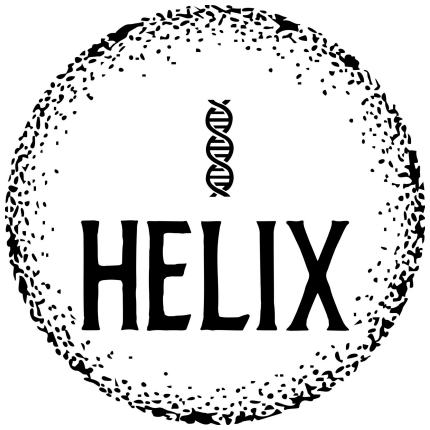


Exploring Attitudes Towards Climate Change Among Gen Z Youth in Toronto

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Why Should I Read This Report?

Climate change is progressing at an alarming rate and is one of the most pressing and prevalent issues for all Canadians in today's political climate (Cole et al., 2025). While most of the responsibility is perhaps aimed at adults, particularly members of the government, it is our youngest generations who will be the most impacted by climate change action or inaction (Tasnim, 2026). Children are most susceptible to the consequences of climate change, as they rely on adults, have immature physiological systems and are often continually exposed to environmental events (Landrigan & Sheffield, 2010).

This research project is geared towards both adults and youth. With a focus on real thoughts and concerns shared by Toronto-based youth (aged 14-21) in interviews with us, our goal is to provide an accurate and well-rounded representation of how climate change is impacting Gen Z youth. We hope this report will be informative, thorough and thought-provoking, while giving youth a platform to have their voices heard surrounding their concerns, frustrations, actions and attitudes towards climate change.

Executive Summary

Generation Z (Gen Z) youth are coming of age in an era of political unrest, economic uncertainty, and social unease. While previous generations grew up with newspapers and radio as

a key source of gathering information about events occurring around them, Gen Z forgoes these more reliable sources in favour of social media (Robertson et al., 2026). With access to news (factual or fictional) readily accessible at the fingertips of present children and youth through numerous social media platforms, so is information (also factual or fictional) about climate change. A 2025 Reuters Institute report found that 39% of adults aged 18-24 considered social media their main source of news, compared with only 21% in the 2015 version of the same report (Robertson et al., 2026).

Studies have shown that members of Gen Z are disproportionally impacted by climate change, with many reporting that they were extremely concerned about climate change and its effects (Stewart, 2025). That concern has extended into taking serious legal action, such as in the LaRosa v. His Majesty the King lawsuit. The historic case, currently in trial hearings, was brought forth by fifteen youth in October 2019, who are challenging the Canadian federal government, stating that the government's climate inaction violates their Charter rights (Savard, 2026).

In our latest research project, The Helix Foundation set out to explore the generationally distinctive attitudes towards climate change of Gen Z youth in Toronto. This report was compiled using individual interviews from real GTA-based youth, as well as through literature reviews and additional data. At the root of this study is the emotional toll climate change is taking on our youth, how educated youth consider themselves to be about climate change (and where their education comes from), and how their environmental habits differ from their parents and grandparents. Participants were asked both rating scale questions and open-ended questions that allowed for and encouraged elaboration to garner the most insight to researchers.

Based on the rich data gathered from each youth interview participant, we found several consistent themes to address and explore in further detail. Notably, these include: 1) The intergenerational differences surrounding eco-conscious behaviours; 2) The idea that the majority of participants said they learn more about climate change from school than from their parents; 3) The often large but not sole role social media and social media influencers play in educating youth about climate change.

We can conclude, based on the responses we received, that GTA-based youth are aware of climate change and are at least moderately concerned about the impacts of climate change.

Key Themes

"Do Gen Z youth suffer from climate change-related anxiety?"

"How do Gen Z youth access climate change information?"

"Do Gen Z youth have better eco-conscious habits than previous generations?"

"Is climate education emphasized at school?"

