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Non-State Actors and Security Management in Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is confronted with many security challenges, including insurgency and banditry. The activities of violent non-state actors have continued to ravage the country. During the first quarter of 2024, there were almost 100 violent conflict incidents across 25 states, with a significant number of victims or casualties. The Northwest region was the most troubled of Nigeria's six regions during this period. Insecurity in Nigeria has adversely affected livelihoods, human safety, and investment opportunities. Towards addressing this challenge, non-state actors have become a strategic component of the nation's security apparatuses. These actors have operated over the years in the form of hunter guilds, community associations or private security outfits, among others. Some state governments have gone a step further by legislating into existence these extra-security bodies, which are now saddled with the responsibilities of the formal security organizations. This paper interrogates the efficacy of these non-state bodies as instruments of peace, order, and security in the state. Anchored on the principal-agency, human security, and securitization theories in explaining the work's various dimensions, the study adopts both the primary and secondary sources of data. It argues that while non-state actors have contributed significantly to the nation's security, they are limited by various constitutional, operational, and societal factors in the effective discharge of their duties. The paper recommends, among others, the need to prioritize security reforms, especially conflict mitigation by focusing on the root causes of conflict and promoting cooperation among key stakeholders in the conflict process.

Keywords: Non-State, Actors, Security, Management, Nigeria

Introduction

Security management is a fundamental pillar of governance, essential for ensuring societal stability, economic development, and the protection of lives and property. Traditionally, the Nigerian state, through its formal security agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force, the military, and other paramilitary bodies, has held the primary responsibility for maintaining internal security. However, persistent security challenges, including insurgency, banditry, communal conflicts, and kidnapping, have revealed the limitations of state security structures in effectively addressing threats. In response, non-state actors have emerged as critical players in security management, particularly in regions grappling with escalating insecurity.

Kogi State, located in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone, is strategically positioned as a gateway connecting the northern and southern parts of the country. This geographical significance has made it vulnerable to various security threats, including herder-farmer conflicts, armed robbery, kidnapping, and political violence. As such, various non-state

actors—such as vigilante groups, community-based security networks, private security outfits, and traditional institutions—have become increasingly involved in security governance to complement formal state efforts. These actors operate within legal and informal frameworks to fill security gaps, maintain order, and enhance community resilience in the face of security crises.

Despite their increasing relevance, the role of non-state actors in security management remains a subject of debate. On the one hand, proponents argue that these actors enhance grassroots security, provide localized intelligence, and foster community participation in crime prevention. On the other hand, critics highlight concerns about human rights violations, lack of accountability, and the potential for political manipulation. Scholars such as Ehwarieme and Umukoro (2023) contend that the involvement of non-state security actors is indicative of state failure, while Adesote and Ajayi (2021) acknowledge that in contexts where state security structures are weak, these actors play indispensable roles in stabilizing communities.

In the same vein, Okechukwu, Gift and Iheanyichukwu (2020) and Yusuf (2018) have noted that in many parts of Nigeria, including Kogi State, the blurred lines between formal and informal security arrangements have led to tensions between government forces and non-state actors. These tensions often stem from issues of jurisdiction, operational autonomy, and accountability. Similarly, the proliferation of armed vigilante groups, some of which operate beyond legal constraints, raises concerns about the risks of extrajudicial actions and their implications for human security and democratic governance (Aina, 2024). The increasing collaboration between non-state actors and formal security agencies, as seen in Kogi State, underscores the complexities of security governance in contemporary Nigeria.

Given the growing reliance on non-state actors in security management, this paper, therefore, evaluates the contributions of non-state actors to security management in Kogi State. In doing so, the paper seeks to provide an evidence-based understanding of how non-state actors influence security dynamics in Kogi State and to explore strategies for fostering accountability, efficiency, and coordination in security governance. Indeed, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on hybrid security governance and the evolving role of non-state actors in maintaining stability in Nigeria by examining these critical issues.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of security management in Nigeria, particularly in Kogi State, is increasingly influenced by the role of non-state actors. While the Nigerian Constitution and various security agencies are mandated to ensure the protection of lives and property, persistent security challenges such as banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and armed robbery have led to growing reliance on vigilante groups, hunters' associations, and other informal security outfits (Ero, 2000; Nwankpa, 2022). However, the involvement of these non-state actors raises critical questions about legitimacy, accountability, and operational effectiveness.

