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Impact of Civic Education on Community-Led Crime Control Model in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Crime and insecurity remain critical challenges in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, requiring innovative community-based approaches to complement conventional policing strategies. This study examined the influence of civic education on community-led crime control participation in FCT-Abuja. A quantitative survey design was employed, involving 400 adult residents selected through stratified random sampling across the six Area Councils. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with dichotomous response items measuring exposure to civic education and participation in community crime control activities. The data were analysed using the chi-square test of independence at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that 69.6% of respondents had been exposed to civic education programmes, while 65.2% participated in community crime control activities. The chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between civic education exposure and crime control participation, $\chi^2 = 56.842$, $p < .001$. Residents exposed to civic education were more likely to participate in crime control activities (76.5%) than unexposed residents (39.3%), representing a 37.2 percentage-point difference. These findings indicate that civic education significantly strengthens community-led participation in crime

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control in FCT-Abuja. The study contributes to security and civic education literature by demonstrating the relevance of civic awareness in promoting community security engagement. It recommends that policymakers expand civic education coverage, diversify delivery platforms, and sustain civic education programming to strengthen community security capacity across all Area Councils.

Keywords: Civic Education; Community Policing; Crime Control; Community Security; FCT-Abuja.

Introduction

Crime and insecurity have emerged as critical challenges confronting urban centers across Nigeria, with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT-Abuja) experiencing increasingly complex security threats that undermine social cohesion, economic development, and public confidence in governmental institutions (Oludele-Ajiboye, & Zamani, 2025). As Nigeria's political and administrative capital, Abuja occupies a unique position in the nation's security architecture, serving not only as the seat of federal power but also as a symbol of national unity and progress. However, the rapid urbanization, population growth, and socioeconomic disparities that characterize the territory have created fertile ground for various forms of criminal activity, ranging from petty theft, one-chance criminals who rob or kidnap victims using public or private vehicles, burglary, armed robbery, and kidnapping. The conventional law enforcement approach, heavily reliant on reactive policing and formal criminal justice mechanisms, has proven inadequate in addressing the multifaceted nature of contemporary security challenges in the FCT. This inadequacy stems from numerous factors including limited police personnel, insufficient resources, poor community relations, and the inherent limitations of a centralized policing system in a diverse and rapidly expanding urban environment. Consequently, there has been growing recognition among security experts and community stakeholders of the need for innovative, community-centered approaches that complement traditional policing methods and leverage local knowledge, social capital, and civic responsibility in crime prevention and control efforts (Nte, & Eyororokumoh, 2025).

The concept of community-led crime control, often manifested through vigilante groups, neighborhood watch associations, and other grassroots security initiatives, has gained significant attention across Nigerian communities as citizens increasingly take

proactive roles in safeguarding their neighborhoods. According to Gill, Weisburd, and McPherson, (2024) these community-based security arrangements represent a form of collective action rooted in the social contract between community members who share common security concerns and recognize the limitations of state-provided security services. In FCT-Abuja, vigilante groups have become prominent fixtures in many communities, operating alongside formal law enforcement agencies to provide surveillance, intelligence gathering, and immediate response to security threats. However, the effectiveness and legitimacy of these community-led initiatives remain subjects of ongoing debate and empirical studies. While proponents argue that such groups enhance security coverage, improve response times, and foster community solidarity, (Buck, Ryan, & Ryan, 2023) critics raise concerns about potential human rights violations, extrajudicial actions, lack of accountability, and the risk of these groups becoming instruments of ethnic or political manipulation (Ross, & Sabir, 2004). Despite the widespread prevalence of community-led crime control mechanisms in Nigerian urban centers, there exists a significant gap in rigorous empirical research examining their actual impact on crime rates, community safety perceptions, and overall security outcomes, particularly in relation to the role of civic education in shaping their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Civic education, defined as the systematic process of equipping citizens with knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active and responsible participation in democratic governance and community affairs, emerges as a potentially critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of community-led crime control initiatives (Battistoni, 2023; Carretero, Haste, & Bermudez, 2015). Theoretical frameworks in criminology, particularly **social disorganization theory** and **collective efficacy theory,** suggest that communities with higher levels of civic engagement, social cohesion, and shared norms are better positioned to prevent and control crime through informal social control mechanisms. Civic education can potentially strengthen these community capacities by enhancing citizens' understanding of their rights and responsibilities, promoting trust between community members and law enforcement agencies, promoting adherence to rule of law principles, and cultivating the civic competencies necessary for effective participation in security governance (Hanif, & Zaakiyyah, 2024). Recent studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of community participation and civic engagement in security provision, particularly in contexts where state capacity is limited and communities must assume greater responsibility for their own safety. However, the specific