These are just some of the themes our researchers were curious about and asked our youth interview participants. In the following pages, you'll find key themes that arose during multiple interviews that sparked further elaboration.

“I feel that climate change isn’t being discussed enough in school.”

– Interviewee, 19



Kaboompics via Pexels

One theme that arose in several interviews with Toronto-based youth was the decline in emphasis on climate change education as they progressed through the education system. Many interviewees discussed learning extensively about climate change in early grades, some even joining school eco-clubs when they were young, and then found that the curriculum became less focused on climate change in later grades. One interviewee highlights the prevalence of climate change content in certain grades as opposed to others:

"I feel as though when I was younger, maybe in sixth grade or eighth grade, [teachers] discussed climate change," said one interviewee, age 16, "but we don't talk about climate change that much and it isn't a major part of our [grade 11] curriculum."

A UNESCO report (Benavot & McKenzie, 2026) lends credence to this sentiment in that it found that, while the extent of focus on topics of climate change and the environment was low or very low, the extent of content on these topics is more prevalent in grade 6 curricula as opposed to grade 3 across the 88 countries studied. The same report also found that content about the environment is over twice as prevalent as sustainability content and over five times as prevalent as climate change content in the curricula, with climate change content five times more prevalent in grade 6 curricula than grade 3 (Benavot & McKenzie, 2026).

As echoed by our interviewees, the curriculum for certain grades emphasize climate change and environmental content more heavily than others:

"Mostly every year we learn about [climate change], but not necessarily as thoroughly every year," said one interviewee, age 14.

For example, in grade 9 in Ontario schools, semi-recent changes to the science curriculum place emphasis on relating science to the changing world (Government of Ontario, 2022). Specific outcomes include to "assess impacts of climate change on ecosystem sustainability and on various communities, and describe ways to mitigate these impacts."

One interviewee, age 14, supports that climate change is part of the grade 9 curriculum at their school:

"I'm in geography class right now and my unit right now is focusing on climate change and what we can do to prevent it and also how it ties into global warming," said Interviewee, 14.

A report from Learning For a Sustainable Future titled *From Awareness to Action: Canadians on Climate Change and Education* (Acton, Schwartzberg & Stevens, 2025) found that only 9% of students say climate change is discussed often in class. The report also found that students wanted more emphasis on solutions, action and empowerment related to climate change. Additionally, it was found that only 17% of Canadians (not just children and youth) felt confident differentiating real from fake climate information, and 23% of Canadians thought the seriousness of climate change to be exaggerated. Additionally, 79% of Canadian participants thought climate education should focus on critical thinking skills to assist students in assessing conflicting information.

