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## **Influence of Populism on International Trade Policies in Latin America**

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## Influence of Populism on International Trade Policies in Latin America

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the influence of populism on international trade policies in Latin America.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study found that populism has significantly influenced international trade policies by promoting a shift toward protectionist measures. As populist leaders prioritize domestic industries and workers, there is often a push to re-evaluate existing trade agreements and relationships. This trend frequently involves imposing tariffs and trade barriers, which aim to shield local economies from perceived external threats. Additionally, populist rhetoric typically frames international trade as a zero-sum

game, fostering nationalism and economic isolationism. Ultimately, the rise of populism disrupts established trade norms and compels policymakers to critically assess the socio-economic impacts of globalization, often at the expense of broader international cooperation.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Political economy of populism, dependency theory and constructivist theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the influence of populism on international trade policies in Latin America. Policymakers should focus on developing balanced trade policies that protect local industries while fostering international relations. Governments must adopt adaptive trade policies that include provisions for safeguarding vulnerable sectors without extreme protectionism. Establishing monitoring and evaluation systems for trade policies will allow for timely adjustments in response to populist pressures.

**Keywords:** *Populism, Trade Policies, Latin America*

## INTRODUCTION

Populism has emerged as a significant force in contemporary politics, influencing various facets of governance, including international trade policies. International trade policies in developed economies like the USA and Japan are primarily centered on promoting exports, protecting domestic industries, and negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) to enhance market access. In the USA, trade policies have shifted in recent years, with an emphasis on renegotiating existing agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was replaced by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2020. This agreement impacted over \$1.4 trillion in trade annually. Japan, on the other hand, has focused on multilateral agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), signed in 2018. Trade data show that Japan's total exports rose by 2.3% between 2018 and 2022, driven by the CPTPP's influence on expanding markets for Japanese goods (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2022).

In developing economies, international trade policies are often focused on promoting industrialization and export diversification to reduce dependency on primary commodities. For example, India has embraced a mix of protectionist measures and FTAs, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which India negotiated but opted out of in 2019 due to concerns about protecting local industries. Between 2018 and 2022, India's exports of manufactured goods increased by 15%, indicating the growing importance of diversification in its trade policy (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2022). Similarly, Brazil's trade policies emphasize export promotion in agricultural and industrial sectors while maintaining protective tariffs to support local industries. Brazilian exports grew by 4% from 2018 to 2022, with agricultural products accounting for a significant portion of this growth (World Bank, 2022).

Indonesia and Vietnam, have implemented international trade policies aimed at integrating into global value chains and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Indonesia has focused on reducing trade barriers and signing trade agreements such as the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) in 2020, which has expanded access to Australia's market, especially for agricultural exports. Between 2018 and 2022, Indonesia's exports increased by 13%, reflecting the impact of improved trade relations (Indonesian Ministry of Trade, 2022). Vietnam, on the other hand, has pursued an aggressive strategy of signing multiple FTAs, including the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), which came into force in 2020. As a result, Vietnam's export growth surged by 22% between 2018 and 2022, with electronics and textiles playing a significant role (Vietnam Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2022).

Similarly, Turkey has balanced protectionist measures with open trade policies, capitalizing on its strategic location between Europe and Asia. Turkey's trade policies have focused on signing customs union agreements with the European Union and fostering trade relations with neighboring countries in the Middle East. From 2018 to 2022, Turkey's exports grew by 8%, driven by increased demand for automotive and textile products in European markets (World Bank, 2022). These examples demonstrate that trade policies in developing economies are often geared toward enhancing participation in global markets while protecting domestic industries and encouraging diversification.

Nigeria and Ethiopia have pursued trade policies that focus on promoting regional trade and boosting local industries. Nigeria's international trade policies emphasize import substitution through tariffs on agricultural products and manufactured goods while also engaging in regional trade agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Between 2018 and 2022, Nigeria's non-oil exports increased by 10%, driven by agricultural exports such as cocoa and sesame seeds (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, 2022). Ethiopia, on the other hand, has focused on export-oriented industrialization, with policies geared toward developing its manufacturing sector. Ethiopia's membership in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has supported a 5% rise in exports between 2018 and 2022, particularly in textiles and leather products (World Bank, 2022).

