



# Ramadan 2020

A COVID-19 Global Impact Study



Premise Contributor Photo:  
*Street market Cirebon, Indonesia*

## Executive Summary

From Tirana to Timbuktu and Mogadishu to Manila, nearly two billion of the world's Muslims celebrate the holy month of Ramadan, which lasts from April 23rd-May 23rd 2020. As one of the five pillars of Islam, Ramadan is typically celebrated by fasting during the day and eating and drinking only at night, culminating in Eid al-Fitr, which ushers in the new month of Shawwal. Like everything else in 2020, this year's observance was severely impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which forced many Muslims to change the way the holiday is observed.

Many mosques, madrassas and community centers are now closed and the global food supply chain severely impacted, forcing people all over the world to adapt to a new normal. The Premise global network of nearly two million contributors, many of whom are Muslim, provides insight into the new normal. As part of our ongoing work to measure the effects of COVID-19, Premise launched a series of tasks across 31 countries, covering the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa, Eurasia and Southeast Asia to understand how the world is celebrating Ramadan 2020 and how this might impact the spread and affect of COVID-19 across the world.

Ramadan is traditionally a time where Muslims, across the world, congregate in large numbers with friends and family for community events. To understand the impact of COVID-19 Premise Contributors provided insight into special precautions that were being followed, and what communities across the world are eschewing those precautions which may be an indicator of potential prolonged outbreaks.

In addition to the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak, Ramadan is traditionally a time when extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and its affiliates and al-Qa'ida (AQ) increase attacks due to a distorted narrative that those who achieve martyrdom during Ramadan will achieve special status in the afterlife.

Premise conducted a survey from April 27 to May 9 resulting in 500 responses per 32 countries including Albania, Algeria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Mali, Malaysia, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, the Palestinian Territories, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen.



## Key Judgements

- We assess Afghanistan and Mali are at greater risk for more severe or prolonged outbreaks of COVID-19 due to reported lax social distancing and/or continued gatherings of large numbers of people.
- We assess the Sahel, primarily Mali and Burkina Faso, will be impacted by COVID-19, and at an increased risk of attacks by extremist groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS' affiliates in West Africa, and other extremist groups throughout the region. Reduced aid operations by international aid organizations and world powers will strain the capacity of local governments and existing peacekeeping missions.
- Despite reports<sup>1</sup> of increased ISIS attacks, low oil prices leading to a collapsed economy<sup>2</sup>, and political instability the fear of the spread of COVID-19 outweighs the fear of increased violence according to our respondents in Iraq.
- Yemen, already under siege due to an ongoing humanitarian crisis, will continue to succumb to pressure given COVID-19's effect on international humanitarian aid missions' ability to send goods and services into the country.
- We note a direct correlation between a strong government response to COVID-19 and reported personal behaviors associated with closures of mosques, and an increase in taking special precautions and/or reduced attendance at public events.
- Contributors reported high levels of concern regarding the spread of COVID-19 within communities despite the majority of respondents indicating they are taking the necessary personal precautions to protect themselves as well as extra safety measures instituted by their national governments.

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<sup>1</sup> Loveluck, Louisa and Mustafa Salim. "ISIS exploits Iraq's coronavirus lockdown to step up attacks", Washington Post, 08 May 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/isis-exploits-iraqs-coronavirus-lockdowns-to-step-up-attacks/2020/05/07/1513edee-8f98-11ea-9322-a29e75effc93\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/isis-exploits-iraqs-coronavirus-lockdowns-to-step-up-attacks/2020/05/07/1513edee-8f98-11ea-9322-a29e75effc93_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> Loveluck, Louisa and Mustafa Salim. "Iraq's economy is collapsing under the double blow of sinking oil prices and coronavirus lockdown", Washington Post, 04 May 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iraqs-economy-is-collapsing-under-the-double-blow-of-sinking-oil-prices-and-coronavirus-lockdown/2020/05/04/61b26a3e-8897-11ea-80df-d24b35a568ae\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-economy-is-collapsing-under-the-double-blow-of-sinking-oil-prices-and-coronavirus-lockdown/2020/05/04/61b26a3e-8897-11ea-80df-d24b35a568ae_story.html)