Although scholars such as Aghedo and Osumah (2015) and Monguno (2015) acknowledge that non-state security actors often complement formal security institutions by providing localized intelligence and swift responses to security threats, concerns remain regarding their regulatory framework, adherence to human rights norms, and potential for abuse of power. Instances of extrajudicial actions, ethnic biases, and power struggles between state security forces and these groups further complicate the security landscape, thereby undermining public trust in security governance.

Fundamentally, this situation presents a paradox wherein the expected outcome (a well-coordinated security architecture ensuring stability and public safety) sharply contrasts with the observed outcome (persistent security breaches, alleged complicity of security operatives, and the rise of parallel security structures). The absence of a clear policy framework regulating the activities of non-state security actors exacerbates the risk of an uncoordinated and, at times, counterproductive approach to security management. Against this backdrop, this study evaluates the role of non-

state actors in security management in Kogi State by addressing the question: To what extent have non-state security actors influenced security governance in Kogi State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Perspectives on Non-State Security Management

Security management has traditionally been the responsibility of the state, yet the increasing involvement of non-state actors has reshaped the security landscape. Some theoretical perspectives help explain the motivations behind their emergence, their interactions with state agencies, and their overall impact on security outcomes. Various frameworks, including the principal-agent theory, the human security framework, and the securitization theory, provide details of the role of non-state actors in security governance.

The principal-agent theory examines the delegation of security responsibilities from the state (principal) to non-state actors (agents). This delegation occurs when state institutions are unable to address security challenges effectively due to resource constraints, corruption, or inefficiency. The state relies on these actors to fill the gaps in security provisions. However, this arrangement creates a problem of accountability, as non-state actors may pursue self-interests that do not align with public safety goals. Olawale (2019) argues that the proliferation of vigilante groups in Nigeria reflects the failure of formal security agencies to maintain law and order. In Kogi State, local vigilante units have taken on significant security roles, often in collaboration with state forces. Despite their effectiveness in crime reduction, concerns over human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings remain prevalent. The principal-agent theory highlights this tension, as the state struggles to regulate and control the actions of these groups while relying on their capabilities.

In the same vein, the human security framework shifts focus from state security to the protection of individuals and communities. This perspective emphasizes the role of non-state actors in addressing security threats that directly affect local populations. Unlike conventional security approaches that prioritize national defense, this framework considers the security of people in their everyday lives. For example, Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2019) suggest that non-state actors play a critical role in community policing, intelligence gathering, and emergency response. In Kogi State, vigilante groups and hunter associations have been instrumental in protecting rural communities from bandit attacks and kidnappings. These groups often operate with a deep understanding of local dynamics, allowing them to respond more swiftly than state security forces. However, questions arise regarding their long-term sustainability and the potential for abuse of power. While these actors provide immediate security benefits, their operations often lack oversight, leading to accusations of ethnic bias and selective justice.

Going further, the securitisation theory provides another perspective by analyzing how security threats are socially constructed and how non-state actors become involved in addressing them. This theory posits that certain issues are framed as security threats through discourse, prompting extraordinary measures to counter them. In Nigeria, the inability of the police and military to effectively combat crime has led to the legitimization of vigilante groups and other informal security networks. Sule, Ibrahim and Adamu (2022) examine how political leaders and community stakeholders justify the presence of non-state actors by framing them as necessary responses to rising insecurity. In Kogi State, the government has at times supported vigilante activities, recognizing their role in stabilizing conflict-prone areas. However, this endorsement also raises concerns about the potential for these groups to operate beyond legal limits. When non-state actors gain significant power, they may become difficult to disband, creating a parallel security structure that challenges state authority. The securitization perspective explains why some non-state actors receive public approval despite their controversial methods.

