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ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR OF NEURODIVERSE MEMBERS OF GENERATION Z IN A SOCIETY OF 'DEMOCRATIC FATIGUE' – THE POLISH EXAMPLE

ABSTRACT

Objectives: *The aim of the article is to analyze the voting behavior of neurodivergent representatives of Generation Z in Poland in the context of the growing phenomenon of democratic fatigue. The author focuses on how young neurodivergent voters perceive the political system, what expectations they have of the state, and which factors influence their electoral decisions, with particular emphasis on ideological preferences.*

Material and methods: *The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining an analysis of existing research and secondary data with original qualitative research. The key empirical component consisted of asynchronous online interviews with neurodivergent individuals aged 18–30 who were students and graduates of a Polish university. This research design enabled respondents to freely express their opinions and experiences related to participation in political life and elections.*

Results: *The findings indicate that neurodivergent members of Generation Z, despite their critical assessment of the political class and disappointment with the actions of successive governments, remain electorally active. Their expectations of the state focus on economic issues such as material stability and access to housing, as well as on ideological and social matters, including minority rights, access to healthcare, and greater inclusivity toward neurodivergent people.*

Conclusions: *The respondents show a clear tendency to support left-wing parties, which the author interprets as a result of a strong sense of social justice and personal experiences of exclusion. The article demonstrates that democratic fatigue does not necessarily lead to withdrawal from political participation, but may instead encourage the search for alternative forms of political representation.*

KEYWORDS: *political preferences, voting behavior, neurodiversity, Generation Z, neurodiverse voters*

INTRODUCTION

Gen Zedders characteristically espouse specific values that differ from previous generations: concern for the natural environment, a pursuit of justice, and a desire to be part of an inclusive society where each member has the potential to use their skills and predispositions. On the other hand, Zoomers are highly uncertain about their future and the economic circumstances that may befall them. This generation is particularly vulnerable to experiencing precarity. A significant number of them are neurodiverse. Despite various

obstacles and limitations, these individuals do participate in political life, as evidenced by their electoral activity.

The phenomenon of democratic fatigue is apparent throughout European societies and manifests itself in a growing lack of trust in politics and politicians, declining voter turnout, and a sense of having no real influence on the political situation. Some Gen Zedders, disillusioned with mainstream politics, support populist political parties. In Poland, the situation is somewhat different. Zoomers in general, and their neurodivergent representatives, are disappointed with the failures of successive governments, particularly in terms of recognising the problems facing this group of voters. Nevertheless, they do participate in political life and are active voters. The disappointment and impatience among neurotypical Gen Zedders is reflected in their growing interest in left-wing parties. They are less likely to support conservative parties. The primary objective of this study is to examine the electoral preferences, motivations, and voting barriers of neurodivergent youth in Poland. While the central analytical focus remains on Generation Z, the research sample inherently encompasses the youngest cohorts of Millennials as a vital socio-demographic baseline for comparative analysis.

GENERATIONS AND VALUES

In sociological literature, the term 'generation' refers to '(...) all people of approximately the same age belonging to a given cultural circle who, based on a shared historical and social situation, have similar attitudes, motivations, expectations, feelings towards the world, and value systems' (Warwas et al., 2016, p. 19). For A. Giddens, a 'generation' is '(...) all individuals born and living at the same time' (Giddens et al., 2012, p. 1084). This author also emphasises that 'belonging to a generation is determined not only by the year of birth, but also by the community of experiences shaped by a specific society' (Giddens et al., 2012, p. 1064). Another definition indicates that a 'generation' is 'a group of people born at approximately the same time, sharing the same historical experiences. Based on similar, unique experiences, representatives of a generation display certain similarities in the way they act as well as ideology, which distinguishes them from earlier and later generations' (Marshall, 2005, p. 240). In the context

of this study, Generation Z (Zoomers) is precisely demarcated as individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (currently aged 18–31), whereas the preceding cohort of Millennials encompasses those born between 1981 and 1996.

Of course, generations are not homogeneous; internal diversity does exist. This diversity particularly applies to young people, but it is certainly possible to identify certain distinguishing features of the young generation that distinguish them from representatives of older generations.