## Afghanistan and Malaysia

### Strong Government Response and Increased Risk



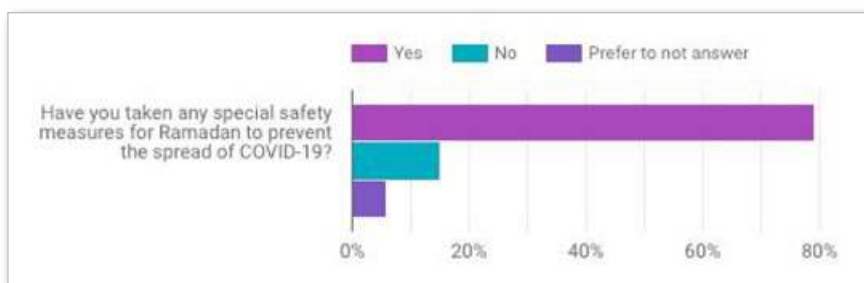
Street market in Kabul, Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, nearly 50% of contributors were not aware of any special safety measures for Ramadan to prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country. We note 65% of contributors indicated their local mosques were open and that community events continued and nearly 70% planned to participate in those community events.

In Malaysia, 85% of contributors were aware of national government enacted special safety measures in place for Ramadan, and nearly 80% indicated they themselves planned to take special precautions to celebrate. Furthermore, over 60% of contributors indicated their local mosques would be closed. Less than 40% of Malaysian respondents were aware of any community events due to take place.



Security officer taking temperatures at the entrance to public building Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



## The Sahel

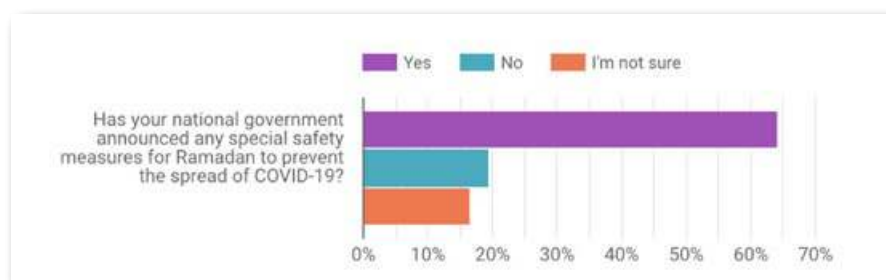
### A Region Under Intense Pressure

The Sahel is an area under intense pressure. We assess Mali and Burkina Faso are at significant increased risk from COVID-19 and attacks by extremist groups such as Boko [Haram](#)<sup>3</sup>, ISIS' affiliates in West Africa and others throughout the region, particularly during the Ramadan month. Limitations of international aid groups and world powers to provide aid will put even more pressure on local governments and those existing peacekeeping [missions](#)<sup>4</sup>. Mali is home to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MUNISMA) as well as significant deployments of French personnel under Operation [Barkhane](#)<sup>5</sup>.

As of May 6, Mali had 612 confirmed cases and 32 reported deaths<sup>6</sup>. These numbers are likely to rise as Mali's neighbors are all in the top quarter of African countries with confirmed COVID-19 cases. The Sahel has not experienced the full impact of COVID-19 as compared to potential projections when Europe is

used as a comparison. In response to the virus, the Malian government recently<sup>7</sup> shut down international borders, banned gatherings over 50 people, and temporarily closed schools.

Despite those announcements, 91% of the respondents in Mali say they will be celebrating Ramadan this year, even with 76% of respondents being concerned or very concerned with new levels of violence within their country. With respect to COVID-19, 80% of respondents are concerned about the spread of the virus in their community. While 64% of respondents are aware of special safety measures that have been instituted by the national government. Notably 62% of respondents are still aware of community events taking place to celebrate the holiday and 80% of those who know plan on participating in them. In the face of high levels of concern toward both COVID-19 and increased levels of violence, the overwhelming majority of Mali contributors will seek ways to celebrate Ramadan.