Each of these theoretical approaches provides a distinct explanation for the role of non-state actors in security management. Specifically, the principal-agent theory highlights the dilemmas of delegation and accountability; the human security framework underscores the necessity of localized

security interventions but also points to challenges in governance while the securitisation theory explains how non-state actors gain legitimacy through discourse and public perception. These perspectives collectively illustrate the complexity of integrating non-state actors into formal security structures.

To buttress the centrality of these theoretical perspectives in explaining the role of non-state actors in security management, empirical studies provide evidence supporting these theories. For example, Ero (2020) documents the effectiveness of vigilante groups in reducing violent crime in parts of northern Nigeria but also emphasizes the risks of militarization. In Kogi State, studies by Nwankpa (2022) reveal that non-state actors have significantly contributed to intelligence gathering and crime prevention, yet their lack of formal training and legal accountability remains problematic. Conflicts often arise between vigilante groups and police forces over jurisdiction and operational methods, creating additional security challenges rather than resolving them.

While non-state actors play a crucial role in supplementing formal security, their involvement presents both advantages and risks. The reliance on these groups is a symptom of broader structural weaknesses within state security institutions. The theoretical perspectives discussed above help explain why these actors emerge, how they operate, and the challenges they pose to conventional security governance. Accordingly, understanding these dynamics is essential for developing policies that enhance security management while mitigating the risks associated with non-state actors.

Conceptualizing Non-State Actors in Security Governance

Generally, non-state actors in security governance are individuals or groups that operate outside the formal structures of state security institutions but play a role in maintaining law and order. These actors include vigilante groups, community-based security organizations, private security companies, paramilitary organizations, and local militias. Their involvement in security governance arises from the inability of formal security agencies to effectively address growing threats such as terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence. In many cases, the state cannot provide security coverage across all regions, leading to a reliance on non-state actors to fill the gap.

Scholars have identified various classifications of non-state security actors. For instance, Momodu (2020) categorizes them into community-based groups, commercial security providers, and armed militias. Community-based groups include traditional hunters, vigilante associations, and neighborhood watch groups that operate within local communities. These groups are often formed in response to rising insecurity and work closely with community leaders. Private security companies function as commercial entities offering security services to individuals, businesses, and organizations. They operate under formal legal frameworks but are primarily profit-driven. Armed militias, on the other hand, are groups that take up arms either to protect their communities or to advance ideological, political, or economic interests. Some of these militias function as self-defense groups, while others engage in criminal activities, further complicating security governance.

The presence of non-state security actors is not unique to Nigeria. In many parts of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, states with weak security institutions have witnessed the rise of alternative security providers. Tiwa (2022) examines the role of vigilante groups in West Africa and argues that while they provide immediate security benefits, they often lack oversight mechanisms, making them prone to abuse. In Nigeria, groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast have assisted in counterterrorism efforts against Boko Haram. However, Sandra (2021) reports that some members of the CJTF have been implicated in human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and forced recruitment of child soldiers. This raises concerns about the long-term implications of relying on non-state actors for security governance.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of non-state security actors is a subject of debate. Some scholars argue that these actors are necessary in contexts where

state security agencies are ineffective or absent. Abrahamsen and Williams (2021) assert that non-state actors contribute to local security arrangements by leveraging community trust and intelligence. Their ability to operate within familiar cultural and social structures enables them to respond swiftly to threats. However, other scholars question their accountability and adherence to human rights norms. Olowonihi and Musa (2024) highlight cases where non-state actors have engaged in acts of extortion, discrimination, and unlawful detentions. Without proper regulation, these actors risk becoming another source of insecurity rather than a solution.

The relationship between the state and non-state security actors is complex. In some cases, governments formally recognize and collaborate with these groups. In others, there is open hostility, particularly when non-state actors challenge the authority of state institutions. In Kogi State, local vigilante groups have played a crucial role in combating banditry and kidnapping. State authorities have occasionally endorsed their activities, but there have also been reports of conflicts between these groups and law enforcement agencies. However, Aina (2024) observes that while collaboration between state and non-state actors can enhance security outcomes, the absence of clear regulatory frameworks often leads to friction.