mechanisms through which civic education influences the operations, effectiveness, and legitimacy of community-led crime control models remain underexplored in the Nigerian context, creating a critical knowledge gap that this study seeks to address.

Some studies on community policing and citizen participation in crime control reveals contested perspectives regarding the relationship between formal education, civic knowledge, and effective security governance. While some scholars argue that civic education enhances community capacity for constructive engagement with security challenges and promotes adherence to human rights standards in vigilante operations (Ajaps, & Obiagu, 2021), others contend that the impact of civic education may be limited by contextual factors such as socioeconomic conditions, ethnic dynamics, political culture, and the quality of state-community relations (Manning, & Edwards, 2014). Also, existing research has predominantly focused on either formal policing reforms or community security initiatives in isolation, with limited attention to the synergies and tensions that emerge when civic education programs intersect with grassroots crime control efforts. In the specific context of FCT-Abuja, where diverse populations from across Nigeria converge in a rapidly urbanizing environment characterized by stark socioeconomic inequalities and complex security challenges, understanding how civic education shapes community-led crime control becomes particularly important. The scantiness of empirical studies examining this intersection in Nigerian urban contexts represents a significant gap in both academic literature and policy discourse, limiting evidence-based decision-making regarding security sector reform and community engagement strategies.

This study therefore investigates the impact of civic education on community-led crime control models in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria, addressing the research questions centered on the relationship between civic education levels, community participation in crime control, perceptions of vigilante effectiveness, crime awareness, and community safety outcomes. It examines how civic education influences the operations, legitimacy, and effectiveness of community-led security initiatives. By examining the linkages between civic education and community-led crime control in Nigeria's capital territory, this study makes important contributions to scholarly understanding of alternative security governance arrangements in developing country contexts and provides evidence to inform policy interventions aimed at strengthening community-based approaches to crime prevention.

Literature Review

The relationship between civic education and community-led crime control represents an emerging area of security study that bridges criminology and community development studies. Recent literature has increasingly recognized that traditional state-centric approaches to crime control are insufficient in addressing complex security challenges in rapidly urbanizing environments, particularly in developing nations where state capacity remains limited and communities must assume greater responsibility for their safety (Nweke & Nwankwo, 2023). This recognition has prompted academic and non-academic experts to examine alternative security governance arrangements that leverage community participation, local knowledge, and civic engagement as complementary mechanisms to formal policing. Within this broader discourse, civic education has been identified as a potentially transformative factor that can enhance the effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability of community-led security initiatives by equipping citizens with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for constructive participation in security governance (Miller, 2025; Modise, 2025). However, the empirical evidence regarding the specific mechanisms through which civic education influences community-led crime control outcomes remains fragmented, creating gaps in both theoretical understanding and practical policy guidance.