<sup>3</sup> "Boko Haram jihadists in deadly clash with army in southwestern Niger", France 24, 06 May 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200506-boko-haram-jihadists-in-deadly-clash-with-army-in-southwestern-niger>

<sup>4</sup> "French soldier dies in Mali fighting extremists, 2nd in days", Associated Press, 04 May 2020, <https://apnews.com/8968fc7a4e4f7ff1181a29d10b4a0429>

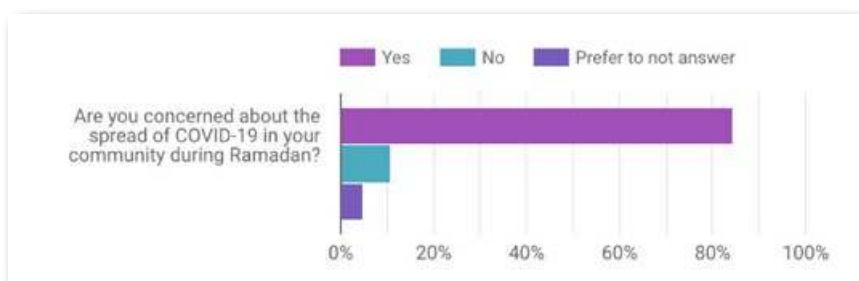
<sup>5</sup> "Operation Barkhane", Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Barkhane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barkhane)

<sup>6</sup> "COVID-19 Dashboard", Johns Hopkins University Medicine: CoronaVirus Resource Center, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

<sup>7</sup> Hoije, Katrina. "Mali Holds Vote Despite Virus, Kidnapped Opposition Leader", Bloomberg, 19 April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/amp/news/articles/2020-04-19/pandemic-kidnapped-opposition-leader-fail-to-stop-mali-election>



In Burkina Faso 84% of respondents indicated that they are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in their community and 69% are either concerned or very concerned about increased levels of violence. Additionally, 61% reported that mosques in their communities were closed and only 39% are aware of any planned community celebrations. Even with high levels of concern about violence and the spread of COVID-19, 87% of respondents indicated they plan to celebrate with 80% of respondents potentially attending community celebrations in their community.





## Iraq and Yemen

### Countries Under Pressure

Both Iraq and Yemen face difficult situations this Ramadan season with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased violence from a resurgent ISIS in Iraq to the ongoing Huthi struggle and threats from ISIS and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. Consistent with these concerns, Contributors reported similar outlooks on Ramadan festivities in both countries, underscoring a subdued approach to celebrations in 2020. We further note, according to a previous survey conducted by Premise across Yemen, 56% of contributors reported humanitarian assistance in their community had been cancelled or delayed due to COVID-19.

In Iraq, 72% of our contributors are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in their community during Ramadan and only 53% of respondents stated that they plan on celebrating. Additionally, 58% are aware of special safety measures

instructed by the national government, while 55% respondents indicated that they are concerned or very concerned about violence in Iraq during the holiday. ISIS will likely continue to exploit the security void opened by a decrease in readiness among Iraqi Security Forces. Finally, 58% of our respondents are unaware of any public events in their communities celebrating Ramadan. Overall our responses from Iraq indicate a more cautious approach when it comes to participating in any public Ramadan related festivities. According to a previous survey conducted by Premise across Iraq in March and April, over 60% of contributors believe the government's military forces would be required to maintain law and order in event of an emergency. Continued economic pressures due to low oil prices and readiness amongst security forces due to COVID-19 will place an increased strain on new PM Mustafa al-Kadimi to maintain law and order throughout the country.