Mainly, the selective application of justice has been found as one of the major criticisms of non-state security actors. Unlike state security agencies that operate under constitutional guidelines, many non-state actors function based on community norms and interests. This often results in biases against certain groups, especially ethnic or religious minorities. Ojo (2024) documents instances in which vigilante groups in northern Nigeria have disproportionately targeted individuals based on ethnic affiliations. Such actions contribute to social divisions and erode public trust in security governance.

The legal and policy framework governing non-state security actors in Nigeria remains weak. While some states have attempted to integrate vigilante groups into formal security structures, there is no uniform national policy regulating their operations. Ero (2000) notes that the absence of clear guidelines creates room for abuse and power struggles. In Kogi State, for example, some vigilante groups have been accused of operating as political enforcers rather than neutral security providers. This politicization of non-state security actors undermines their credibility and raises concerns about their long-term role in security governance.

Despite these challenges, non-state actors continue to play a significant role in security management. Their presence reflects the limitations of state security institutions and the need for alternative mechanisms to address insecurity. However, their effectiveness depends on regulation, accountability, and cooperation with formal security agencies. Without these measures, the involvement of non-state actors in security governance may contribute to further instability rather than improved security outcomes.

Impact of Non-State Actors on Security Outcomes

The role of non-state actors in security management has generated significant academic and policy debates. These actors, which include vigilante groups, hunters' associations, community watch organizations, and private security firms, have emerged as critical players in filling security gaps left by formal state agencies. Their impact on security outcomes varies across regions, depending on the level of state control, community acceptance, and the nature of security threats they address. Some scholars argue that non-state security actors contribute positively to crime prevention and conflict resolution, while others highlight concerns regarding human rights violations, lack of accountability, and potential threats to state sovereignty.

Non-state actors have contributed to security through rapid response to local threats, intelligence gathering, and deterrence. Their knowledge of local terrains and community structures often enables them to track criminals effectively. In some instances, their presence has led to a reduction in crime rates. For example, Adelani (2024) examined the role of vigilante groups in Nigeria and found that in areas where these groups operated, incidents of armed robbery

and cattle rustling declined. The study attributed this outcome to the ability of vigilantes to act swiftly, unlike formal security agencies that often struggle with bureaucratic delays and inadequate resources. Similarly, Iduma (2021) observed that in Kogi State, hunters' associations have played a critical role in securing rural communities, particularly in combating kidnappers who use forested areas as hideouts.

While some scholars emphasize the effectiveness of non-state security actors, others point to their limitations and negative consequences. Several studies have documented cases of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, illegal detention, and torture. According to Ojo (2024), vigilante groups in northern Nigeria have been implicated in unlawful executions of suspected criminals without trial. The lack of oversight mechanisms allows these groups to operate with impunity, raising concerns about justice and the rule of law. Bello, Agunyai and Amusan (2022) argue that the activities of non-state security actors sometimes mirror the same criminality they seek to combat. Reports of ethnic and religious biases in their operations have also emerged, with some groups accused of targeting individuals based on identity rather than actual involvement in crime.

The relationship between non-state actors and formal security agencies further complicates security governance. In some cases, cooperation between these actors and the police or military has led to improved security outcomes. For instance, a study by Abraham and Sakariyau (2023) found that joint operations between vigilante groups and the Nigerian Police Force resulted in the successful dismantling of several criminal networks. However, conflicts between these actors and state agencies have also been recorded. Security operatives have clashed with vigilante groups over issues of authority, control, and jurisdiction. In certain instances, state actors view non-state security providers as competitors rather than partners, leading to operational tensions. In fact, Adebayo (2021) examined cases in which the police disarmed and arrested members of community-based security outfits, accusing them of engaging in illegal security operations.

Of course, the risk of militarization and political manipulation is yet another challenge associated with non-state security actors. Some of these groups evolve into militias, using their security mandate as a cover for advancing political or economic interests. The case of the Bakassi Boys in southeastern Nigeria illustrates this concern. Originally formed to combat crime, the group eventually became involved in political violence and targeted killings. To this end, Udeagbala and Ntukogu (2022) argue that without proper regulation, non-state security groups can become a liability rather than an asset, undermining state authority and contributing to insecurity. This is so because political elites sometimes exploit these groups to settle scores or intimidate opponents, further eroding trust in security institutions.