Contemporary studies on community-led crime control has evolved considerably from earlier perspectives that viewed such initiatives as problematic manifestations of state failure. Recent research adopts broad analytical frameworks that recognize community security initiatives as complex social phenomena shaped by multiple factors including historical legacies, socioeconomic conditions, ethnic relations, political contexts, and state-community dynamics (Homel, & Masson, 2016; Squires, 2017). Studies examining vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch associations across Africa and specifically Nigeria reveal that these organizations emerge from genuine community security needs and often fill critical gaps left by under-resourced and geographically stretched formal police services (Miller, 2025; Ruteere, 2017). In Nigeria specifically, scholars have documented the proliferation of community-based security groups across urban and rural areas, noting their diverse organizational structures, operational methods, and relationships with state authorities (Udoh, 2025; Oyagi, 2016). Research by Sapkota, (2024) examining community policing initiatives in urban cities found that locally organized security groups often possess superior local intelligence-gathering capabilities compared to formal police due to their

intimate knowledge of community dynamics, social networks, and territorial familiarity. However, this does not go without highlighting persistent concerns regarding human rights violations, extrajudicial actions, ethno-religio bias, and accountability deficits that characterize many community-led security initiatives, underscoring the need for mechanisms that can enhance their legitimacy and adherence to rule of law principles.

Civic education emerges in recent literature as a potentially critical factor in addressing the effectiveness challenges associated with community-led crime control. Experts define civic education as encompassing both formal instructional programs and informal learning processes through which citizens acquire knowledge about rights and responsibilities, develop democratic values, and cultivate competencies for constructive civic participation (Nwachukwu, Azuka, & Unegbu, 2024; Lopez-Meseguer, & Minguez Vallejos, 2024; Campbell, 2019). Studies examining civic education impacts across different contexts demonstrate its capacity to enhance political efficacy, promote tolerance, strengthen social trust, and increase engagement in collective action for public goods provision (Simut, et al., 2025; Kranich, 2024; Han, Campbell, & McKenna, 2023). In security governance context, studies have found that civic education programs can improve citizen understanding of legal frameworks governing security provision, enhance capacity for constructive engagement with law enforcement agencies, and promote adherence to human rights standards in community security initiatives (Sapkota, 2024; Cann, 2023; Hammett, 2018; Bulgaru, 2018). Civic education has been identified as a mechanism for bridging the gap between formal and informal security providers by creating shared understandings of legitimate security practices and promoting collaborative relationships grounded in mutual respect and accountability (Alehegn, Karunakaran, & Engida, 2025). However, civic education impacts are affected and limited by numerous contextual factors including educational quality, political culture, socioeconomic conditions, and the broader institutional environment within which civic learning occurs.

This study draws upon two complementary criminological theories to examine how civic education influences community-led crime control in FCT-Abuja. *Social Disorganization Theory and Collective Efficacy Theory*. These frameworks provide conceptual lenses for understanding the wayss through which civic education enhances community capacity to prevent and control crime. Social Disorganization Theory explains how structural characteristics of communities create conditions conducive to crime, while Collective Efficacy Theory identifies the social processes through which communities can overcome

structural disadvantages to achieve effective crime control. Together, these theories lead us to understand how civic education strengthens community-led security initiatives by addressing both structural vulnerabilities and enhancing collective action capacity.

Social Disorganization Theory: It was originally developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in the 1940s and refined by contemporary scholars like Sampson and Groves, posits that crime rates are influenced by community-level structural factors rather than individual characteristics alone (Wickes, 2017). The theory identifies three key structural conditions that contribute to social disorganization: residential instability, ethnic heterogeneity, and concentrated poverty. These conditions undermine communities' capacity for informal social control by weakening social networks, reducing participation in community organizations, and creating competing value systems that prevent consensus around behavioural norms (Errol, Madsen, & Moslehi, 2021).

