

## SPATIAL AND SECURITY EMPHASES HYBRID WAR IN UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF ELECTORAL AND PARTY-IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

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### Abstract

*Preparing for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has long used hybrid warfare methods in various forms and manifestations. This study focuses on the peculiarities of hybrid warfare in Ukraine by assessing the procedure of electoral influence. The data of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, as well as analytical studies on the ideological views of parties and key political figures of the country are used. The manifestations of hybrid warfare are analysed through the influence of pro-russian parties on the electorate and on important components of state life in Ukraine. In Ukraine, the ambiguity of hybrid warfare has allowed Russia to seize the initiative and secure political and military results that would otherwise be ineffective and costly. Manifestations of the hybrid war's in Ukraine influence include appeals to language, religious, administrative, and territorial issues and the promotion of anti-state ideas. The need to introduce a national policy of national identity is noted, which should become the main instrument for the formation of a state with European values and national traditions.*

**Keywords:** hybrid warfare, Ukraine, national elections, factors of national identity, ideological influences

### Introduction

Information actions are key in the context of hybrid warfare. A lot of attention has been paid to this issue, and the tools and key areas of activity have been identified. Mumford and Carlucci, in addition to processing powerful scientific and academic source material, emphasized its effectiveness using the example of the Ukrainian-russian war. In particular, the authors confirm that hybrid warfare is used only if it meets the political goals of those who launch it and those who have to defend themselves. Ambiguity links this operational concept, providing a link to the strategy above and its tactical dimension below (Mumford and Carlucci, 2023).

We would like to draw attention to a poorly researched component of this process – whether hybrid warfare has any connection with electoral preferences. Without claiming it to be a comprehensive study of this issue, we would like to

explore the role of hybrid warfare as a tool for shaping the electoral preferences of the state's population, taking the example of Ukraine.

The military invasion that Ukraine has been experiencing since 2014 had a significant preparation phase, which was reflected in various formats and manifestations of activity. Everything demonstrated a thorough operational plan of the Russian Federation, which combined kinetic and non-kinetic elements in a time sequence and in key spaces aimed at slowing down defence and deactivating threshold countermeasures. In many spheres of social life, there were manifestations of the formation of anti-state policies and the continuation of the idea of inferiority. The role of the media, the church, and financial as well as economic conglomerates is worth mentioning here. However, we should not forget about the formation of electoral opinion, which, in the regional context, had a certain basis and can be fully defined as one of the ways of shaping the informational hybrid war.

The conclusions on this issue are not always obvious and require some analytical generalisation.

## **Material and methods**

Some elements of hybrid warfare have occurred in almost all armed conflicts of the past, although the traditional perception of war as a direct armed (military) confrontation between the parties has remained. This is how the famous Prussian general and military theorist of the early nineteenth century, Carl von Clausewitz, defined war: "War is the continuation of politics by other means" (Sakhnovsky and Chedoluma, 2015). Today, the role of hybrid warfare as a tool has increased significantly, and countries that skilfully use it as a starting phase of active military intervention gain a significant advantage. Therefore, it is important that the other party to the war responds adequately to such actions and influences. The statement by Mumford and Carlucci that hybrid warfare is the result of time and space, not an abstract behavioural reflection, is quite relevant (Mumford and Carlucci, 2023). It should be noted that the formation of electoral preferences and electoral processes in general has a similar context. Therefore, we believe that the instruments of hybrid warfare have influenced the formation of electoral preferences of the Ukrainian population.

The UK Ministry of Defence in one of its programmes (Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC)) even suggests to separate hybrid threats from hybrid warfare, defining threats as "a wide range of non-violent means to target vulnerabilities across society to undermine the functioning, unity, or will of their targets while humiliating and disrupting the status quo..." (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2017).

Hybrid warfare is a form of violent conflict that simultaneously involves state and non-state actors, using conventional and unconventional means of

warfare that are not limited to the battlefield or a specific physical territory (Jacobs and Lasconjarias, 2015). In academic circles, it is argued that the definition of hybrid warfare belongs to Hoffman: "a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts, including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal unrest" (Hoffman, 2007). Thus, the tools of hybrid warfare are designed to influence the minds of the population and can have different forms of dissemination and manifestation.