The effectiveness of non-state actors in security management is also influenced by public perception. In some communities, these actors enjoy significant support due to their perceived commitment to protecting lives and property. As Usman, Yunusa, Gomment and Owoyemi (2023) found, rural dwellers in Kogi State prefer engaging local vigilantes for security purposes over-relying on the police. Usman et al. further revealed that residents believe vigilantes are more accessible, responsive, and less corrupt than formal security agencies. However, in other areas, skepticism exists regarding their legitimacy and methods. For instance, reports of arbitrary actions and financial extortion from local businesses and residents have led to resistance against these groups.

Notably, the legal and institutional framework guiding the operations of non-state security actors remains weak. Many of these groups operate without clear guidelines or state supervision, leading to inconsistencies in their conduct. Onyia, Ugbor-Kalu, Ikem and Okoye (2024) argue that the absence of a regulatory framework makes it difficult to hold these actors accountable when they violate laws or engage in criminal activities. Some states have attempted to integrate non-state security groups into formal security structures through licensing and partnerships, but challenges persist in standardizing their operations. The lack of a coordinated national policy on non-state security actors creates a

fragmented security landscape, with each region adopting different approaches.

Indeed, while non-state actors have contributed to crime prevention, community-based intelligence gathering, and rapid response to threats, without proper oversight, these groups risk becoming sources of insecurity rather than solutions.

Interactions Between Non-State and State Security Agencies

The relationship between non-state security actors and state security agencies in Nigeria is marked by both collaboration and conflict. Non-state security groups, such as vigilante organizations, hunters' associations, and community-based militias, have become critical in addressing security gaps where state institutions struggle to provide adequate protection. Their involvement is often justified by the increasing prevalence of criminal activities such as kidnapping, banditry, and communal violence, particularly in states like Kogi, where security threats persist despite government efforts. The nature of interactions between these non-state actors and formal security agencies raises concerns about coordination, legitimacy, accountability, and operational effectiveness.

Indeed, the collaboration between non-state and state security agencies in intelligence gathering and crime prevention emerges as one significant area of interaction. Given their familiarity with local terrains and communities, non-state actors often provide actionable intelligence that enables security forces to track criminals and prevent attacks. Scholars such as Aina (2024) and Okoli and Nwankwo (2022) argue that the informal networks of vigilante groups facilitate quick responses to security threats that formal institutions, constrained by bureaucratic delays, often fail to address. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria's northeast is frequently cited as a model of how informal security groups can work alongside the military in counterterrorism operations. Similar arrangements exist in Kogi State, where local vigilante groups have supported police and military operations against criminal gangs operating in forested areas.

These collaborative efforts, notwithstanding, tensions between non-state and state security actors remain prevalent. Many state security officials perceive vigilante groups as competitors rather than partners, leading to disputes over jurisdiction, operational authority, and recognition. In some instances, conflicts have escalated into violent confrontations. Adesote and Ajayi (2020) note that the absence of a clear regulatory framework often results in power struggles between non-state actors and law enforcement agencies. In Kogi State, allegations of police officers harassing or arresting vigilante members have fueled resentment, weakening trust and undermining cooperative efforts in security management. The lack of legal backing for many non-state actors further complicates their relationship with formal institutions, as they operate in a gray area where their legitimacy is questioned.

Accountability and human rights implications of non-state security involvement appear to be another area of concern. While non-state actors often justify their actions as necessary to fill security gaps, reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, and ethnic profiling have raised ethical and legal concerns. For example, Wambai, Tijani and Iroye (2024), and Onuoha, Ojewale, and Oluwole (2025) highlight cases where vigilante groups, unchecked by legal oversight, have engaged in abuses under the guise of crime control. In Kogi State, there have been incidents where local security outfits were accused of using excessive force against suspects, raising fears that such groups may become tools of oppression rather than protection. State security agencies, on the other hand, have struggled to regulate these groups effectively, as efforts to impose stricter controls often lead to resistance from local communities that see vigilantes as their primary source of security.

