The Role of Research in Informing Public Policy on International Migration in a Changing World[1]

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Background

Immigration has been central to the development of the United States and will be central to shaping its future. Americans are justly proud of their tradition of being a nation of immigrants and continuing to welcome immigrants, as embodied in the message of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Yet in every era, as immigration patterns and trends have changed, some Americans have felt some ambivalence toward continuing to extend our traditional welcome to new immigrant groups. U.S. immigration policy, as reflected in law and practice, attempts to balance these two themes: control of immigration and openness to new immigrants.

Surprisingly, in spite of the importance of immigration in shaping both our history and our current national circumstance, our immigration policy has been influenced more by perception and opinion than by knowledge about the impacts of immigration, the effects of existing immigration laws, and analysis of the likely effects of changes in those laws. This stands in stark contrast with other countries of immigration. Although a substantial amount of research on immigrants in the United States has been conducted over the past several decades, much of it has not been helpful to policymakers interested in having a full range of information. In some cases research has not been designed to assist in shaping law and policy on lawful permanent immigration. In other cases the research has been influenced by the particular views of the researchers or their organizations toward immigration. In others research has been limited to specific immigrant groups or locations and therefore is difficult to generalize for use in policymaking. However, notwithstanding the scarcity of pertinent, unbiased information, policymakers have not hesitated to formulate immigration policy based on whatever information is available.

While the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the Justice Department was once responsible for implementing most aspects of immigration law, as of March 2003, U.S. immigration laws are administered by several agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which is responsible for providing services and benefits related to immigrants; Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which along with many non-immigration responsibilities is responsible for interior immigration enforcement, detention, and removal; and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which is responsible for port-of-entry inspections and patrolling the border. Additionally, the statistical function of the former INS was placed into a separate office and is now the Office of

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Immigration Statistics within the DHS Office of Management. Although the core immigration functions are in the Department of Homeland Security, a number of other cabinet departments, including most prominently the Departments of State, Justice, Labor, and Health and Human Services (HHS), are responsible for other significant immigration-related processes and programs.

Congress has traditionally guarded its role in immigration policymaking and been more likely to rely on special short-term commissions than on executive branch agencies to develop information and make recommendations for changes in immigration policy than on the standing agencies. Over the last half-century commissions dealing specifically with immigration policy have included the President's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization (1952-1953), the Western Hemisphere Commission (1965-1968), the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (1979-1981), and the Commission on Immigration Reform (1990-1997), which have led to the major changes in immigration law enacted in 1965, 1976, 1986, 1990, and 1996.

A New Context for Immigration Policy Research

Notwithstanding this history, Congress has taken a step toward establishing an executive branch capability for immigration policy analysis and formation within USCIS. Specifically, in establishing the DHS, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 statutorily established within USCIS the position of Chief of Policy and Strategy, responsible for "making policy recommendations and performing policy research and analysis on immigration services issues."

The USCIS Office of Policy and Strategy as currently configured includes several divisions including strategic planning, policy, regulations management, and research and evaluation. This office, which is headed by a political appointee, and the Research and Evaluation Division in particular, is playing a major role in defining what the congressional mandate will mean in practice and the research directions the agency will take. Given the wide range of possible directions but limited resources, the research and evaluation functions have been focused on broad immigration policy issues with national importance.

Typical of all organizations conducting research, however, funding for research is not sufficient to meet needs. To exacerbate this situation further, as of fiscal year 2005 USCIS is a fee-based agency with very limited appropriated funds earmarked solely for backlog reduction and fraud prevention. With limited funding and no specific set-aside of funding currently available for research, the Research and Evaluation Division has developed several strategies for leveraging resources to expand immigration research capabilities within USCIS and the executive branch.

The Research and Evaluation Division currently has six primary strategies for conducting its work. First, the Division is participating with other agencies on major research and reporting initiatives such as the New Immigrant Survey, the Triennial Comprehensive Report on Immigration, and the reestablishment of the DC area Federal Working Group on Immigration Statistics and Research. These activities are described below in more detail.