Zambia and Senegal, are also shaping their trade policies to enhance economic growth and strengthen regional integration. Zambia's trade policy has focused on promoting exports of copper, which is its primary export product, while also striving for export diversification in agriculture and manufacturing. Between 2018 and 2022, Zambia's exports grew by 7%, with copper accounting for over 70% of total exports. Efforts to diversify have resulted in modest increases in agricultural exports like maize and tobacco, supported by regional agreements such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Senegal, on the other hand, has implemented trade policies aimed at boosting its export of fisheries, groundnuts, and phosphates. Senegal's participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and its active engagement in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have bolstered its trade with both regional and international partners. From 2018 to 2022, Senegal's exports rose by 5%, largely due to improved market access within ECOWAS and enhanced trade facilitation at its ports (World Bank, 2022). These policies reflect the growing emphasis on regional integration and export diversification as key pillars of trade policy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Similarly, in Sub-Saharan economies like Ghana has adopted trade policies to improve regional cooperation, notably through its active participation in AfCFTA and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Ghana's trade policies prioritize the export of gold and cocoa, and the country saw a 6% increase in total exports from 2018 to 2022, largely due to improved access to regional markets (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). These examples illustrate the focus of sub-Saharan economies on regional integration and industrialization to enhance trade volumes and economic growth.

Sub-Saharan economies often pursue international trade policies focused on regional integration and trade facilitation to overcome infrastructure and market access challenges. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2021, is a prime example of such efforts, aiming to create a single market for goods and services across the continent. In South Africa, trade policy has increasingly emphasized expanding intra-African trade, with exports to other African countries rising by 7% between 2020 and 2022 (UNCTAD, 2023). Kenya's trade policies have similarly focused on regional agreements, particularly within the East African Community (EAC), leading to a 5% increase in exports between 2018 and 2022 (World Trade Organization, 2022). Overall, sub-Saharan economies are seeing gradual growth in trade volumes as a result of enhanced regional cooperation and trade facilitation measures.

Uganda and Tanzania have also been shaping their international trade policies to foster economic growth and regional integration. Uganda's trade policy emphasizes enhancing agricultural exports and integrating into regional markets, especially within the East African Community (EAC).

Between 2018 and 2022, Uganda's total exports increased by 8%, with coffee, fish, and tea being its main exports (Bank of Uganda, 2022). Uganda's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has also allowed it to expand its trade relations within Africa, capitalizing on tariff reductions.

Similarly, Tanzania has adopted trade policies focused on export diversification and infrastructure development to support its growing manufacturing sector. Between 2018 and 2022, Tanzania's exports grew by 6%, largely due to increased exports of minerals such as gold and agricultural products like cashew nuts (Tanzania Revenue Authority, 2022). Tanzania's trade policy emphasizes improving trade facilitation through port expansions and participating in regional economic communities such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These strategies are helping sub-Saharan countries like Uganda and Tanzania gradually increase their participation in international trade, improve export volumes, and integrate with global and regional markets.

Populism is a political ideology that often focuses on representing the "common people" against elites, perceived outsiders, or corrupt institutions. It typically manifests in four key forms: economic populism, right-wing populism, left-wing populism, and nativist populism. Economic populism focuses on protectionist policies, where trade barriers are increased to protect domestic industries, as seen in the U.S. under Donald Trump's "America First" trade policy, which led to tariffs on Chinese goods (Pettifor, 2019). Right-wing populism, prevalent in Europe, often favors restricting international trade, particularly with countries seen as unfair competitors, emphasizing nationalism over global cooperation (Mudde, 2021). Nativist populism, found in both developed and developing countries, tends to oppose free trade policies and immigration, as such policies are often viewed as benefiting elites at the expense of ordinary citizens (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2020).

Populism's influence on international trade policies often leads to significant changes in trade agreements and foreign economic relations. Left-wing populism, evident in countries like Venezuela, advocates for nationalizing industries and reducing reliance on international trade, viewing it as a tool of capitalist exploitation (Panizza, 2019). This contrasts with economic populism, where trade protection is viewed as a mechanism to shield domestic workers from unfair foreign competition, as seen in Brazil's imposition of tariffs to protect its industrial sector (Baker, 2020). Across these forms, populist policies frequently disrupt global trade agreements and lead to uncertainty in international markets, with increased protectionism or unilateral actions to reshape trade balances, as observed in the renegotiation of NAFTA into the USMCA (Pettifor, 2019). Ultimately, populist ideologies across the political spectrum share skepticism toward globalized trade and tend to favor domestic industries over multilateral trade agreements.