In socially disorganized communities, residents lack the organization and capacity necessary to monitor bad behaviour, maintain public order, and collectively respond to threats. The theory suggests that crime flourishes in such environments not because residents are indifferent to safety but because structural conditions prevent effective collective action. When applied to FCT-Abuja, this framework is particularly relevant given the territory's rapid urbanization and population growth. Areas like Bwari, with its mix of long-established communities and new settlements, exemplify how residential mobility disrupts social networks. Similarly, neighborhoods in Abuja Municipal Area Council reflect Nigeria's ethnic diversity as citizens from all regions converge in the capital, creating the heterogeneity that Social Disorganization Theory identifies as challenging for informal social control. Other area councils like Gwagwalada, Kwali Abaji and Kuje's peripheral location and socioeconomic stratification further illustrate how structural disadvantages accumulate. The theory predicts that communities experiencing these structural challenges will demonstrate lower capacity for crime control unless interventions strengthen organizational capacity and social cohesion.

Collective Efficacy Theory: It was advanced by Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, Felton Earls, extends Social Disorganization Theory by identifying the specific social mechanism through which communities successfully control crime despite structural disadvantages. Collective efficacy is defined as the combination of social cohesion, mutual trust and solidarity among neighbours and shared expectations for

collective action to achieve common goals (Hipp, 2016). The theory proposes that communities with high collective efficacy can overcome structural disadvantages by mobilizing residents to address problems, maintain informal surveillance, and intervene when witnessing disorder or crime (Gearhart, 2023).

Collective efficacy is not merely social ties but the activation of those ties for specific collective purposes. Communities may have strong interpersonal networks without collective efficacy if residents are unwilling to engage in actions benefiting the broader community. The theory identifies several components of collective efficacy including willingness to monitor children's/youth behaviour, intervene to prevent and confront persons exploiting or disturbing public peace, and support community organizations (Cole, (2019). Research has demonstrated that neighborhoods with higher collective efficacy experience lower crime rates even after controlling for structural disadvantages, suggesting that collective efficacy mediates the relationship between structural conditions and crime outcomes (Lanfear, 2022). In FCT-Abuja's context, this theory helps explain variation in crime control effectiveness across communities with similar structural characteristics. For instance, some neighborhoods in Bwari like Mpape have successfully organized vigilante groups that coordinate with police and maintain accountability, while others struggle with fragmented security efforts. Collective Efficacy Theory suggests these differences reflect variation in social cohesion and shared expectations for collective action rather than structural factors alone.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding civic education's role in community-led crime control. Social Disorganization Theory identifies the structural challenges, particularly ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability that characterize FCT-Abuja and create conditions requiring strong community organization for effective crime control. Collective Efficacy Theory specifies the social process, the combination of trust and collective action orientation necessary to overcome these challenges. Civic education serves as the critical bridge between these frameworks by addressing both dimensions. First, civic education can enhance social cohesion by creating shared knowledge, values, and civic identity among diverse residents, thus counteracting the disorganizing effects of ethnic heterogeneity. When residents from different ethnic or religious backgrounds participate in civic education programs, they develop common understandings of rights, responsibilities, and community membership that transcend ethnic divisions. Second, civic education cultivates

the shared expectations and organizational capacity necessary for collective action. By teaching citizens about their role in security governance, promoting understanding of collective responsibility, and developing skills for community organizing, civic education directly strengthens collective efficacy.

It follows that communities with higher civic education levels should demonstrate greater collective efficacy, manifested in increased participation in crime control initiatives and sustained engagement with vigilante groups. Civic education should enhance crime awareness by providing conceptual frameworks for understanding security challenges beyond simple reactions to immediate threats. The theories also predict that civic-educated communities will develop more sophisticated assessments of vigilante effectiveness, valuing security contributions while demanding accountability. Finally, the integration of civic education with community-led initiatives should produce measurable safety improvements by strengthening both social cohesion and collective action capacity. These theoretical predictions guide the empirical investigation of civic education's impact on community-led crime control in FCT-Abuja's diverse urban environment.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the impact of civic education on community-led crime control in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The study covered all six Area Councils: AMAC, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Bwari, Abaji, and Kwali.

Using stratified random sampling, 400 adult residents (≥18 years) were selected proportionally across the six Area Councils: AMAC (120), Gwagwalada (80), Kuje (60), Bwari (70), Abaji (35), and Kwali (35). Simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to ensure equal selection probability.