Thus, we can state that hybridity is a combination of different elements that coexist in one object. The study of its informational manifestations should be more focused on how its unique nature can achieve the ultimate goal. This type of conflict, by its very definition, can take different forms and use different actors, but to achieve conceptual clarity, we should focus on why it exists, not how. In this context, the definition of hybrid warfare formulated by Mumford and Carlucci: "the synchronised use of multiple instruments of power, tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the spectrum of societal functions, to achieve a synergistic effect" (Mumford and Carlucci, 2023). This emphasises the role of the information effect, which can be realised through various media, often political forces or their representatives. A state or population that has become a victim of hybrid aggression may not be able to assess how synchronised the actions of key players can be to spread information influence. Osiichuk and Shepotylo estimates the contemporaneous impact of military violence on civilians' well-being, using micro-level individual survey data to study the case of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war (Osiichuk and Shepotylo, 2020).

No wonder that shaping public opinion, promoting the right ideologies, and strategic behaviour have become powerful elements of influence. It seems appropriate to consider them in the light of electoral processes. They are a living embodiment of the state's policy, which is shaped by its citizens. Through the promotion of adherence to certain views, it is possible to assess the impact and significance of hybrid warfare tools for the state.

The methods used in this study were statistical, analytical, as well as generalisation, which allowed us to form a holistic picture of the manifestations of the hybrid war in the promotion of certain ideological approaches and ideas in Ukraine. The list of such parties was determined by the sampling method. At the next stage, the study compared the electoral commitment to pro-Russian ideas by assessing the voting results according to key markers of influence (state system, issues of self-identification of the Ukrainian nation, language, religion, and foreign policy orientations). The sampling method also identified the key narratives of anti-Ukrainian information, which were repeated by the leaders of pro-Russian parties.

## Results and discussion

The formation of electoral preferences is a complex and rather painstaking process. It depends on many factors that can be objective or subjective. Traditionally, such views are "prepared" at the level of certain focus groups that act as active repeaters of a certain range of ideas (Kuzyshyn, 2023). The judgements presented in the article below are an application of the principles that we relay as information influence.

The first principle is the usefulness of ambiguity. Hybrid warfare is a political choice that can be embodied in shaping public opinion through electoral sympathies. The specificity of such manifestations lies in the formation of different scenarios of influence. The expected political result may be extended in time and does not always clearly define the territory of influence.

The second principle is the dispersal strategy. The ambiguity in hybrid warfare means that a covert aggressor is forced to disperse its resources as several targets are planned. If a country does not know what it is fighting for or against, it cannot effectively defend itself or enforce its "red lines". The only way to counter such a strategy is to fight back with the same type of war. Ambiguity cannot, a priori, be characterised by concentration of force and attrition alone, but rather by mastery of space and time and a realistic understanding of power. The statement by Lawrence Freedman is relevant here. He defines strategy as "the art of creating power" (Freedman, 2013). Ambiguity has the minimal goal of denying the enemy this power, as it impedes Clausewitz's dialectic of war.

The third principle is tactical creativity. Hybrid warfare is one of the most creative types of warfare. When it is used, large sums of money are invested to implement a wide variety of tactics. These tactics win time and space and often face ineffective defences (as the examples will demonstrate further). Therefore, it is important to emphasise the fact that hybrid tactics are not "fuzzy", or "grey", or "mysterious", they are skillfully designed to be so. Hybrid warfare, from the perspective of shaping public (electoral) opinion, may create chaos, but it is never chaotic.

The fourth principle is de-escalation. The ambiguous use of force used in hybrid conflicts provides some residual means of reducing tensions down the escalation ladder as quickly as it pushes them up. Hybrid wars can end as quickly as they begin, commonly because the degree of ambiguity with which they are fought can save any potential risks if a retreat is necessary. Alternatively, such ambiguity can be created by both sides to deliberately avoid a major conflict.

An example is the manifestation of electoral activity. Over the years of local and national election cadences, some stable trends in electoral activity at the regional level have emerged. The information on the website of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine allows us to analyse the following (cvk.gov.ua).