Premise Contributor Photo:  
**Street market - Ibb, Yemen**

**The Premise global network is more than 2 million users in over 100 countries.**

Responses from contributors in Yemen were consistent with those in Iraq; 65% of respondents indicated they are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in their communities while 42% are aware of special safety measures implemented by the national government. Violence remained a concern with 53% either concerned or very concerned about increased levels of violence, and 54% are unaware of community events taking place to celebrate Ramadan.



*Iftar dinner in Jadidah, Iraq*



# The Global Ramadan Experience

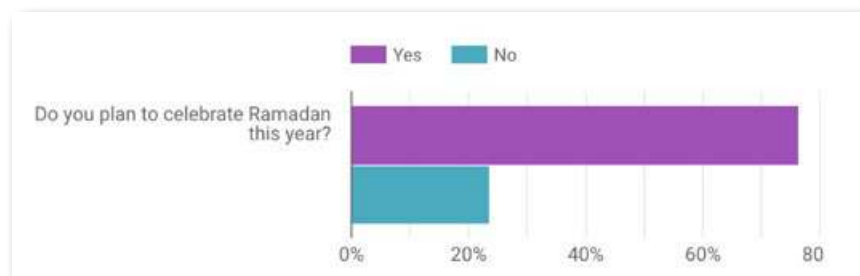


Premise Contributor Photo:  
*Street market Gemlik, Turkey*

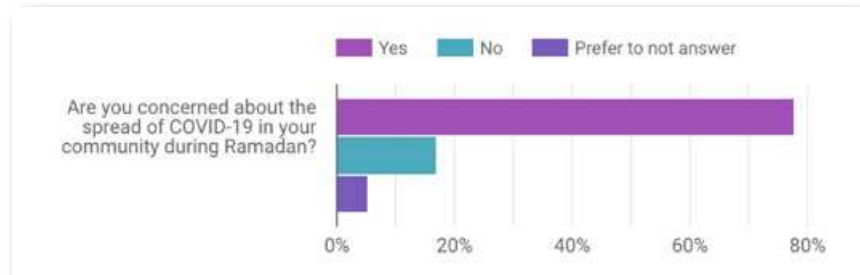
## COVID-19 Data and Charts

(Charts are built from 6,058 respondents across 30 plus countries who identified as Muslim)

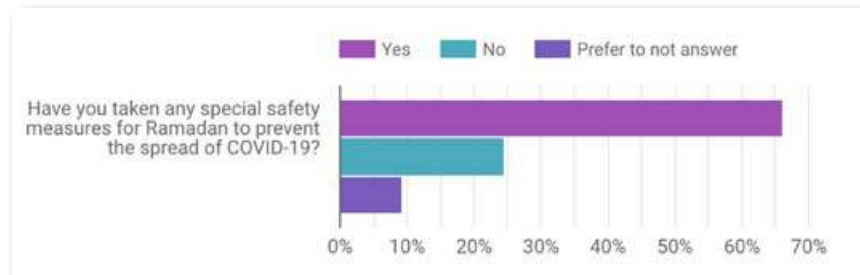
Even with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic limiting social and familial interactions, more than 75% of our respondents indicated that they still plan on celebrating Ramadan in some fashion this year.