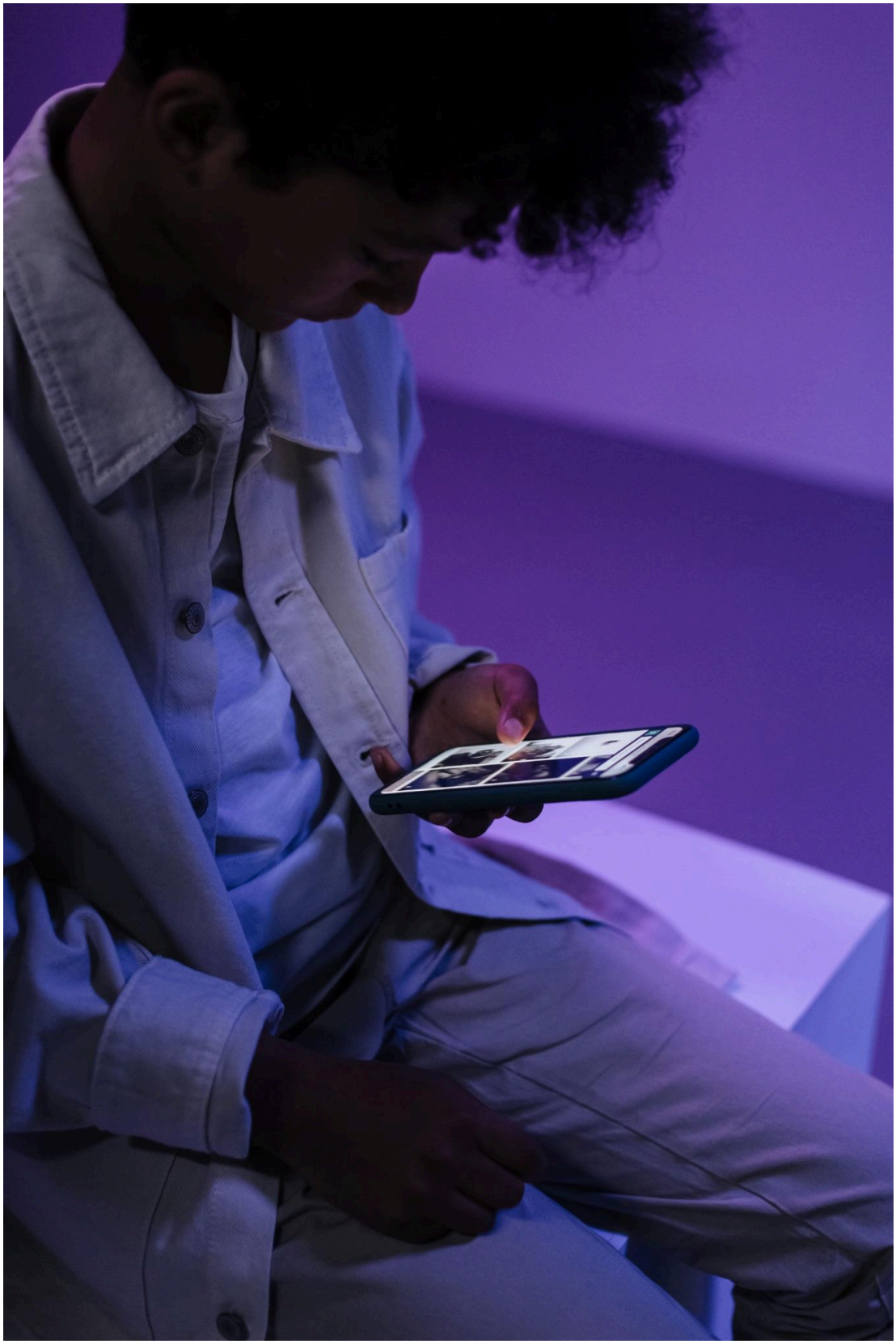
From Awareness to Action: Canadians on Climate Change and Education (Acton, Schwartzberg & Stevens, 2025) also explored educator's thoughts and concerns, which included insufficient time, professional learning opportunities, and strategies to help students determine and address

misinformation. Furthermore, the study found that Canadians were seeking improved curriculum flexibility, support for student-led projects, climate change education in teacher education programs and collaboration among parents, schools and the community.

A 2023 exploration of grade 7-12 Canadian educational curriculum policy echoes the above report, as it found uneven and fragmented incorporation of climate change topics, themes and units (Field et al., 2023).

“I get a lot of my climate change information from social media.”

– Interviewee, 19



Ron Lach via Pexels

Another theme that was relatively consistent across our youth interviews was the common use of social media as a source of information on climate change. Overall, our interviewees said they do not solely rely on social media for climate information. However, the majority of those interviewed said they either follow accounts of reputable news organizations (such as CP24 and Global News) or frequently encounter climate change-related content that appears on their social media feeds or "for you" pages.

"For sure [social media] makes me question whether or not climate change is really important," said Interviewee, 16. "When I'm seeing news articles about how the ice caps are melting, rising sea levels, and temperatures are rising, and heat waves, that really makes me understand that climate change is really important."