Second, it is working with sole source experts in the government domain such as the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress and the National Academies of Science. For

example, the Library of Congress has recently completed a report commissioned by USCIS on protection mechanisms for victims of human trafficking. The study analyzes the criminal and immigration legislation in several European countries, Canada, and Australia pertinent to human trafficking, with a focus on how the legislation is implemented and what specific kinds of assistance are offered to victims. This material can be consulted by policymakers interested in expanding protections under U.S. law for victims of trafficking.

Third, the Division conducts its own research using in-house administrative data and records. These sources cannot be made readily available to outside researchers, and they provide a sound source for providing information on or answering many policy-relevant questions. Areas currently or previously addressed through such means include immigrant sponsorship, the mail-order marriage industry, verification of immigration status, and changes to naturalization testing procedures.

Fourth, the office uses its limited resources for highly focused competitive awards to outside sources when research requirements call for expertise or levels of staffing that are otherwise unavailable to conduct research of high importance to the agency. The extensive evaluations conducted on the congressionally mandated employment verification pilot programs over the past 6 years is the best example of this type of research, but it also includes work done earlier on asylum and immigrant sponsorship.

Fifth, the Evaluation and Research Division conducts reviews and synthesizes existing descriptive, analytical, or empirical information to provide background information and input to policy deliberations within the agency. For instance, the division has provided research-based information relevant to policy development on the proposed temporary worker program. Areas of interest have included the demographic composition of the immigrant population, its geographic distribution and residence patterns, household composition, education, skills, languages spoken, earnings, remittances, entrepreneurship, and other measures of impact.

Finally, the office is exploring the feasibility of other collaborative approaches to data generation and analysis. Such approaches might include linking information, where feasible, with other Federal administrative or survey data. Such initiatives should be furthered by changes in the design of USCIS case management and information systems, which are expected to increase the amount of policy-relevant information available for analysis.

Clearly, without a significant research budget, USCIS research efforts will require creativity, cooperation among interested government agencies, and consciousness-raising in the immigration research community, many of whom are represented in the PAA membership. A steady source of research funding is currently being sought, but even if it becomes available, these elements will be necessary to establish and maintain a research enterprise whose mission will always be larger than its budget.

Models of Policy Research

For creative approaches to organizing to obtain the best possible policy-relevant research on immigration, the example of other governments is instructive. International immigration flows,

particularly within Europe, have changed substantially over the past decade and a half. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the transition to more open forms of government in Eastern Europe, continuing civil and economic strife in some areas of Europe, and economic boom within many of the European Union (EU) members of long standing, more people are on the move within Europe than at any time since the end of World War II. Similarly, flows to Europe continue from Africa and to a lesser degree from other parts of the world. Given these movements, EU members are facing the new reality of being destinations rather than sources of immigrants. This is particularly true for the ten new EU member nations, which still have feet in both camps. For example, Polish workers leave to look for employment in Germany while Poland guards against would-be illegal workers from Russia, where opportunities are fewer.

The EU nations, formerly with largely only guestworker experience, are now seeing immigrants coming to their borders in greater numbers and are looking at this phenomenon quite differently than has the United States. Immigration is not only a new experience for them, it is often perceived as a threat to the longstanding more homogeneous populations and cultures of many European countries. Modes of reception and integration of immigrants are therefore logically viewed as far more important issues to these nations. As long as the newcomers were thought of as temporary helpers who would bring their willing hands but not their families and their cultures, and would leave in due course, no attention needed to be given to their possible impact on host societies. When it became apparent that many "temporary" workers were not leaving, and that second and third generations were being born without full citizenship rights in many instances, the host societies began to develop more comprehensive immigration policies.

Some Europeans still favor severe restrictions on immigration; others seek to minimize the impact of newcomers and to have them integrate into societies and become as much like natives as possible. However, European nations also generally recognize the benefits of their new immigrants for their willingness to work in low wage jobs where workers are needed and in many cases to help offset population aging and national population decline with its anticipated problems. Some European leaders are attempting to shape public policy in a way that welcomes immigrants and responds positively to the changes they may bring. As immigration has become a more important public policy issue within the EU, so too has the desire to have information to help manage and understand these flows.