Representatives of this generation are characteristically thought of as open, sensitive, tolerant, willing to learn and act, and self-confident. Zoomers are not afraid to take risks, cope well with change, and strive for work-life balance. Religion may have been important to their parents and grandparents, but Generation Z has different priorities (Onet.pl, 2024; SWPS & They.pl, 2024).

Politically speaking, Gen Z reflects a broader outlook than previous generations. Gen Zedders have their own particular worldview and seriously consider their role in making the world a better place. They have to balance this dream with their own concerns about securing a good job and a decent standard of living. They are perceived as idealists or dreamers. Their top concerns and priorities are both global and local. When asked what causes them stress, most Gen Zedders feel (very) concerned about the future, particularly their own, and this includes having enough money to live on (67%), getting a good job (64%), and being able to pay for school or university (59%). They also worry about global issues such as gun violence (62%) and climate change (61%). However, when global concerns clash with preparations for their own future, most Zoomers pragmatically prioritise themselves (Merriman, 2020).

Generation Z is a diverse generation that gravitates toward progressive social principles and cares about certain social issues of particular interest. When making political decisions, they support political candidates whom they perceive as sharing a similar outlook. In other words, their vote means something to them, and they must believe that the person they vote for represents their values. The politicians they trust must be authentic and genuine. Social justice may be paramount for Generation Z, but issues like climate change and ensuring the rights of social minorities are also important to them. Gen Zedders are active on social media, which is a means of communicating political messages to them. However, Generation Z is not a monolithic group.

What interests young people in urban settings may not interest those living in the suburbs or rural areas ('The Politics of Gen Z', 2023).

The views, attitudes, and preferences of different generations are of particular interest to political parties, which commonly commission social surveys of support within different age groups. Failure to do so would risk losing votes. This runs into trouble when the views of different generations diverge sharply on certain issues. Generation Z is significantly more liberal than previous generations and is significantly more likely to prioritise the freedom of the individual to protest for what they believe is right. They are more likely to agree that a citizen may engage in acts of civil disobedience when opposing government actions, and significantly less likely to agree that always obeying the law is an important part of being a good citizen. Looking back at the views held by older generations when they were younger, one can analyse whether their views change as they age or remain the same. Overall, one may note that Generation Z's views are highly consistent and do not change as members of this group age. Generation Z and Millennials hold more liberal views than their Baby Boomer and Silent Generation grandparents. It seems likely that Generation Z will continue to be more liberal than previous generations as they age, enter the workforce, have children, and settle down (Caulori, 2024).

DEMOCRATIC FATIGUE

Trust in democratic institutions and political parties has declined globally over the past two decades. This decline has been increasingly apparent in countries with established democratic traditions. This is not surprising, given that ruling parties have performed poorly in terms of meeting the key needs of their constituents, including stable employment and affordable housing, while keeping food and energy prices in check. As a result, millions of people are turning toward right-wing leaders perceived as anti-establishment, such as Trump and Farage, or European populists, who have been doing increasingly well at the polls.

When moderate politicians gain power, they become embroiled in scandals. They also lack ideas on how to address the pressing issues of our time, from climate change to regulations surrounding the development of artificial intelligence. The system of representative democracy, where we elect

members of parliament to govern on our behalf, is failing. But are there any other options? Winston Churchill declared that ‘democracy is the worst form of government, except for all others that have been tried’ (Krznaric, 2024).

Faith in democracy is eroding. It turns out that one-fifth of Britons under 45 believe that the best system for effective governance is ‘a strong leader who doesn’t have to bother with elections’ (Mason, 2025). Only 8% of Britons over 45 share this view. Similar findings came to light in a 2020 study by Cambridge researchers, which examined citizens’ attitudes in 160 countries and found that younger generations ‘have become increasingly disillusioned with democracy’ (Foa et al., 2020). According to the Pew Research Center, almost two-thirds of citizens in 12 high-income countries were dissatisfied with democracy in 2024, compared to just under half of those surveyed in 2017 (Fetterolf, 2024). As can be seen, dissatisfaction with democracy has soared over the analysed period. A significant reason for this state of affairs is the economic model implemented so far, which is floundering in stagnation and failing to meet citizens’ need for security. The aforementioned study by scientists from Cambridge showed that economic exclusion was the main reason for this situation.