### **Problem Statement**

The rise of populism in Latin America has significantly influenced the region's international trade policies, leading to increased protectionism, renegotiation of trade agreements, and a shift toward nationalist economic strategies. Populist leaders often advocate for policies that prioritize domestic industries and reduce reliance on global markets, challenging the integration of Latin American economies into the global trading system (Baker, 2020). This protectionist stance has resulted in fluctuating trade relationships, particularly in countries like Brazil and Argentina, where tariffs and trade restrictions have been imposed on imports to protect local industries. Such policies disrupt regional trade agreements like MERCOSUR and create uncertainties for foreign investors

(Panizza, 2019). Furthermore, populist-driven policies have led to the re-nationalization of industries in some countries, negatively impacting foreign trade partnerships and economic stability (Levitsky & Roberts, 2020). The challenge is understanding the extent to which populist policies hinder international trade cooperation and economic growth in Latin America.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Political Economy of Populism**

The political economy of populism theory explores how populist leaders mobilize public support by appealing to popular sentiments against elites and established institutions. Originated by scholars such as Jan Zielonka, this theory examines the economic motivations behind populist policies, emphasizing the distribution of resources and power (Zielonka, 2022). In the context of Latin America, this theory is relevant as it elucidates how populist leaders justify protectionist trade policies by framing them as necessary to defend national interests against foreign exploitation, which can disrupt established trade relationships and regional cooperation.

### **Dependency Theory**

Dependency theory posits that underdeveloped countries are economically dependent on developed nations, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequality. Originally formulated by scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, this theory has been adapted to contemporary contexts by examining how populist movements challenge dependency through protectionist measures (Gereffi, 2019). In Latin America, this theory is relevant as it helps analyze how populist leaders may promote trade policies aimed at reducing dependence on global markets, which can lead to re-nationalization and a focus on local production.

### **Constructivist Theory**

Constructivist theory focuses on the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping political behavior and institutions. Pioneered by Alexander Wendt, it emphasizes that political actors' perceptions and social constructs influence policy decisions (Wendt, 2018). This theory is pertinent to the study of populism in Latin America, as it highlights how populist leaders construct narratives around national identity and sovereignty to justify protectionist trade policies, influencing public perception and political outcomes.

### **Empirical Review**

Baker (2020) analyzed the impact of populism on Brazil's trade policies, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that included qualitative interviews with policymakers and quantitative analysis of trade data over the past decade. The primary purpose of the study was to explore how populist rhetoric has reshaped Brazil's trade landscape. Findings indicated that under populist leadership, there was a marked increase in tariffs on various imports, which was primarily aimed at protecting domestic industries and responding to public discontent with globalization. The study revealed that such measures led to short-term gains in some sectors, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, as local producers benefitted from reduced competition. However, it also highlighted significant negative repercussions on Brazil's international trade relations, including strained ties with traditional trading partners. The author recommended that policymakers consider the long-term implications of these protectionist policies on Brazil's economic growth and competitiveness in the global market. Moreover, Baker emphasized the need for a more balanced approach that supports local industries while maintaining Brazil's role as an active player in international trade.

The research contributes to understanding the broader implications of populism on economic policy, particularly in emerging economies like Brazil, where populist leaders often prioritize national interests at the expense of international commitments.

Mazzolini and Vargas (2021) examined Argentina's trade policies under populist administrations, employing a case study methodology that involved analyzing specific policy changes and their economic impacts. The study aimed to investigate how populist governance has altered the country's approach to international trade, focusing on the implications of import restrictions and tariffs. Their findings indicated that while these restrictions led to immediate benefits for local producers, particularly in agriculture, they ultimately hindered the country's overall economic competitiveness and growth potential. The research uncovered a pattern where populist leaders utilized trade protection as a tool to garner public support, but this often resulted in retaliatory measures from trading partners. Additionally, the authors found that such isolationist policies contributed to rising inflation and diminished foreign investment in Argentina. As a result, they recommended that the government foster a more sustainable balance between protecting local industries and engaging in meaningful international trade agreements. This study underscores the complexities and trade-offs associated with populist trade policies in Latin America, emphasizing the importance of long-term strategic planning over short-term political gains. By critically evaluating Argentina's experience, the authors contribute valuable insights into the broader discourse on populism and trade policy.

Panizza (2019) investigated the role of left-wing populism in reshaping trade policies in Venezuela through a historical analysis of policy changes over the past two decades. The purpose of the study was to assess how populist governance influenced Venezuela's trade dynamics and economic interactions with other nations. The findings revealed that populist policies led to significant trade isolation, characterized by the imposition of strict import controls and tariffs aimed at protecting domestic industries. While such measures initially appeared to bolster local production, they ultimately resulted in economic decline and exacerbated the country's dependency on oil revenues. The research emphasized that Venezuela's retreat from international trade agreements had dire consequences for its economy, leading to shortages of essential goods and services. Panizza argued that restoring Venezuela's trade relations is crucial for economic recovery and long-term sustainability. He recommended engaging in dialogue with international partners to renegotiate trade terms that could facilitate reintegration into the global market. This study contributes to understanding the interplay between populism and international trade, highlighting how populist policies can lead to unintended economic repercussions. By analyzing Venezuela's case, the research adds to the discourse on the potential pitfalls of populism in shaping trade policy.