Canada, a long-standing country of immigration, is perhaps the epitome of a country where the government has a well-defined process to develop immigration policy based on sound information systematically gathered. The Canadian system includes policy analysis and research conducted on several fronts both within the federal government and under government sponsorship, including Statistics Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and regional centers. Five "Centres of Excellence" have been established to conduct research under the auspices of the Metropolis Network (described below) in Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and most recently in Atlantic Canada (Halifax and Moncton). The Centres of Excellence are affiliated in turn with a number of universities, and their research focuses mainly on the integration and status of immigrants in Canada.

The policymaking process in Canada, compared to that in the United States, may also be facilitated by their parliamentary form of government through which the work of the executive

bodies is directly linked and responsive to the priorities of the legislative body. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has a well defined process for identifying what research is needed to shed light on impending policy deliberations, incorporating that subject matter into its research program, and bringing the findings into the policy process. Because the research priorities are set at the ministerial level, an audience for the findings is reasonably assured.

Along with individual country interest in knowing more about migration trends, there has been growing interest within several migration-related international organizations to learn more about the causes, impacts, and policy implications of international migration and to systematize the ways in which research on international migration and immigrant adjustment is brought to bear on policy formation. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), for instance, launched a project in 2003 to make an inventory and begin a dialog on how national governments obtain the information they need to make policy decisions on immigration. Their project encompasses the traditional receiving countries like the United States and Canada, newer immigrant receiving nations such as some of the members of the European Union, and both new and traditional sending countries.

In February 2004 the IOM hosted the first of what it hopes to establish as a series of meetings of government officials from receiving and sending countries to share experiences and practices in migration research and to discuss effective ways to enhance the contribution of research to policymaking. Twenty-two countries representing every populated continent participated. Probably the single most striking impression coming from that meeting is that the United States stands alone in its laissez-faire approach to the incorporation of new immigrants into its society and to the management of research bearing on immigrant policy. This unique approach, anathema to other immigrant receiving nations, is perhaps rooted in our history and in the notion that immigrants, like native-born Americans, are free to succeed or fail on their own, without government intervention.

Another international forum in which the nexus between migration research and migration policy is emphasized is the International Metropolis Project, which was launched by the government of Canada. Metropolis is "a set of coordinated activities carried out by a membership of research, policy, and non-governmental organizations who share a vision of strengthened migration policy by means of applied academic research." The name *Metropolis* recognizes that, while migration policy is usually made at the national level, it is implemented at the local level, which in the 21st century means in the cities where international migrants settle, since few good settlement opportunities now exist in rural areas.

A related idea central to Metropolis is that we live in a world where international migration will inevitably increase, and that efforts are better directed to finding ways to manage it constructively than to halting or reversing it. The annual International Metropolis Conference program commonly includes workshops linking research with policy formation and other workshops presenting information on specific local government initiatives and programs for helping migrants to adjust to their new settings. Although the United States is represented at these conferences, the majority of attendees are from European countries and Canada, where immigrant integration and the link between information and immigration policy are important values.

Coordination on Policy Research within the U.S. Government

Another difference between the United States and most other countries is in the way immigration, statistical, and research functions are organized at the national level. Many countries have a cabinet-level department devoted to immigration, which includes programs related to the admission of immigrants as well as services tailored for the integration of newcomers after admission. Many countries also have a cabinet-level statistics ministry, which is responsible for the compilation of official statistics and administration of research on other matters of official interest, including migration. The United States has neither type of agency.

In addition, while many executive branch agencies within the U.S. Government have program management and regulatory missions related to international migration, generally without specific authority or funding to sponsor research, other agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have grant-making authority and have established programs for funding research, some of which focus on population and immigration issues that contribute significantly to the body of knowledge. These two types of missions are not often combined in one agency in the U.S. Government, but partnerships between program agencies and research agencies have been useful in the past in bridging the gap.

The Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences also has conducted important research on immigration with funding from Executive Branch agencies. During the 1980s the INS sponsored a landmark evaluation of the immigration statistics collected both by INS and by other U.S. Government agencies. The title of the final report, *Immigration Statistics: A Story of Neglect* (Levine, Hill, and Warren: 1985), summarizes the findings. Improvements have been made in the last 20 years, but the finding that more support is needed for immigration data collection and research is almost as true today as it was 2 decades earlier. More recently the Commission on Immigration Reform sponsored a review of what was know about the impact of immigration on the United States. That report, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration* (Smith and Edmonston, 1997), developed models for assessing the impact of immigration and has become a basic reference in discussions about immigration policy.

Cooperation among Executive Branch agencies, as described earlier, is essential to initiate and support such efforts as the New Immigrant Survey. This study is funded through a grant by the Center for Population Research, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, HHS, with joint funding from a consortium of other agencies including USCIS as well as some private support. It follows a successful pilot test on persons who gained lawful immigrant status in 1996 of the basic approach and methodology, and it is the first large-scale longitudinal survey of a new cohort of legal immigrants to the United States. The first round of interviews of new immigrants gaining status from May through November 2003 was completed in mid-2004, and the second round will begin late in 2005. The research design and content focus on gathering policy-relevant information by direct observation of immigrants as they adjust to life in the United States. The survey is too ambitious and costly to be funded and conducted by one agency alone, making partnership among agencies essential to launch and continue this work.

The *Triennial Comprehensive Report on Immigration* was mandated in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. It requires a report from the Executive Branch to Congress on a regular schedule, covering the impact of immigration on the United States in a broad range of subject matter areas reflecting the work of many Federal agencies. The USCIS is now responsible for coordinating and editing the report. The process of gathering the material for the report entails a great deal of communication and cooperation among agencies, and the resulting document provides a picture of how the many facets of immigration to the United States are reflected in domestic programs as well as in foreign policy and international business transactions. We are in the process of reassessing this recurring report, however. Mandated before the growth in the body of immigration research, the ease of dissemination and sharing of information by the Internet, and vast improvements in the timeliness and quality of Federal immigration and census data, the Triennial Report may be an outmoded concept. Further discussions within the Administration and Congress will explore the future nature of this report.

Recently the Research and Evaluation Division and the Office of Immigration Statistics of DHS have joined to reactivate the Federal Working Group on Immigration Statistics and Research. This is intended to provide a forum for formal sharing of information on current and planned Executive Branch agency statistical and research initiatives, availability of official data sources for studying immigration, and for development of new collaborative research projects. We hope and expect that it will be a vehicle for increased interagency cooperation in the future. In the early 1990s this group was the catalyst for adding nativity information to the basic characteristics collected on new respondents entering the Current Population Survey, a simple improvement that has resulted in a great expansion of research on immigrants in this country. It also created broader support within Executive Branch agencies for funding a longitudinal survey of immigrants.

Cooperative efforts also include working with other agencies conducting surveys such as the planned National Children's Study sponsored by HHS and the Environmental Protection Agency to suggest appropriate questions to increase the usefulness of survey results for immigration policymaking purposes. This survey expects to sample 100,000 live births in the United States over a period of several years and to follow the children and their families longitudinally to monitor aspects of their health over time. While these children will be U.S. citizens by birth, it can be conservatively estimated that at least 20 percent of them will have one or both parents who were born outside the United States, which implies a final sample of at least 20,000 children with at least one immigrant parent. Such a large sample will present a unique opportunity to study factors influencing the health and well-being of children in immigrant families, provided that the survey collects information on place of parents' nativity and date of their arrival in the United States as part of the survey and includes this information on data bases released for analysis. The need to ensure that the necessary data are collected again reflects the importance of ongoing interagency communication and cooperation.

Challenges in Immigration Policy Research

To elevate the policy discussions, we seek to raise the consciousness of researchers interested in exploring the field of international migration and challenge them to consider the possible policy applications of their research when the research is being designed. By being cognizant of the

policy implications initially, researchers can directly inform the policy debate by including relevant questions and response categories and analyzing the subject matter of interest to policymakers. This is not an argument favoring applied over basic research, but an observation that there is a demand for more and better information on all aspects of immigration and immigrant reception that derives from sound research methodologies. Specific, practical information on immigrant adjustment and the impact of immigration on communities and the society as a whole is needed, as is better theorizing to organize, analyze, and present the information in ways that will communicate effectively to policymakers.