Free-market capitalism as the foundation of democracy has not fully delivered, but instead has created a platform for citizen disillusionment (Jones, 2025). Many young voters appear to share the belief that broken, dysfunctional government systems are incapable of addressing the critical challenges that have largely befallen their generation. According to researchers, this sense of fatalism extends to the right, center, and left. Millennials and Generation Z are generations apart because of the risks they face. They experience everything from the housing crisis to the threat of climate change and the rise of AI. Young people feel hopeless about the challenges they face and are disillusioned with a political system that fails to address their needs (Lempinena, 2024).

NEUROATYPICAL PEOPLE AND THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Neurodiversity is a concept popularised by Australian sociologist Judy Singer and refers to neurological diversity considered as a natural and positive feature of society. According to this concept, differences in how we think, process information, and respond to stimuli are an expression of the natural diversity of human minds, not a symptom of illness. Society itself is therefore neurodiverse because we all have different ways of processing stimuli and information. Our brains function in various ways, some more or less typical.

Neuroatypical individuals function in a way that deviates from the standard. This often entails diagnosing them with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette syndrome, synesthesia, specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyscalculia), or dyspraxia. However, the latest edition of the International Classification of Diseases and Disorders (ICD-11) emphasises the importance of considering these differences in the context of difficulties prevalent in specific areas of life and of moving away from generalising and pathologising neurological differences (ICD-11, n.d.).

The concept of neurodiversity emphasises that difficulties in certain areas of life directly relate to advantages in other areas. Monotropism is one scientific theory that explains the challenges faced by individuals along the spectrum, emphasizing that neuroatypical individuals have difficulty shifting their attention from one thing to another and processing multiple stimuli simultaneously (Murray et al., 2005). While multitasking is highly valued by many managers, neuroatypical individuals' lack of this skill is often compensated for by profound and intense concentration (so-called hyperfocus) on a selected area of work or interest. In times of distractions that can disrupt productivity and stretch deadlines, collaborating with individuals who can focus on a task to such a degree undoubtedly offers significant benefit.

Neuroatypicality, as one of the premises of diversity, can be treated as a resource. When conditions are created so that its inherent potential may be developed, it can bring tangible benefits – not only economically, but also socially.

The political engagement of neurodivergent people can be observed in the way they conduct political discourse. Neurodiversity activism is gaining traction. While there is certainly partisan and political activity related to neurodiversity (Craine, 2020), the main actions are activist in nature, uniting under the ‘banner’ of the neurodiversity movement. What is interesting is how activists operate – not through street protests, strikes, or other established social movement techniques (Rodgers, 2018), but primarily via online activism. This approach is particularly favoured by the development of social networks. Many neurodiversity activists can now reach tens of thousands of people with their message, and the number of followers and activists is constantly growing (Grummt, 2024).

Voting in any election can be a source of anxiety and fear. Voting is a fundamental right and a crucial aspect of participation in public life, but for people on the autism spectrum, this process can present unique challenges. Neuroatypical individuals face systemic sensory, social, and informational barriers when participating in elections. Traditional polling stations are frequently crowded, noisy, and poorly lit, which triggers severe sensory overload and anxiety. Furthermore, the mandatory face-to-face interactions with election officials, combined with complex, unadapted ballot layouts, significantly exacerbate social friction. Uninformed poll workers often rush or misinterpret voters who require additional time, transforming minor procedural friction into a profound sense of exclusion. Consequently, these structural obstacles, alongside previous negative voting experiences, actively discourage neurodivergent individuals from exercising their democratic rights (Arond, 2024; Young, 2025).

Acknowledging the challenges that neuroatypical voters may face could boost their confidence and motivate them to participate in political elections. With appropriate procedures in place, voting may become a more inclusive and less overwhelming experience. Every neuroatypical person’s vote matters, and with the right support, all votes may be counted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the method of literature analysis and criticism, alongside extensive desk research of existing sociological data. Mixed-methods research (MMR) methodology was subsequently applied to study the voting behaviour of neuroatypical Gen Zedders from Poland. This approach enables researchers to adopt various approaches to discovering truth and/or knowledge. Mixed-methods research (MMR) is a research methodology that encompasses multiple methods for seeking answers to research questions, including the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman 2012; Cresswell 2015; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011).