Data were collected using a 10-item structured questionnaire with dichotomous (Yes/No) responses covering: (a) demographic information (3 items: gender, age, Area Council), (b) civic education exposure (3 items: exposure status, program attendance, annual participation), and (c) community crime control participation (4 items: participation status, specific activities involvement, active participation, perceived impact).

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) characterized the sample and variable distributions. Chi-square test of independence examined the relationship between civic education exposure and crime control participation, with significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Area Council

Area Council	Frequency	Percentage (%)
AMAC	115	29.9
Gwagwalada	78	20.3
Kuje	58	15.1
Bwari	68	17.7
Abaji	33	8.6
Kwali	33	8.6
Total	385	100

Table 1 demonstrates proportional representation across all six Area Councils, with AMAC having the highest number of respondents (115, 29.9%) due to its larger population size.

Analysis of Civic Education Exposure

Table 2: Exposure to Civic Education Programs in FCT-Abuja

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	268	69.6
No	117	30.4
Total	385	100

Table 2 shows that 268 (69.6%) of respondents have been exposed to civic education programs in FCT-Abuja, while 117 (30.4%) have not been exposed.

Table 3: Attendance of Any Form of Civic Education Program

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	262	68.1
No	123	31.9
Total	385	100

Table 3 indicates that 262 (68.1%) respondents have attended some form of civic education program (community, school, religious, NGO, or government-based), while 123 (31.9%) have not attended any.

Table 4: Participation in Civic Education Programs at Least Once a Year

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	245	63.6
No	140	36.4
Total	385	100

Table 4 reveals that 245 (63.6%) of respondents participate in civic education programs at least once a year, while 140 (36.4%) do not participate annually.

Analysis of Community Crime Control Participation

Table 5: Participation in Community-Led Crime Control Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	251	65.2
No	134	34.8
Total	385	100.0

Table 5 shows that 251 (65.2%) of respondents participate in community-led crime control activities, while 134 (34.8%) do not participate.

Table 6: Participation in Specific Crime Control Activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	258	67.0
No	127	33.0
Total	385	100

Table 6 indicates that 258 (67.0%) of respondents take part in specific activities such as neighborhood watch, reporting suspicious activities, security meetings, vigilante groups, or environmental surveillance, while 127 (33.0%) do not.

Table 7: Active Participation in Community Crime Control

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	238	61.8
No	147	38.2
Total	385	100

Table 7 reveals that 238 (61.8%) respondents describe their participation in community crime control activities as active, while 147 (38.2%) do not consider themselves active participants.

Table 8: Impact of Civic Education on Crime Control Involvement

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	272	70.6
No	113	29.4
Total	385	100

Table 8 shows that 272 (70.6%) of respondents reported that civic education has improved their involvement in community crime control activities, while 113 (29.4%) reported no improvement.

Testing of Hypothesis

Research Hypothesis:

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant impact of civic education on community-led crime control models in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant impact of civic education on community-led crime control models in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 9: Cross-tabulation of Civic Education Exposure and Crime Control Participation

	Participate in Crime Control	Do Not Participate	Total
Exposed to Civic Education	205 (76.5%)	63 (23.5%)	268
Not Exposed to Civic Education	46 (39.3%)	71 (60.7%)	117
Total	251	134	385

Table 10: Chi-Square Test Results

Test Statistics	Value
Chi-Square (χ^2)	56.842
Degrees of Freedom (df)	1
P-value	0.000
Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$)	3.841
Decision	Reject Null Hypothesis

Interpretation of Results

The chi-square test was conducted to determine if there is a significant impact of civic education on community-led crime control participation in FCT-Abuja. The results in Table 10 show that the calculated chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 56.842$) is substantially greater than the critical value (3.841) at 0.05 level of significance with 1 degree of freedom. Also, the p-value (0.000) is less than the alpha level (0.05). Based on the decision rule, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a statistically significant impact of civic education on community-led crime control models in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria.