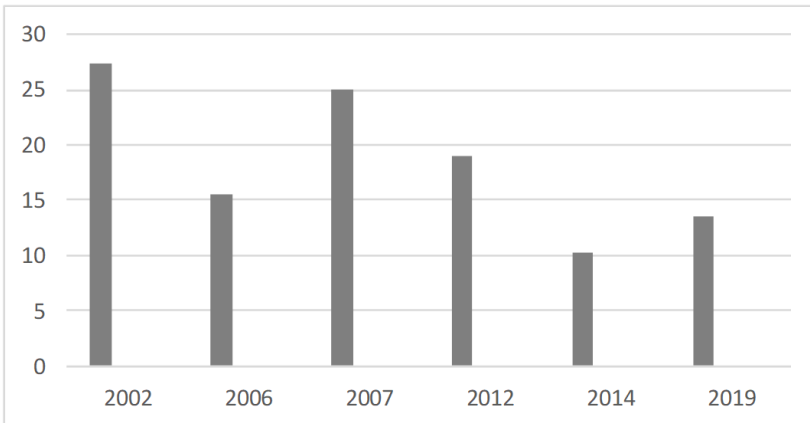
It is often believed that the extreme eastern regions of Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) have low and medium voter participation in elections. However, the average turnout data for 2010-2019 show that in the vast majority of districts (communities) in this area, voter activity was significantly higher than the average Ukrainian figure and fully competed with the activity of the electorate in the Western Ukrainian regions (the average for the period exceeded 69%) (socialdata.org.ua). It can be assumed that various (not always fair) technologies were used to stimulate participation in the elections, which ensured that a certain political force or individual candidate overcame the threshold. Examples of such activity include Donetsk, Yasynuvata, Shakhtarskyi district (Donetsk oblast), Antratsytskyi, Lutuhynskyi, Krasnodonskyi (Sorokynskyi), Popasna, Sverdlovskyi (Dovzhanskyi) districts, where the average turnout rate for the period exceeded 70 %. Given the significant number of voters who are geographically connected to these areas, it can be argued that manipulations to control the course of the elections are present here. Traditionally, these territories have supported the ideology of the Party of Regions, which in the last election cadence transformed into the Opposition Platform - For Life, whose views were clearly associated with pro-russian influence and promotion of pro-russian interests. Even support for ignoring the right to participate in the elections of certain communities in the southern part of Ukraine and multi-ethnic regions of western Ukraine (Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi regions) may also be based on the decreased support of statehood ideas in these regions due to promoting Russian political and technological influences. Often, such steps were the initial ones to promote pro-russian ideas that got into business circles, the educational and scientific segment, church views, and governmental structures. In the last decade, such things have been referred to as manifestations of the hybrid war – influencing public opinion through the promotion of anti-state ideas against Ukraine. It is noteworthy that MPs can be the carriers and repeaters of such ideas and have the ability to extrapolate them to the general population due to their social status.

The next step in assessing electoral preferences as an element of the hybrid war is political socialisation. It is nicely explained in the study by Pantazis, which states that "the processes of political socialisation can be seen as an influential parameter in national defence and security planning" (Pantazis, 2021). However, the term "political socialisation" itself, namely "the process by which citizens crystallise political identities, values, and behaviours that remain relatively stable throughout their lives" (Neundorf and Smets, 2017), may lead this research to paths that go beyond the public understanding of national security. For reasons of distinction, the term "socialisation of internal security" is therefore preferred. However, at first glance, the further correlation between the latter concept and strategic decision-making seems incompatible. This raises the question: why should this practice be considered potentially decisive? By supporting a certain

ideology and promoting it through parliamentary or regional institutions, covert influences appear regarding various issues, which are classic elements of hybrid warfare. This includes the idea of political identification. It is clearly reflected in the ideological views of party structures.