This approach applies the triangulation method, based on the assumption that no single method can grasp, explain, or facilitate an understanding of lived experience in all its multiplicity, and so the multi-method approach evolved. The triangulation strategy seeks solutions that ensure a holistic picture of the phenomena under study and the most insightful and critical understanding possible. This is achieved by combining diverse methods, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study. Triangulation involves using multiple methods or data sources to comprehensively understand a research issue or to test the validity of established assumptions by converging information from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). Triangulation allows researchers to overcome personal biases and limitations that may arise when adopting a single methodology. By combining different methods in a single study, researchers can partially overcome the imprecision resulting from using a single method (Furmanek 2016).

For the purposes of this study, source triangulation was employed, involving the application and comparison of data from available research on the voting behaviour of Generation Z and neuroatypical individuals. This involved direct research conducted by the author of this study via asynchronous interviews, as well as the findings of other studies relevant to this topic. References to these studies are presented in the discussion and summary section. Direct, as well as desk, research was conducted, which is an example of the aforementioned source triangulation. The methodological aspects of the qualitative research

conducted for this study are presented in more detail below. Asynchronous email interviews were used for this study. This qualitative research method involves repeated online exchanges of information between the researcher and the participant within a specific timeframe (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Invitations to participate were sent via email from the University of Silesia. After clicking on the link in the email containing information about the study and its topic, those wishing to participate were redirected to a Google Form containing specific questions for respondents to answer. Participants in the voluntary, anonymous survey had one week to respond. After this period, they were no longer eligible to participate in the ongoing research.

The literature indicates that asynchronous interviews can facilitate qualitative research because they are inexpensive and shorten the research time. They also yield detailed and useful information. Email interviews are cheaper to run than face-to-face interviews and the online channel is useful in situations where geographical distance plays a part and might otherwise require an international phone call, generating additional costs. Email interviews can be easily transcribed, copied, and pasted compared to other types. Researchers are not limited by location or even by having to conduct one conversation at a time. Asynchronous interviews via email and online questionnaires enable researchers to interview multiple participants simultaneously, saving both time and money (East et al., 2008; Meho, 2006). From the participant's perspective, email interviews reduce the pressure of face-to-face communication, especially when sensitive topics are being discussed, provide a sense of privacy and anonymity, and allow for time-flexible participation (Amri et al., 2021; Dahlin, 2021). Participants in asynchronous interviews rate email communication (compared to face-to-face conversations, online video, and online chat interviews) as a convenient and safe means for expressing feelings, although they feel less connected to the interviewer than those who communicated live and synchronously (Guest et al., 2020). For researchers, challenges posed by asynchronous interviews may include the inability to directly observe the participant and notice nonverbal cues. However, the absence of eye contact can eliminate any unintentional or hidden biases a researcher might impose based on a participant's appearance (McCoy & Kerson, 2006).

Existing research suggests that the quality of responses and participant experience is comparable between email interviews and other methods, such as telephone interviews, in-person interviews, or live video broadcasts (Keen et al., 2022; Ranieri et al., 2021).

To explore the voting behaviour of neuroatypical Gen Zedders from Poland, the empirical study was designed as a diagnostic survey (sondaż diagnostyczny), utilizing qualitative asynchronous interviews as the primary research technique. The study targeted neuroatypical individuals aged 18–30 years old with ADHD, autism, dysgraphia, or dyslexia. Students and graduates of the University of Silesia in Katowice participated in the research. The asynchronous interviews were addressed to both students and graduates of the aforementioned university. An online questionnaire, serving as the primary research tool, was sent to 1,700 individuals via the university's internal email system. Current and former students of the author of this article participated. The goal was to obtain at least 15 interviews, which was exceeded as 22 interviews were collected in the end. The interviews included a personal profile section and questions organised into nine thematic groups. The responses were used to understand the voting behaviour of neuroatypical Generation Z voters during the recent parliamentary elections in Poland.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The first interview question concerned the actions neuroatypical voters expect from the current government. These expectations can be related to economic and moral issues, as well as problems directly experienced by neuroatypical individuals, such as access to specific medications. The respondents also raised other issues, such as Poland's need for armaments and affordable housing. However, these topics were marginal.