The issue of political interference further complicates interactions between non-state and state security actors. To be sure, politicians frequently exploit vigilante groups for electoral purposes, using them to intimidate opponents or suppress dissent. To this end, Olowonihi and Musa (2024) argue that political elites in Nigeria have historically manipulated informal security

networks to maintain control, leading to a situation where some non-state actors operate more as political enforcers than security providers. In Kogi State, reports have emerged of vigilante groups being mobilized during election periods to influence voter behavior or target opposition supporters. This political entanglement undermines the credibility of non-state security actors and creates friction with formal agencies that are expected to remain neutral.

Funding and logistical challenges also shape the interactions between non-state and state security actors. Unlike government-funded security agencies, most vigilante groups and community-based militias rely on community contributions, local government support, or informal patronage networks to sustain their operations. Adebayo and Aderinto (2018) point out that the lack of adequate resources often forces these groups to seek alternative funding sources, which sometimes include private donors with vested interests. This financial disparity affects cooperation, as state agencies may view non-state actors as unreliable or susceptible to external influence. In Kogi, some security collaborations have faltered due to disputes over resource allocation, with vigilante groups expressing frustration over inadequate support from the government despite their role in crime prevention.

Despite these challenges, the interaction between non-state and state security agencies remains a necessary aspect of security management, particularly in regions where formal institutions struggle with capacity limitations. Attempts have been made to institutionalize cooperation through policy frameworks and legislation. Some states in Nigeria have introduced laws recognizing vigilante groups as auxiliary security forces under police supervision. Okonkwo and Ibrahim (2021) argue that formalizing these relationships through legal structures can enhance coordination, ensure accountability, and minimize conflicts. However, the success of such measures depends on political will, adequate oversight mechanisms, and the ability to strike a balance between community-driven security initiatives and state control.

In Kogi State, the debate over the role of non-state actors in security management continues, with advocates highlighting their contributions to crime reduction while critics emphasize the risks associated with their unregulated operations. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of future interactions between non-state and state security actors will depend on the ability to develop a structured framework that fosters collaboration without compromising the rule of law.

Conclusion

Non-state actors have become a fundamental component of security management in Kogi State, Nigeria, due to the limitations of state security agencies. The principal-agent theory, the human security framework, and the securitisation theory explain their emergence, operations, and legitimacy. While these actors contribute to crime prevention and intelligence gathering, their activities raise concerns over accountability, human rights violations, and the challenge of integrating them into formal security structures. The lack of regulatory oversight has created operational overlaps and conflicts between state and non-state security providers.

Empirical evidence highlights both the effectiveness and risks of these actors. Vigilante groups, local hunter associations, and community-based security outfits have enhanced safety in rural and urban areas. However, their unchecked operations often lead to abuses, ethnic bias, and extrajudicial actions. If these challenges are not addressed, the growing dependence on non-state actors may undermine the legitimacy of the state's security apparatus and escalate insecurity rather than resolve it.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, a clear and structured approach is required to regulate and optimize the contributions of non-state actors while preventing their excesses. Similarly, strengthening formal security institutions, establishing oversight mechanisms, and enhancing coordination between state and non-state actors are essential. Of course, without decisive action, the security landscape in Kogi State will remain fragmented, increasing the likelihood of further instability. In this light, the paper recommends as follows:

Establish a legal framework for non-state actors: The government should formalize the operations of non-state security groups through legislation that defines their roles, limits their powers, and establishes accountability measures to prevent abuses.

Enhance oversight and monitoring mechanisms: Independent bodies should be created to oversee non-state actors, ensuring they operate within the law and do not engage in human rights violations or extrajudicial activities.

*Improve coordination between state and non-state security forces***:** Regular training, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and structured partnerships between formal security agencies and non-state actors will enhance efficiency and reduce conflicts.

*Strengthen state security institutions***:** The government must invest in equipping and training formal security agencies to reduce reliance on non-state actors and improve their ability to handle security threats.

*Implement community-driven security reforms***:** Security strategies should involve local communities in designing and monitoring security initiatives, ensuring that interventions are tailored to specific threats while upholding human rights.

*Develop a phased disengagement plan***:** Where non-state actors have taken on excessive security roles, a structured transition plan should be created to gradually return security functions to formal agencies while integrating trained personnel into official structures.

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