



Varieties of Petro-States
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This summer, I had the honor of working with Professor Rudra Sil on a project entitled, “Varieties of Petro-States”—a comparative political and economic study focusing on the “resource curse” in different countries.” The “resource curse” is an economic theory that contends, contrary to expectation, countries endowed with natural resource wealth (i.e. oil and minerals) actually fare *worse* than their resource deficient counterparts.

I spent the first half of my summer learning the ins and outs of this theory. What immediately struck me were the many facets of the “resource curse”; naturally, there is an economic component, the foundation of which is the “Dutch Disease.” Named after the economic downturn experienced by the Netherlands after the discovery of gas reserves in the 1960’s, the Dutch Disease describes a situation whereby a state neglects investment in its manufacturing and agricultural sectors as a result of its reliance on “petro-cash” (or revenues from fossil fuel exports). More interesting to me, however (as a political science major and student interested in anthropology), were the political and social dimensions of the resource curse, whereby regional inequalities persist, governments use oil revenue to quell political dissidents, and questions of ownership often culminate in violence.

These issues (and some great advice from my PURM mentor!) led me to choose Nigeria and Venezuela as two countries to compare, in order to determine the degree to which the “resource curse” plays out in different petro-states. Especially with recent food riots witnessed in Venezuela, and lingering ethnic violence in Nigeria, uncovering the root economic causes beneath the similarities was really enlightening. Despite vastly different histories, different electoral systems, and different processes of oil industry nationalization, these two countries on opposite sides of the globe have similar current experiences—much of which can be traced to their comparably high oil-reliance indicators (i.e. net exports, government revenue from oil sales, percentage of GDP from oil revenue etc.).

Through my research experience, I learned not only about the global political economy of oil and the economic and political situations—both present and historic—of Nigeria and

Venezuela, but also how to conduct effective comparative research, as well as convey it in a written study. I now have skills and opportunities that *never* would have been available to me without this unique experience, and I am extremely grateful for the flexibility of my mentor, and (more importantly!) the fascinating nature of the content.