In economic terms, neuroatypical voters expect the current government to impose stable and low taxes, as well as labour market regulations leading to higher wages. The following statement illustrates the above: 'Lower taxes... Higher wages, lower housing prices, lower food prices.'

When it comes to social issues, neuroatypical voters expect the government to take action to encourage greater tolerance throughout Polish society

towards LGBTQ people and civil partnerships, provide access to abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, and legalise certain substances, such as marijuana. These issues are nicely illustrated by statements given by two interviewees: 'legalisation of marijuana, greater acceptance of LGBTQ people and civil partnerships', '...introduce legal abortion up to 12 weeks, increase sexual education for young people, and facilitate access to contraception'.

Regarding the third area – the everyday lives of neuroatypical people – interviewees expect the new government to educate the public about the problems faced by people with ADHD, as well as offer wider access to medications that would help them to function better in everyday life, as well as increase spending on healthcare to provide easier access to specialists who treat the health problems suffered by neuroatypical people. The following statement is a good illustration of such expectations: 'increase the supply (and therefore availability) of ADHD medications, extend the period during which prescriptions can be used to purchase a given medication, introduce/invest in education campaigns about ADHD in general or ADHD in women specifically, allocate more money for psychiatry in Poland, reimburse therapy for people with ADHD/facilitate access to it through the National Health Service'.

The next question asked respondents to assess the current government, both positively and negatively. Most answers were negative. It can be said that neuroatypical voters evaluate the current government negatively and are disappointed with it. They do not see any correlation between its actions and fulfilling its campaign promises. This opinion is nicely summarised by a statement given by one of the interviewees: 'At the moment, I don't feel any changes in the government's policy. I believe that many issues are still being used for political games, especially ideological issues, such as LGBT rights or the right to abortion, which translates into the government's lack of action on social issues such as introducing civil partnerships and the right to abortion up to 12 weeks. I acknowledge that it's important not to make drastic decisions and to consult and work on controversial issues, but I believe that a happy medium should be reached on these issues, namely, sustainable development and efforts to reach compromises'.

The next interview question probed the reasons for not participating in the 2023 parliamentary elections in Poland. Only one respondent stated

the reasons why he did not participate in these elections. According to him, there were no suitable candidates to choose from. The remaining respondents participated in the 2023 elections, which demonstrates relatively strong social mobilisation among young people, including neuroatypical individuals.

The next interview question examined the reasons that guided neuroatypical voters when choosing candidates for the Sejm. The answers indicate that these included personal political views and campaign promises. Five interviewees participants mentioned the importance of political views. Two indicated their sympathies towards left-wing political parties. One respondent stated that goes to vote as a kind of habit or routine. One respondent stated that, from his perspective, the reason for choosing candidates was their economic development program for Poland. Clearly, the surveyed group of voters was guided by various reasons for participating in the recent parliamentary elections in Poland. However, these reasons were largely driven by their own political views as well as campaign promises.

The next interview question asked whether young neuroatypical voters were swayed by the opinions of external authorities in their voting decisions. The responses obtained here can be divided into two groups. The first stated that their voting decisions were not influenced by external authorities. The second group claimed that they had been swayed – by religious authorities, well-known political scientists, the media, and politicians presenting the programs of the political groups they represented.

The penultimate question addressed whether the parliamentary candidates chosen by young neuroatypical voters accurately represent their views and political expectations. Most respondents did not think so. However, these opinions are mitigated by the respondents' pragmatic approach to politics, believing that politicians are unable to fulfil all their promises, and that this is an inherent part of politics. Voters must accept this to some extent. This view is summed up by one of the study participants: 'My expectations are never 100% met, but I always try to vote for someone who is closest to my beliefs'. Only two respondents stated that their chosen parliamentary candidates fully represent their political views.