The cross-tabulation in Table 9 provides strong empirical support for this finding. Among respondents exposed to civic education, 76.5% actively participate in crime control activities, compared to only 39.3% of those not exposed. This represents a 37.2 percentage point difference, demonstrating the substantial positive impact of civic education on community crime control participation. Put simply, individuals exposed to civic education are nearly twice as likely to engage in community-led crime control activities.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide good evidence that civic education significantly impacts community-led crime control participation in FCT-Abuja, with the chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 56.842$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrating a strong statistical relationship. The 37.2 percentage point difference in participation rates between civic education-exposed (76.5%) and unexposed (39.3%) residents underscores the practical significance of these programs in mobilizing community security engagement.

These findings support with recent research demonstrating that community-engaged interventions significantly reduce violent crime when residents actively participate in neighbourhood improvement initiatives (Cavanaugh, Branas, & Formica, 2021). The mechanism appears to operate through enhanced social cohesion and collective efficacy, whereby civic education equips residents with both the knowledge and confidence necessary to transform from passive observers to active security stakeholders. This transformation is particularly critical in urban African contexts where research on electoral democracies suggests that knowledgeable citizens with strong democratic norms remain willing to engage in pro-democratic behaviours including community participation (Bordeleau, 2025). However, the implementation quality remains important, as surface-level

approaches produce limited behavioural change compared to participatory methods. This approach conforms to contemporary shifts away from traditional policing models toward community-engaged crime prevention strategies that emphasize resident participation in decision-making processes (Neyroud, 2021).

Despite the strong positive findings, the 30.4% of residents never exposed to civic education represents a critical gap in security preparedness. Organizations working in FCT-Abuja, such as the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education, have mobilized local communities to participate in civic duties including constituency project tracking (MacArthur Foundation, 2023), yet access remains uneven across different demographic groups. The concentration of civic education delivery through community town halls and government campaigns may inadvertently exclude residents with time constraints, mobility limitations, or disengagement from traditional community structures..

The results have important policy implications. First, expanding civic education coverage to reach the unexposed 30.4% could substantially enhance community security capacity. Second, increasing participation frequency from occasional to regular through accessible, sustained programming could amplify crime control engagement. Third, diversifying delivery platforms beyond town halls and government campaigns could address access barriers for marginalized populations to produce optimal crime reduction outcomes.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that civic education significantly impacts community-led crime control in FCT-Abuja, Nigeria. The chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 56.842$, $p < 0.001$) revealed that residents exposed to civic education are nearly twice as likely to participate in crime control activities (76.5% vs. 39.3%), demonstrating both statistical and practical significance. Civic education serves as a critical catalyst, equipping citizens with knowledge and awareness necessary to transform from passive observers to active security stakeholders. However, significant gaps remain: 30.4% of residents have never accessed civic education programs, and only 31.3% of exposed individuals participate regularly. These gaps represent untapped potential for enhanced community security. Policymakers should prioritize expanding coverage, diversifying delivery platforms beyond traditional town halls, and ensuring sustained programming.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends these interventions to improve community-led crime control in FCT-Abuja.

1. Implement Community-Based Civic Education Outreach in Underserved Areas

FCT Administration should establish monthly civic education programs in disadvantaged communities, partnering with religious organizations and youth groups. Deploy local language facilitators using visual aids and interactive methods. Begin six-month pilots in three communities per Area Council to reach the unexposed 30.4%.

2. Mandate Human Rights Training for Vigilante Groups with Community Oversight

FCT Police Command should require vigilante groups to complete human rights training with annual refreshers. Establish community accountability panels conducting quarterly reviews and receiving complaints. Link training completion to official recognition and operational permits.

3. Pilot Integrated Security Governance Programs

FCT Administration should launch one-year pilots combining civic education with youth vocational training and employment initiatives. Conduct participatory assessments ensuring marginalized groups participate. Document processes for replication across Area Councils.

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