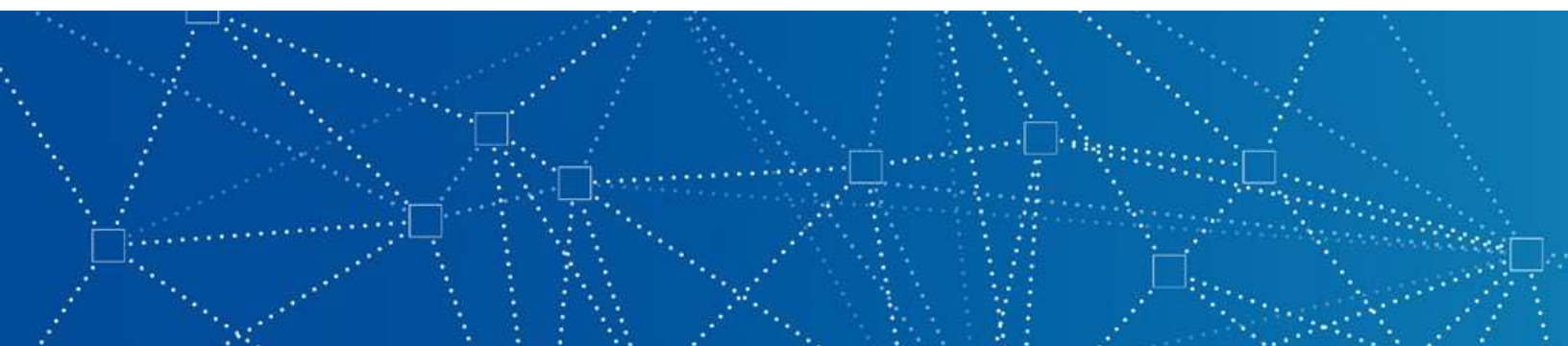
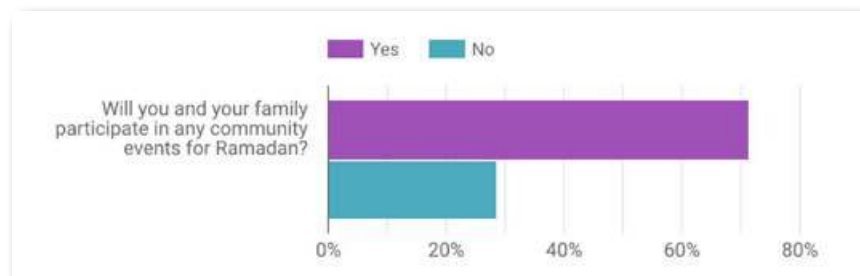
With a majority (75%) of respondents indicating that they plan to celebrate Ramadan there are still high levels (79%) of concern regarding the spread of COVID-19 in communities during the holiday.



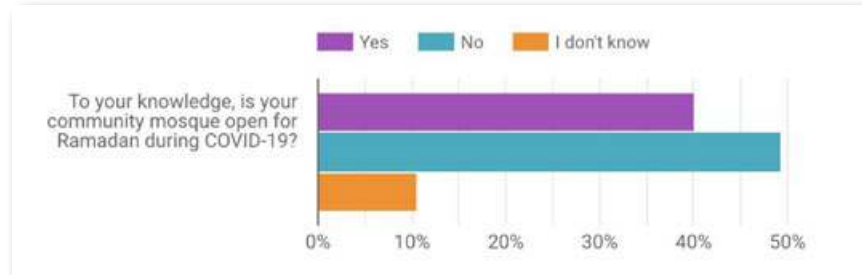
Due to the high level of concern surrounding the community spread of COVID-19, two-thirds of respondents indicated that they are taking special safety measures to prevent the spread. Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they are NOT taking special safety measures, with nearly 10% preferring not to answer.



COVID-19 concerns are not deterring respondents from an enthusiasm to celebrate the holiday in their respective communities (66%).



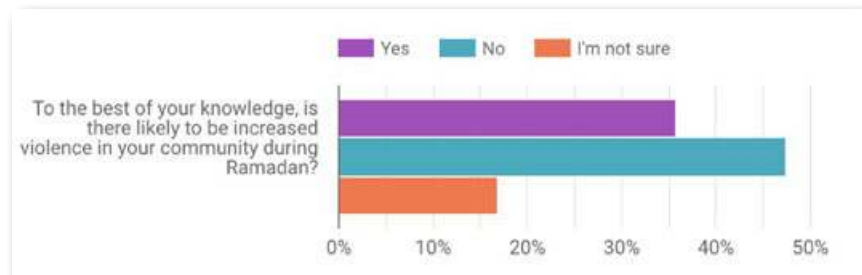
While a majority of our respondents indicated that they will be participating in community events during the holiday, nearly half of the respondents stated that their mosques will be closed.