Some examples of areas where research is needed to inform the policy debate are outlined below:

1. The foreign-born population is increasingly diverse in terms of country of origin, socio-economic characteristics, languages spoken, and also more geographically and residentially dispersed in the United States than in the past. What are the implications of such diversity and dispersal for immigrant adjustment to life in this country and for planning services for the immigrant population? Immigrant diversity means that broad generalizations about immigrants are increasingly less accurate, which suggests a need for more high-quality case studies in more locations, as well as for theories to tie this information together.

2. What are the policy implications of different residence patterns of immigrants? The U.S. government does not dictate where immigrants settle other than marginally through refugee "placement policy." A few years ago the governor of Iowa floated a proposal to attract immigrants to Iowa, which was rapidly losing its younger population, by giving immigrants special preference at the time of admission if they were destined to Iowa. U.S. immigration law does not support a state-specific admission policy, but if policymakers wanted to design an incentive structure to encourage immigrant settlement in selected places, what would be its components? Could such a policy be sustained? Should it feature employment opportunities, language instruction, specialized social or health services, ethnic markets, places of worship, a core population of a certain size? Should special immigration preference be given to medical professionals who agree to practice in underserved areas, and does such a policy improve access to medical care in the long run? Compare the case of Canada, where many of the provinces have an agreement with the central government that allows them to "nominate" applicants for immigration who meet the province's needs and are judged to have a genuine intention to settle there.

3. What expectations do immigrants bring regarding their life in the United States?_Source countries of immigration to the United States have changed over the last four decades. How do these immigrants differ from earlier migration flows to the United States? Has American culture been diffused so broadly around the world that newcomers are already partly acculturated, or are people who migrate drawn from the more Westernized segment of their societies? Do migrants aim to integrate into American society, to participate selectively in American society while maintaining important aspects of their home culture, or to live according to their national traditions in a new setting? How does

this vary among nationalities? What are the policy implications of these different orientations? What are the implications for groups with significant cultural distance? What are the implications for the communities in which they settle? How does this change over time?

4. What are the economic arrangements among immigrants in this country and between immigrants and their friends and families in their home countries? Financial arrangements in the United States play a major role in immigrant adaptation. What do we know about money-pooling by immigrants to support small business development, and other forms of income-sharing, and how does this affect their success in the United States? More information is needed about remittances: how much is remitted, by whom, to whom, where, why, and for how long? How do remittances affect the decision to stay in the United States or return? What is the long-term impact of remittances on economic development in sending countries? Do some aspects of U.S. immigration policy, such as the Temporary Protected Status program, create unrealistic expectations concerning continuing stay of migrants and flow of remittances, even on the part of the governments of the source countries? It has been argued that remittances are a more effective type of foreign aid than government-to-government payments. Can this be quantified? Should a program to facilitate remittances be implemented as official U.S. policy?

5. What strategies do families use in the international migration process? We know, often only from anecdotes, that international migration does not necessarily consist of a nuclear family moving to the United States all together at the same time. We have almost no data on how nuclear and more extended families accomplish their migration to another country. Who migrates first? In what sequence do the different family members migrate, and why? How much travel back and forth to the home country is involved as part of the initial migration process? What are the socially defined responsibilities of family members to help each other during the migration process? Most important from an immigration policy perspective, how does a family's migration strategy interact with immigration laws? How has the impact of stricter policies on immigrant sponsorship affected the migration process, and are these policies effective or destructive?

6. What happens to gender and family roles and relationships among immigrants? To what extent do sending country customs regarding marriage and family continue in this country, and do they create cultural or even legal clashes? Despite the prohibition, is polygamy continued among some immigrants? Many domestic disputes in immigrant families arise from wives and/or children being quicker to adopt American customs than traditional husbands and fathers are willing to tolerate. Can immigrant policy be developed to address this problem? We have laws against using marriage for the purpose of immigration, and spousal immigration is the largest single category of immigration—do these families stay together? What is the appropriate policy response if the marriages end?

