday lawbreaking. Experts, in contrast, more frequently emphasise property crime and public-order offences, reflecting a more structural assessment of post-war conditions, including economic instability and new opportunities for acquisitive crime during reconstruction.

Taken together, the results suggest that early post-war crime risks are expected to be most significant in the violence and weapon-related domains, while other risks are perceived through different lenses by the public and experts.

CONCLUSIONS

This article represents one of the first attempts in Ukraine to anticipate post-war crime trends after the Russian-Ukrainian war by combining social (public) expectations with expert forecasting. The findings show a strong overlap between the two perspectives. Both the general public and experts largely expect the overall crime levels to increase during the first years after the end of the war. The predominant view in both groups is that there will be an increase in violent crime, including domestic violence, and that violence involving firearms may become more frequent. Beyond these shared expectations, the two groups of respondents highlighted different secondary concerns. A sizeable proportion of the public expects more offences committed under alcohol or drug intoxication, whereas experts more often point to increases in hooliganism and property crime. Finally, the present study underlines an important limitation of these forecasting methods. Sociological and expert surveys are useful for identifying the direction of change – whether crime is expected to rise, fall, or remain stable – but they do not provide a reliable estimate of the magnitude of change in terms of percentage.

The results suggest that the early post-war years may bring higher levels of violence and property crime, highlighting the need for planning and monitoring to

account for this risk. The circulation of illegal firearms appears especially salient, as it can fuel weapon-related incidents and escalate everyday conflicts. Veteran reintegration remains important, particularly access to mental health support, help with substance dependence, and availability of stable jobs. Wider economic strain – poverty, unemployment, and inequality – should also be considered, given its potential links to acquisitive offending.

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