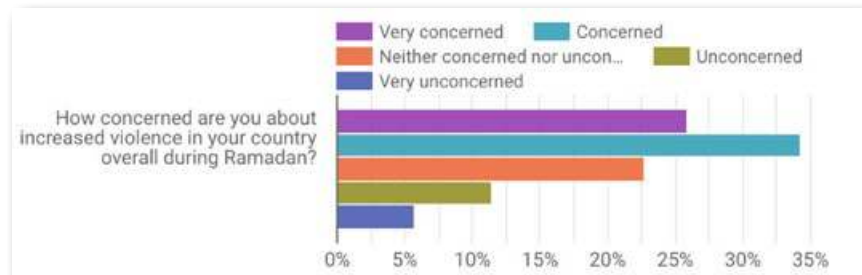
## INCREASED THREAT OF VIOLENCE

(Overall responses)

Historically the Ramadan holiday includes an increased risk of attacks or other acts of aggression from extremist organizations and other non-state actors; however, there was not a clear consensus regarding the likelihood of increased violence.



While respondents had mixed feelings surrounding violence within their own communities, there were overall heightened levels of concern about violence overall in their respective countries.



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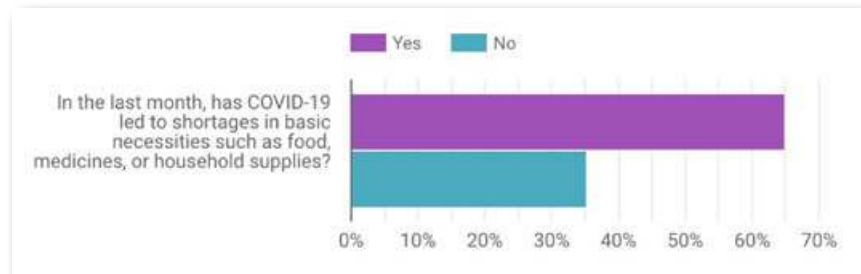
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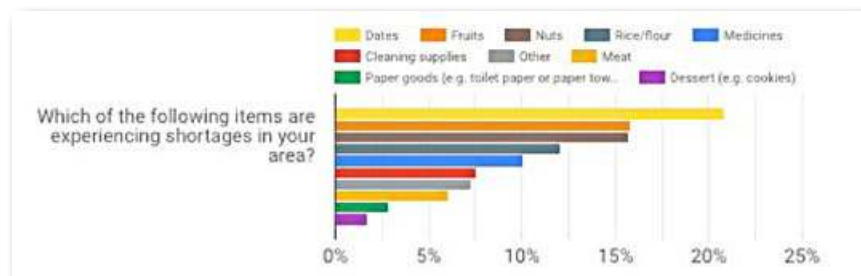
## SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

(Overall responses)

COVID-19 has put a global strain on the availability of necessary goods and services, and this tension has continued since restrictive measures were put in place by local and national governments. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) indicate shortages of basic necessities in their respective communities over the last month.



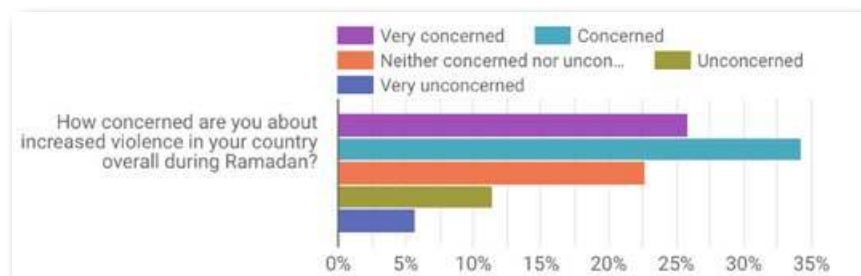
The following chart highlights the items that respondents are experiencing shortages of in their respective communities:



## STRONG GOV RESPONSE

(Overall responses)

Respondents have indicated that there is a strong government response to the COVID-19 pandemic with 65% detailing that their respective national governments have announced special safety measures during Ramadan.



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