The elections to the Ukrainian parliament during the XXI century demonstrated a significant antagonism between pro-state and pro-russian views. The carriers of the pro-russian views were parties that possessed powerful financial resources and had some significant influence on large areas of Ukraine (in different electoral cadences, such party structures were Natalia Vitrenko's People's Opposition Bloc, the Peasant Party of Ukraine, the Electoral Bloc of Political Parties "FOR THE UNION", the Russian Bloc Party, the Party of Regions, the Opposition Bloc, the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (renewed), and the Opposition Platform - For Life!). As Figure 1 suggests, the number of parties of this type has been quite significant over the past two decades. It cannot be argued that they were fully funded by the Russian Federation, but they were definitely an instrument of hybrid warfare to promote the views of the "Russian World" in Ukraine through their election programmes (at the election stage) or in the course of implementing administrative and state decisions made by the deputy corps of the above-mentioned party structures.

Figure 1: Share of parties that participated in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada and acted as proponents of pro-russian ideas, %\*



\* The list of parties is provided according to the website of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine (cvk.gov.ua)

It should be emphasised that not all of these "political projects" of the Kremlin were successful. In 2002, two out of nine pro-russian parties were elected

to the Ukrainian parliament; in 2006 – two out of seven, in 2007 – three out of five, in 2012 – two out of four, in 2014 – one out of three, in 2019 – one out of three (the list of pro-russian parties in each election cadence is shown in Table 1). But this had some negative consequences for Ukrainian society. Thus, Moscow's grand chauvinistic ideas were fuelled by hybrid warfare.

Not only the list of parties whose activity had the characteristics of a hybrid war tool on the part of Russia, but also the share of the electorate that supported them is very characteristic. It is clear that not all those who voted for these parties had clear anti-state and pro-russian beliefs. Careful disguise of true plans under the pretext of supporting "strong businessmen", the issue of protecting national minorities without officially recognising Russians as a national minority in Ukraine, support for the concept of common history, and the implementation of Soviet values in modern society were elements of undermining Ukrainian identity, which was not always adequately perceived by Ukrainian society.

Table 1: List of parties that participated in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada and acted as proponents of pro-russian ideas (2002-2019 pp.)\*

N	Year	Party names
1.	2002	1) <i>Electoral bloc of political parties «Bloc of Natalia Vitrenko»**</i> 2) Electoral bloc of political parties "ZUBR" (For Ukraine, Belarus, Russia) 3) Electoral bloc of political parties "Russian Bloc" 4) Communist Party of Workers and Peasants 5) Communist Party (of workers) 6) <i>Communist Party of Ukraine **</i> 7) Communist Party of Ukraine (renewed) 8) Party of All-Ukrainian Union of the Left "Justice" 9) <i>Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) **</i>
2.	2006	1) <i>Communist Party of Ukraine **</i> 2) <i>Party of Regions **</i> 3) Bloc of Natalia Vitrenko "People's Opposition" 4) Electoral bloc "State – Labour Union" 5) Electoral bloc of political parties "For the Union" 6) Political Party of Ukraine "Party of Putin's Policies" 7) Social-Ecological Party "Union. Chornobyl. Ukraine"
3.	2007	1) Communist Party of Ukraine (renewed) 2) <i>Party of Regions **</i> 3) Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine 4) <i>Communist Party of Ukraine **</i>

		5) Electoral bloc of political parties "KUCHMA" (Constitution – Ukraine – Honour – Peace – Antifascism)
4.	2012	1) Communist Party of Ukraine 2) Party "Russian Bloc" 3) <b><i>Party of Regions</i></b> ** 4) Political Party "People's Labour Union of Ukraine"
5.	2014	1) <b><i>Political Party "Opposition Bloc"</i></b> ** 2) Communist Party of Ukraine 3) Political Party "Bloc of Left Forces"
6.	2019	1) Political Party "Opposition Bloc" 2) <b><i>Political Party "Opposition Platform – For Life!"</i></b> * 3) Political Party "Party of Sharyi"

\*The list of parties is provided according to the website of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine (cvk.gov.ua), website of the Ukrainian Center for Public Data (socialdata.org.ua), website of the Ukrainian Institute of the Future (uifuture.org). The affiliation to the mentioned group is regulated by the statements of its leaders and the views that they decorated or had relevant references to in their election programmes and speeches – the selection of parties is ours.

\*\*The parties ***in italics and bold*** are the ones that were elected to the parliament in the respective election years.