Levitsky and Roberts (2020) explored how populist leaders in Latin America leverage anti-globalization sentiments to influence trade policy, utilizing surveys and public opinion data to assess public attitudes toward trade. The study aimed to understand the correlation between populist sentiment and support for protectionist measures in various Latin American countries. The findings indicated a significant relationship between rising populism and increased public support for trade barriers, suggesting that populist leaders effectively mobilized anti-globalization narratives to justify protectionist policies. The authors noted that these narratives resonated particularly well in contexts where economic inequality and unemployment were prevalent, allowing populist leaders to position themselves as champions of the working class against perceived foreign threats. The research emphasized the need for policymakers to enhance public

dialogue on the benefits of global trade and address the underlying economic grievances that fuel populist sentiments. Levitsky and Roberts recommended implementing educational campaigns that highlight the positive aspects of trade while acknowledging the concerns of vulnerable populations. This study contributes to the understanding of the social dynamics underlying populist influence on trade policy, emphasizing the importance of public perception in shaping political outcomes.

Morales (2022) analyzed trade policy changes in Bolivia under populist administrations, utilizing econometric models to assess the impact on export performance over a twenty-year period. The primary purpose of the study was to evaluate how populist policies have affected Bolivia's trade dynamics and economic growth. The findings revealed that while populist policies led to immediate gains in certain sectors, particularly in agriculture and natural resources, they ultimately reduced the overall competitiveness of Bolivia's exports. Morales identified a concerning trend of increasing isolationism, with populist leaders prioritizing national production at the expense of international trade engagement. He recommended that Bolivia adopt a more gradual approach to trade liberalization, allowing local industries to adapt while maintaining access to global markets. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of diversifying export products to reduce dependency on a limited number of commodities. By examining Bolivia's experience, Morales contributed valuable insights into the complexities of balancing populism and trade policy, underscoring the need for sustainable economic strategies in the face of populist pressures.

Cruz and Salas (2023) explored the influence of populism on Chile's trade agreements, utilizing policy analysis and interviews with trade officials to assess the impact of populist rhetoric on international relations. The study aimed to understand how rising populism affected Chile's willingness to engage in new trade agreements and maintain existing partnerships. The findings revealed that populist rhetoric created significant barriers to entering new trade agreements, leading to a cautious approach among policymakers. This reluctance was primarily driven by fears of backlash from constituents concerned about job losses and foreign competition. The authors emphasized the need for Chile to re-engage with its trade partners and seek collaborative solutions that address public concerns while promoting economic growth. They recommended implementing policies that emphasize the benefits of trade and reassure citizens about the protections in place for vulnerable industries. This research provides important insights into the intersection of populism and trade policy, highlighting the challenges faced by countries like Chile in navigating the complex landscape of international trade amid rising populist sentiments.

Rojas and Zuniga (2021) examined the relationship between populism and trade protectionism in Central America, employing panel data analysis to evaluate trade policy outcomes across several countries. The study aimed to investigate how rising populism influenced trade barriers and protectionist measures in the region. The findings indicated a clear association between populist governance and increased tariffs, suggesting that populist leaders often resorted to protectionist policies to secure electoral support. This trend was particularly pronounced in countries experiencing economic instability and social unrest, where populist narratives resonated with the public. The authors recommended implementing regional cooperation initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of populist policies on trade dynamics. By promoting integration and collaboration among Central American countries, they argued that it would be possible to counteract the trend toward isolationism. This study contributes to the understanding of how populism shapes trade



policies in Central America, emphasizing the need for proactive measures to address the challenges posed by populist governance.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gaps:** First, there is a notable lack of comprehensive frameworks that integrate the diverse ways populism influences trade policy across different political systems. While studies like those by Baker (2020) and Mazzolini and Vargas (2021) focus on case-specific impacts, they do not develop a unified conceptual model that captures the multifaceted nature of populism's influence on trade. Furthermore, although some researchers emphasize the immediate economic benefits of protectionist policies, such as increased support for local industries (Mazzolini & Vargas, 2021; Morales, 2022), they overlook the long-term consequences and the mechanisms through which these policies affect international relations and economic sustainability. This gap signifies a need for research that combines economic theory with political analysis to better understand the intricate relationship between populism and trade policy. Additionally, the studies predominantly highlight short-term outcomes, neglecting the potential for longer-term economic ramifications, such as shifts in global competitiveness and dependency on particular sectors (Panizza, 2019). Thus, there is a clear demand for further theoretical exploration into how populist ideologies reshape not only national policies but also international trade dynamics over extended periods.