Several youth interviewees cited Greta Thunberg as an influence, or as a person they often saw on social media advocating for climate action. At age fifteen, Thunberg, a Swedish climate activist, sat outside the Parliament of Sweden every school day to urge the government to take action about the climate crisis (Fridays for Future, 2026). Thunberg's actions launched Fridays for Future, a youth-led and organized movement that marked the beginning of the global school strike for climate in August 2018 (Fridays for Future, 2026). Thunberg influenced many young people to strike and draw attention to the climate crisis, and has held lawmakers, economic leaders and government officials accountable for failing to take meaningful actions toward lowering carbon emissions (Lightner, 2024).

Thunberg has reached and inspired many people around the world, a large part of that due to social media. On X, or what was then called Twitter, she used #FridaysForFuture which had high levels of engagement and reached people around the world, becoming a global climate movement with the assistance of social media and mobile technologies (Estrella-Ramón et al., 2024). Thunberg herself (@GretaThunberg) currently has over five million followers on X, over seventeen million followers on Instagram and 1.6M followers on TikTok. Thunberg regularly uses social media to converse with political figures (and promote accountability and transparency), highlight demonstrations and climate action updates, and highlight the #FridaysForFuture movement.

No other influencers were listed by our youth interviewees, however, nearly all of those interviewed admitted that social media had some impact on how they viewed climate change.

Another key theme we explored was how climate change-related anxiety and how it impacts Gen Z youth.

When asked, on a scale from 1-10, how they would say they suffer from climate change-related anxiety, our interviewees' responses ranged from 1-9. The average was 5.7 out of 10, and the mode was an 8 out of 10.

A survey (Galway & Field, 2023) found that 76% of Canadian youth aged 16-25 reported feeling that people have neglected to care for the planet. The same survey found that 39% of youth respondents reported hesitation about reproducing due to climate change impacts, 48% felt that

humanity was doomed, and 53% believed that they wouldn't be able to take advantage of the opportunities that their parents had.

In a Canadian national survey (Field et al., 2019), researchers found that Canadians between 12 and 18 years-old understood that climate change was occurring but were not optimistic that human actions would be effective in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Climate anxiety is not just a problem that impacts Canadian youth. In a survey by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2020), 57% of psychiatrists reported seeing children and young people in England distressed about the climate crisis and the state of the environment. In a study from the United States, 82% of those aged 10-12 reported feeling fearful, sad and angry when talking about climate issues (Burke et al., 2018). A global study of 10,000 youth aged 16-25 found that 75% of participants thought that the future was frightening, with over 50% believing that they would have fewer opportunities than their parents, and climate anxiety was found to be connected to the youths' perception of improper government climate response and feeling betrayed (Hickman et al., 2021).

One of our interview participants directly related social media, and the content shared on social media, as a key cause of this climate-related anxiety and increasing concern for climate change.

Our findings are also supported by a meta-analysis (Parry et al., 2021) where the majority of young participants said that climate-related social media coverage increased their climate change anxiety, but was not a major contributor to their mental health as a whole. The report also

discovered a clear theme of young people's emotional connection to climate change. Some participants said that media reporting created intense feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, sadness, guilt and shame. Other participants were frustrated by the lack of action the reporting was invoking, and some felt that, while it was promising that more people were treating the issue seriously, it may be too late.

According to Statistics Canada (2023), 62% of Canadians aged 15-24 most frequently receive their news through social media platforms. A 2025 report from Environment and Climate Change Canada found that the regular use of social media, internet searches and AI has steadily increased. The same report found that the majority of Canadians do not closely follow climate change information, however they do encounter it often, on a daily or weekly basis.

One of our interviewees had a different approach to finding climate change information. The interviewee, 21, who recently moved to Scarborough from Sri Lanka, said they frequently tune into East FM 102.7, a multicultural and multilingual radio station based in Scarborough that serves the GTA and parts of the Durham Region. The interviewee shared how climate change is often discussed on the station's radio broadcast and how the station is a main source of climate change information for them, as opposed to social media or other news sources.