It is important that in their speeches and actions, representatives of these parties actively promoted pro-russian ideas, creating social tension and splitting Ukrainian society.

One such example is the promotion of a narrative about the regional division of the state's territory, which weakens the consolidation of its population as a political nation. An important element of consolidating value oppositions in the mass consciousness of Ukrainian citizens and escalating identification contradictions between them has been the manipulation of the topic of the unitary structure of the Ukrainian state. Traditionally, several parties that support this idea and form the relevant electoral field take part in the electoral process. Luckily, with each electoral cadence, support for such views is declining. Back in 2008, the former leader of the political association of the Ukrainian Choice party and, until recently, the leader and member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine from the Opposition Platform - For Life! V. Medvedchuk claimed: "The federalization of our country is the one and only alternative cure for its split, and the threat is real" (Kuzyshyn and Poplavska, 2022). The author of these words showed his complete dependence on Moscow's manipulators in the first days of the full-scale invasion. Many facts today confirm the financial support of this political force by Russia and the formation of relevant electoral and political views.



Statements of this type fuelled socio-political antagonisms in the country, provoking discussions about the similarities and differences in the historical fate of Ukrainians and ethnic Russians living on the territory of modern Ukraine, fuelling conflicts over historical memory, and forming negative stereotypes in the perception of bilingual Ukrainians, their religious heterogeneity, etc. This is done in the following ways to popularise the idea of identifying "Novorossia" or the South-Eastern region as a separate territory (it is clear that this is also a deliberate "throwing in" of information with the aim of eroding Ukrainian identity).

These identification contradictions, in turn, were used by political parties as instruments of political struggle to expand their own electoral circle of support and, as a result, gain access to the economic resources of the whole country and its individual regions.

Based on the support of the parties and blocs that promote the "blurring" of the boundaries of the Ukrainian nation through the establishment of local political regimes and the rejection of "Others", recognising them as "Strangers", the threat of the spread of separatist sentiment remained until 2014. The slogans of local government reforms were perceived by representatives of local power elites in their own way. It was common for regional leaders to change their civic position and geopolitical orientations under the slogan of democratic reforms in accordance with client-patronage relations established with the central government in Kyiv or in the capital of a neighbouring state. It is noteworthy that preventing destructive manipulations around the content of the identity contradictions of the Ukrainian nation was complicated due to the fact that, on formal grounds, a large number of NGOs and political parties and the work of their activists complied with Ukrainian legislation. However, in practice, the activities of such organisations implicitly undermined the foundations of Ukrainian statehood and were openly anti-Ukrainian and inhumane, acting as an element of hybrid warfare and a kind of preparation for open military aggression.

The support of parties that restrained the monolithicity and self-identification of the Ukrainian nation, usually in the centre-left direction, actually stimulated the formation of a kind of "identity market" in Ukraine, which was used as a means of supporting the inter-regional contradictions, undermining the foundations of social solidarity, denying the unity of Ukrainian society as a community of the Ukrainian state, and cultivating inhumane ways of conducting political struggle (Identity Contradictions in Ukraine..., 2015). The laws of the "market of identities" were subject to utilitarian principles of benefit multiplication and became a subject of bargaining, a tool for obtaining political and economic preferences for local political leaders, for whom the state policy of national unity did not play a leading role, and the democratic values of freedom and inviolability of human life were purely declarative (Identity Contradictions in Ukraine..., 2015).

Since the 2014 parliamentary elections, we have clear evidence that the idea of incompatibility of regional identities, the promotion of federalism, and regional autonomy were largely artificial constructs that have proven to be destructive and unpopular in Ukrainian society. Their attempts to implement the strategy of "imposing identities" do not really correlate with the approach of the majority of Ukrainian citizens. This indicates, in particular, more moderate electoral sympathies of the majority of Ukrainian citizens, a decrease in the effectiveness of manipulative populist technologies for opposing the Eastern and Western parts of Ukraine in the election campaign, and a shift in value orientations in both the outlook and priorities of voters and the programme documents of political parties. For example, the election programmes of political parties in the last parliamentary elections were built around the ideas of nation consolidation, in particular: establishing peace, protecting the territorial integrity of Ukraine, fighting corruption, implementing economic reforms, etc. (Identity Contradictions in Ukraine..., 2015).