**Contextual Gaps:** Contextually, the existing literature predominantly addresses trade policy in the context of individual nations, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela, without adequately comparing the influence of varying political, economic, and social environments on populist trade policies across these countries. For instance, while Cruz and Salas (2023) analyze Chile's hesitance in entering new trade agreements, this study does not consider how the specific historical, economic, or social contexts in Chile differ from those in Central America or the Andean region. The lack of comparative analyses hinders the understanding of how different populist movements utilize trade policies based on their unique contexts and challenges. Additionally, while studies like Rojas and Zuniga (2021) focus on Central America, the contextual variations within this region, including differing levels of economic development and historical trade relationships, are not sufficiently explored. This indicates a research gap where future studies could investigate the varying effects of populism on trade policy across different contextual backgrounds, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how local conditions shape populist approaches to trade.

**Geographical Gaps:** Geographically, the literature predominantly focuses on specific case studies within Latin America, particularly the southern cone and Central America, with limited exploration of how populism's influence on trade policies manifests in other regions facing similar political climates, such as Eastern Europe or Southeast Asia. While the studies presented offer valuable insights into Latin American contexts, they do not address whether the dynamics

observed are unique to this region or if similar patterns exist elsewhere. Additionally, emerging economies outside Latin America may present different challenges and responses to populism, suggesting a need for cross-regional comparisons to understand the global implications of populist governance on trade policy. Furthermore, the existing studies often neglect the influence of external factors, such as global trade dynamics and international political relationships, which could offer a broader understanding of the geographic implications of populism on trade. Future research should aim to fill these gaps by conducting comparative analyses across different geographical contexts and by examining how globalization interacts with populist movements in shaping trade policy decisions globally (Rojas and Zuniga, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the influence of populism on international trade policies in Latin America presents a complex and multifaceted landscape characterized by significant economic and political ramifications. As observed in various case studies, populist leaders often leverage protectionist measures to respond to public sentiment, aiming to safeguard local industries and address grievances associated with globalization. However, while these policies may yield short-term benefits for specific sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, they frequently lead to adverse long-term consequences, including strained international relations, increased tariffs, and diminished foreign investment. The rise of populism in the region underscores the critical interplay between domestic political strategies and global economic dynamics, revealing how populist rhetoric can reshape trade policies to prioritize national interests at the expense of broader economic competitiveness.

Moreover, the findings from studies on countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela highlight the need for a more balanced approach that considers the sustainability of economic growth in conjunction with international trade commitments. As populist sentiments continue to resonate in the region, it is essential for policymakers to navigate the challenges posed by such governance while fostering dialogue on the benefits of global trade. By acknowledging the complexities and trade-offs inherent in populist trade policies, Latin American countries can strive for a more integrated and strategic approach to international trade that not only protects local industries but also ensures long-term economic stability and engagement in the global market. Future research should continue to explore the dynamic relationship between populism and trade, considering the broader implications for economic policy and international relations in an increasingly interconnected world.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### **Theory**

Future theoretical frameworks should integrate the impact of populism on trade policy by exploring how public sentiment influences international agreements and protectionist measures. This perspective can enrich scholarly understanding of trade dynamics under populist regimes, enabling the development of models that account for the fluctuating nature of public opinion. Researchers should also investigate the role of public engagement in shaping trade perceptions,

thus contributing to theories that highlight the importance of informed citizenry in economic decision-making.

### **Practice**

Policymakers should focus on developing balanced trade policies that protect local industries while fostering international relations. This includes implementing public education campaigns to demystify globalization and trade benefits, empowering citizens to critically evaluate populist claims. Additionally, strengthening regional cooperation among Latin American countries can amplify collective bargaining power and reduce reliance on protectionism. By establishing formal channels for public dialogue and feedback on trade policies, governments can build trust and create more resilient economic frameworks.

### **Policy**

Governments must adopt adaptive trade policies that include provisions for safeguarding vulnerable sectors without extreme protectionism. Establishing monitoring and evaluation systems for trade policies will allow for timely adjustments in response to populist pressures. Furthermore, creating regional trade frameworks and collaborative agreements will help mitigate the adverse effects of populism on international trade. Engaging diverse stakeholders in policy discussions can enhance transparency and public support for trade initiatives, ensuring that they align with long-term economic goals.

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