“My grandparents were raised in Sri Lanka and they have a different system. They recycle and compost but it’s different.” – *Interviewee, 14*



Firoz Khan M A via Pexels

The final themes that often came up during our interviews and research were the generational differences regarding climate action and eco-conscious behaviours. Climate change is, by nature, an intergenerational concern, as its effects, caused by human actions, present a significant threat to both present and future generations (Wang et al., 2024). While we are focused on Gen Z specifically, we were curious about how this generation was reacting to climate change, particularly given the unique digital age they grew up in. Additionally, many of the GTA-based youth we interviewed are either new Canadians themselves or have parents who emigrated to Canada from an eastern country. Because of this, we found some interesting cultural differences in terms of environmental education, significance of climate change and environmental habits that we wanted to further explore.

The majority of our interviewees said they were more environmentally-conscious than their parents, grandparents or other older family members. Most interviewees mentioned actively taking measures to reduce electricity use, water use, and gas emissions. These measures included turning off lights when not required, taking shorter showers, and using public transportation. When asked if their parents had similar eco-friendly habits, many disagreed, with several noting that their parents don't often use public transportation despite proximity, instead opting to drive to their destinations.

One study (Swim et al., 2022), found that it was only younger generations whose climate-related guilt and anger increased over the past decade. The same study found that climate-related discussions among younger generations had increased more than older generations. It was also

discovered that increased negative emotions toward climate change were particularly present in younger generations as opposed to older generations.

According to data from a Pew Research Center study (Tyson et al., 2021), Gen Zers, as well as Millennials, stood out from older generations regarding climate change activism and high levels of climate-related social media engagement. The study found that adults in the Gen Z and Millennial generations are discussing the urgent need for climate-related action more than other generations, are seeing more climate posts and information online, and are taking more action including volunteering and attending rallies to get involved.

When asked if they learned more about climate change from school or from their parents, one interviewee, 19, said that they “one-hundred percent” learned more from school, as they are a first-generation Canadian and their parents weren't taught about climate change and sustainability in school.

One interviewee, 21, who recently moved to Canada from overseas said that they learned more about climate change and eco-friendly behaviours from new neighbours. Another interviewee, 21, also a newcomer to Canada, said they learned the most from their parents, who have a farm in their home country, and were able to pass down their extensive knowledge about recycling (including reusing and repurposing items) and composting onto him.

A study (Lakhan, 2023) exploring cultural differences in recycling among 12 ethnic groups in three urban Greater Toronto Area communities found that white Canadians had the most positive

attitudes about recycling and the strongest awareness of recycling consequences. It was also discovered that ethnic minorities did not necessarily associate recycling with specific environmental impacts. In alignment with our youth interview findings, the study found a significant difference among first generation Ontarians as opposed to second and beyond generation immigrants regarding environmental behaviour and attitudes that influence their recycling habits.

Another study (Laroche et al., 2002) found that there were even significant cultural differences surrounding environmental habits when comparing English-Canadians and French-Canadians. The latter were discovered to be more educated about and concerned with the environment and its impact, have a stronger belief that the majority of corporations are behaving responsibly toward the environment, and factor in the environmental consequences of a purchase to a greater extent. On the other hand, English-Canadians were found to be most likely to recycle and pay more for eco-friendly products.

Moving Forward

As mentioned throughout this report, climate change is one of the most pressing and prevalent issues for all Canadians in today's political climate (Cole et al., 2025), and it is our youngest generations who will be the most impacted by climate change action or inaction (Tasnim, 2026).

Based on data collected from our youth interviewees and additional studies, we can conclude that Gen Z youth are, overall, concerned about climate change. Major themes of climate-related concern or frustration among Gen Z include a lack of or inconsistent climate education, difficulty finding designated comprehensive waste management systems in public spaces, and lack of climate discussion among friend groups and peers.