7. Can immigration law and policy play a meaningful role in curbing abuse within the family? Immigrant spouses who are victims of abuse may petition on their own behalf for lawful permanent resident status under certain circumstances; does this afford them

enough protection? Our study several years ago of the mail-order bride industry failed to show that it played a significant role in creating abusive or fraudulent marriages, but we did note that domestic violence is all too common in immigrant marriages. To what extent does the immigrant experience exacerbate problems in household relationships? Do families adapt to U.S. values and mores, or do they continue to practice customs at odds with our laws and expectations? Such customs as arranged marriages of girls in their early or mid-teens to men a decade or more older, female genital mutilation, and ritual abduction of a woman by her fiancé's male relatives have all run afoul of U.S. law.

These examples have referred to immigrant policy as well as immigration policy. Immigrant policy has been defined as encompassing the laws, regulations, and programs that influence the integration of immigrants once they are in the United States (Fix and Passel, 1994). In contrast to the repeated explicit efforts of Federal policymakers to shape immigration policy, immigrant policy has generally received laissez-faire treatment. This means that public responsibility for integrating newcomers has fallen to state and local governments, and the situation of immigrants varies enormously depending on whether they settle in a welcoming environment.

Federal policymakers would do well to consider whether more attention to immigrant policy is warranted. The U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform (1997) recommended the adoption of an explicit "Americanization" policy to help achieve civic integration of newcomers, by which they meant the commitment to the values of liberty, democracy, and equal opportunity. For the first time in decades, an office has been established within USCIS with these goals. Specifically, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 established an Office of Citizenship in USCIS charged with promoting civic integration as well as instruction and training on citizenship responsibility for legal immigrants, including development of educational materials and community outreach activities. The Office expands its network by working in partnership with government agencies, community groups, and other organizations involved in civic engagement and integration. As one of its first products the Office of Citizenship recently published a guide for new immigrants, ultimately to be available in 10 languages, that provides information to help new permanent residents adjust to life in the United States. The guide provides everyday information to assist settlement and includes sections on such topics as rights and responsibilities, finding a place to live and a job, getting a Social Security card, taxes, healthcare, education and childcare, emergencies and safety, and finally, learning more about the United States and becoming a U.S. citizen.

Conclusion

At one time, it could have been said that Congress passes major immigration legislation about once in a generation, but now the pace seems to be about once every 5 years. Beyond the fact that all laws are the outcome of a process of compromise, immigration laws owe as much to the prevailing perceptions of the day as to the underlying realities. With immigration so much in the public eye, the need for good research designed with awareness of its policy implications continues to grow. Equally important is the task of bringing this research to the attention of opinion makers and policymakers.

The creation of the USCIS Office of Policy and Strategy with the explicit mission of doing policy research and making policy recommendations is one avenue for bringing research findings into the policy process. The creation of the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics is another promising step toward elevating the role of the immigration statistics function, which also faces serious resource constraints under the new structure. An unprecedented amount of attention is now being given to improving the quality of immigration data systems, and this will eventually result in better information for management and policy analysis. The establishment of an Immigration Statistics staff in the Census Bureau also provides a focal point for data on the resident foreign-born population in the United States, and soon we should begin to see the release of public use data and analysis from the New Immigrant Survey.

However, immigration researchers cannot assume that established data collection programs will be perpetuated in the context of continued pressure for cutbacks in Federal spending. Recently the Department of Labor has decided that it can no longer support the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS). This was the only national survey that collected detailed data on the employment, health, and living conditions of migrant and seasonal farm workers. A key recent finding is that more than half of all crop workers are present illegally, which is important for policymakers to know as they design a temporary worker program, a policy issue at the forefront of this Administration. The research community can play an important role by defending the usefulness of programs such as NAWS.

Beyond government data, there is much room for creativity in designing research leading to a better understanding of the effects of current immigration and immigrant policies. New research at this time could make a significant contribution to policy formation as well as to social science. Our objective in this paper has been to inspire you to think about the many ways in which good immigration research can contribute to good immigration and immigrant policy and to undertake that research.

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