The final interview question concerned the respondents' willingness to participate in the upcoming presidential elections. All of the respondents intended

to vote in these elections. However, their choice of a given candidate was observably polarised. Despite the difficulties in extrapolating the answers they gave to the broader population, it can be concluded that the vast majority of neuroatypical voters surveyed wanted to vote for a left-leaning candidate.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

One may conclude from this study that neuroatypical representatives of Generation Z have specific expectations from the current Polish government regarding economic, moral, and life-enhancing issues, such as easier access to medications that alleviate some of the ailments associated with their neurodiversity. Their expectations regarding economic issues and access to the aforementioned medicine are rationale and indicate that neuroatypical Gen Z voters are interested in the economy and related issues. Economy-wise, they expect the current government to lower inflation in Poland, provide cheaper housing, and increase wages. These expectations are related to life issues that these voters are particularly concerned about, but which the current and previous governments have largely ignored.

Regarding moral issues, neuroatypical voters are very liberal. They expect government action to improve access to abortion, promote acceptance of LGBTQ communities, and legalise marijuana, as well as raise awareness of the issues facing neuroatypical people.

The neuroatypical Gen Z study participants are dismissive of the current Polish government's policies, which they consider to be a continuation of the previous government's. They do not see them as addressing the moral issues that this group of voters seem to care about.

Despite democratic fatigue in the EU, reflected in declining voter turnout, and the growing lack of trust in politicians, the study respondents have not turned away from politics. Despite the negative opinions expressed in this area, the vast majority of respondents did participate in the last parliamentary elections and intended to vote in the presidential elections. It can be concluded that negative opinions towards politicians and the current Polish government have not yet translated into the respondents refusing to vote. This may also indicate that respondents are aware that politics and politicians are not perfect,

but it is worth participating in political life to influence its course. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents had crystallised political views and were influenced by campaign promises, which made them more willing to vote in the last parliamentary elections. Other negative aspects of politics and its imperfections were not significant for the respondents.

According to the respondents, the candidates they selected for the Sejm do not entirely represent their views or fully meet their expectations. However, pragmatic considerations guided their choice. Most likely, these considerations were a desire to change the structure of the Polish political scene, despite an awareness that its current structure has its weaknesses.

Regarding neuroatypical Gen Zedders' willingness to vote in the 2025 presidential election, all respondents expressed a desire to do so. However, left-wing candidates were clearly preferred. Only three respondents wanted to vote for a right-wing conservative candidate. The preference for left-wing values among neuroatypical individuals may be justified by their strong sense of justice and greater sensitivity to social injustice. This leads them to support equalitarian and liberal ideas – stances associated with the left. The very fact of being excluded or stigmatised makes it easier for them to perceive their own interests as linked to broader marginalised groups. Some neuroatypical individuals indicate that traditional, conservative values and social structures, which often support the maintenance of existing social roles and hierarchies, may be perceived by autistic individuals as rigid, limiting, or even hostile to diversity. Neuroatypical individuals claim that their experiences with right-wing or conservative groups have been negative; this includes bullying, intolerance of values that deviate from the 'norm', and a lack of understanding of the needs of people with disabilities. For some, this serves as an argument against such ideologies (Why are most people with autism left-wingers/liberals?, 2024).

The trend outlined here may indicate that neuroatypical Gen Z voters may be more inclined to support left-wing politicians and parties in Poland in the future. This may reflect their fatigue with democracy in Poland and their desire to seek parties that meet their needs. This corresponds to the general polarisation of young voters in Poland. Their division certainly highlights their political views. Some are clearly espouse right-wing and nationalist views, while other young voters with left-wing and socially demanding views

sympathise with the Razem party. In some ways, this new division is more pronounced than the one proposed by the 'old' parties, whose classification along the political spectrum is quite challenging. Young supporters on either side agree on very few issues regarding economic policy and worldview; possibly the scope left for shared interpretations of reality and solutions is even narrower than between the main parties.

It is difficult to assess political trends among young people as positive or negative. Those with left-wing views will likely be dissatisfied with the resurgence of the right, while supporters of the right will disparage leftist demands. One thing is certain: one of the main factors contributing to the failure of mainstream and centrist parties among the younger generation is their own actions, which fly in the face of what young Gen Z voters expect, some of whom are neuroatypical (Oleś, 2025).

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