One of the key issues reflected in the programmes of political parties of different ideological orientations was language. Unfortunately, until recently, it has contributed to the escalation of the identity contradictions of the Ukrainian nation. Since the first elections of independent Ukraine, representatives of certain political forces and NGOs have discussed this problem as a factor that shapes two large historical and cultural areas of the Ukrainian people – Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking. The linguistic and cultural orientations of the East and West of the country have formed a kind of axis of political discourse around which heated discussions have been going on throughout the history of Ukrainian independence. The initial position of pro-Russian political forces and NGOs was to grant Russian language the status of a second state language, given its so-called underdevelopment in independent Ukraine. For a long time, the supporters of this idea were the Party of Regions, which was characterised as pro-government and dominant in 2010-2014. Having its own electorate, this party managed to pass a draft law "On the Principles of the State Language Policy" in July 2012 under the slogan of democratic initiatives and freedom of speech, which provided for the possibility of official bilingualism in regions where the number of national minorities exceeds 10%. In February 2014, the law was cancelled. Its ideas were imposed on the electorate by forming negative stereotypes among residents of eastern Ukraine about the situation of the Russian language in Ukraine; in particular, the idea of its permanent oppression and the original unity of the Ukrainian and Russian language spaces was constantly emphasised.

The division of Ukrainian citizens on the basis of language was one of the most obvious mechanisms for structuring the country's electoral field, a way of differentiating between "insiders" and "outsiders", emphasising the dissimilarity of Ukraine, the antithesis of its regions, and the impossibility of finding a "common language" within the state. In this way, the political discourse fuelled a kind of

"language antagonism" that provoked the conflict over the identity diversity of the Ukrainian nation. Assessing the share of the electorate that supported this idea, there is a constant positive trend of decreasing perception of it as a key issue and a corresponding shift away from ties with Russia due to this strong argument. This is also another step in the self-identification of the Ukrainian nation at the local and national levels.

The complexity of the language issue was also due to the fact that "a number of political parties that have a long and not so long history of activity in Ukraine, as well as various so-called "third" forces known for their pro-russian vision of Ukraine's socio-economic, geopolitical, and humanitarian development, are russian-speaking not only in their narratives but also in reality. Despite the obligation to conduct business in Ukrainian, Russian continued to be the language of everyday communication; it is often the language of documents in private companies. State and regional leaders supported the policy of russian-language publications. In order to play with voters, Ukrainian politicians often use the regional "language game", which does not contribute to national consolidation. The logical consequence of such speculations was the politicisation of the work of a number of pro-russian NGOs, which carried out their work under the "cover" of a cultural and educational mission to protect ethnic Russians from linguistic discrimination. Each following election cadence confirms the idea that speculations around the language issue do not find the desired response among citizens and public forces, and the majority of Ukrainians remain in favour of Ukrainian as the only state language.

## Conclusions

Hybrid warfare has its manifestations in various spheres of Ukrainian social life. It is important to understand how to withstand its effects. To do so, we should analyse the steps that have been underestimated in modern Ukrainian history. In particular, it is necessary to limit the possibility of using the historical past as a source of fake constructs, ethnic, linguistic, and religious components as tools of electoral and ideological influence on voters. This, in turn, should strengthen the political identity of the Ukrainian nation. The introduction of a national policy of national identity should become the main instrument for the formation of the state with European values and national traditions.

In Ukraine, the ambiguity of hybrid warfare has allowed Russia to seize the initiative and secure political and military results that would otherwise be ineffective and costly.

Through the support of certain political forces, over the past two decades, Ukraine has been tracking elements of hybrid warfare by disseminating information and anti-state actions through political forces and their representatives that have a significant regional and national level.

The principles of building a democratic society require the involvement of politicians of different ideological orientations in national channels, but the rhetoric of their speeches often contradicts the criteria of the country's independence and sovereignty.

Manifestations of the hybrid war's influence include appeals to language, religious, administrative, and territorial issues and the promotion of anti-state ideas.

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