Developed in consultation with these key findings, we recommend the following strategies moving forward to address the unique needs and concerns of Gen Z and future generations:

1. Increase the priority of climate education. Knowledge is power!

- **Emphasize consistent climate education throughout the (Ontario) school system.**
    - ***Issue:*** Nearly all of our Gen Z interviewees discussed a lack of consistent climate education while attending an Ontario secondary – or elementary – school.
    - ***Potential Solution(s):*** Modify the Ontario school curriculum to address the growing concern of climate change and global warming, and incorporate thorough, appropriate and practical climate education into every grade level.

- **Incorporate climate education into post-secondary curriculums, or have post-secondary institutions promote climate-related events and education.**
    - ***Issue:*** Several of our Gen Z interviewees discussed a lack of climate education present while attending an Ontario college or university.
    - ***Potential Solution(s):*** While it is up to each individual university, and ultimately professor, to decide whether to integrate climate education into course curriculum (of course, this integration would be more seamless with a science or environmental-focused course), there should be more ways for students to learn about the environment that surrounds them. This could even be achieved through extracurricular activities, clubs, student societies and expert panel discussions on campus.

- **Strengthen climate education for new immigrants and older Canadians**
    - ***Issue:*** Most of our Gen Z interviewees were either first-generation Canadians or new Canadians themselves, and many of whom expressed a lack of climate education and emphasis in their or their parents' home countries.
    - ***Potential Solution(s):*** Develop climate workshops, perhaps offered through the public library system, designed to educate new Canadians on ways they can recycle, compost and reduce electricity usage.

2. Promote barrier-free access to recycling and composting disposal systems.

- **Create easily accessible methods to encourage recycling and composting in outdoor public spaces**
    - ***Issue:*** When asked about barriers that prevent them from recycling and composting, many of the Gen Z youth we interviewed highlighted a lack of designated bins in outdoor public spaces, including parks, as a major deterrent.
    - ***Potential Solution(s):*** For the government (or business/community, where appropriate) to invest in widely accessible and properly labeled comprehensive waste management bins with designated containers for recyclable materials, and potentially compostable materials, if practical.

3. ***Encourage climate conversations among Gen Z youth.***

- ***Issue:*** Most Gen Z youth we interviewed said climate change was not a topic that often came up in conversations with their friends or peers. If Gen Z aren't having these conversations,
- ***Potential Solution(s):*** There are many ways we could encourage Gen Z youth to talk about climate change with their friends and people in their age group. One idea would be to have climate focused group assignments and discussions in class. Another option would be to have social media campaigns aimed at promoting youth climate conversations, and/or have young social media influencers encourage followers to have climate conversations with their friends.

Key Statistics on Climate Change

According to a 2023 report from the World Health Organization (WHO):

- Climate change directly contributes to environmental disasters including wildfires, floods, tropical storms, heatwaves and hurricanes. These climate-related events are increasing in frequency, intensity and scale.
- 3.6 billion people live in places that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.
- Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is anticipated to result in an estimated 250, 000 additional fatalities each year.
- Locations with poor health infrastructure will fare the worst with climate change-related concerns without adequate assistance to prepare and respond.
- Lowering greenhouse gas emissions can result in significant health benefits, especially due to reduced air pollution.

According to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC):

- In Canada, the average temperature increased by 1.7 degrees Celsius from 1948 to 2016, in comparison to a global average temperature increase of about 0.8 degrees Celsius.
- Canada's rate of warming is approximately double the global rate.
- The impacts of global warming have been stronger in northern Canada.
- Presently, climate change is primarily caused by human actions that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
- Noticeable environmental changes in Canada (that align with global findings) include: increased precipitation seen in a significant portion of the country, earlier budding of trees, increased amounts of heat waves, and longer growing seasons.

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