

The Resource Curse and Its Effects On Nigeria's Democracy

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Introduction

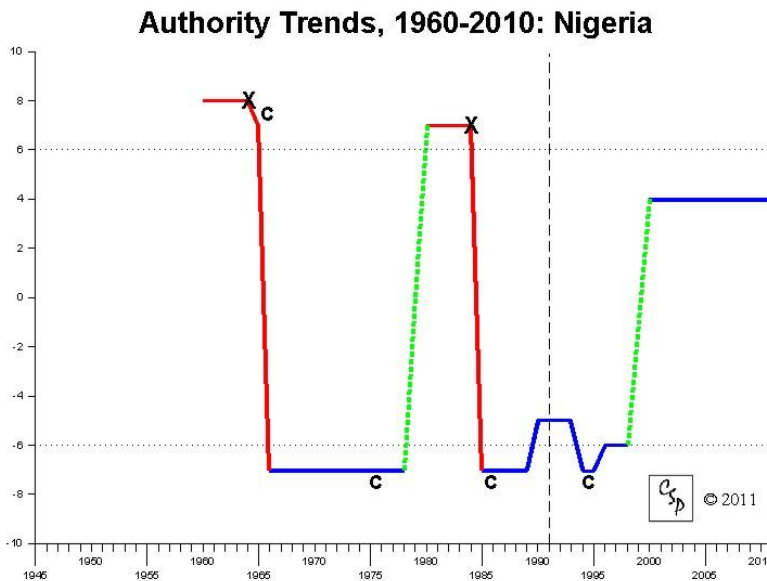
Nigeria is located amongst one of the most highly concentrated areas of violent dictators in Africa. Its transition toward democracy in the past decade brought hope that northwestern Africa would follow its example. However, that has not been the case. Nigeria's democratic progress has stagnated and reversion from democracy is feared. This is why an analysis of the threats that exist to Nigeria's growing democracy is essential. Through this analysis effective recommendations on ways to stop any sort of reversion can be better made. However, for the purpose of making a clearer argument, a proper analysis first needs a constant and unambiguous definition of democracy. This paper uses the liberal democratic definition of democracy, one that falls between the minimalist and the maximalist definitions. The liberal definition of democracy is one that harnesses a clear separation of powers between the executive, legislator and judiciary, where the rule of law is fair and constant for all citizens and provides guaranteed protection for all minorities.¹ Suffrage, civil liberties and rights and the freedom of the press are also all necessary under the liberal definition of democracy.² This definition has a strong presence in the methodology that Polity IV utilizes in order to obtain its data. It is for that reason that this paper will use Polity IV as benchmark for assessing Nigeria's democratic status. Freedom House will also be used in order to provide more up-to-date information on Nigeria's democratic progression.

According to Polity IV and Freedom House, Nigeria has become increasingly democratic over the past decade.^{3 4} This however does not mean that threats to democracy in the country are no longer relevant. Militaristic and institutional threats still persist; however, neither are as great a danger to Nigeria's democratic pursuits as those posed by the economy. More specifically, it is a phenomenon known as the 'resource curse' that exists vis-a-vis the economy that presents the most substantial threat. First this paper will provide a brief historical context of Nigeria's

democratic progression and the status of its democracy as it was at the time this paper was written. Second, an analysis of the institutional threats that exist will take place followed by an analysis of the civil-military threats. Afterwards, an analysis of the threats to democracy that exist via the resource curse will be presented and emphasized. This paper will then discuss whether or not Nigerian civil society is capable of protecting Nigeria's growing democracy and will cumulate with an outline of effective solutions in combating the threats to democracy mentioned.

Historical Context

Figure 1:



Graph from: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/nig2.htm>

As can be seen in Figure 1 Nigeria has experienced 4 substantial movements in authority, 2 away from democracy in 1965 and 1984 along with 2 towards democracy in 1978 and 1999.⁵ After gaining its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960,

Nigeria was considered to be a democratic success, raking 9 out of 10 on Polity's scale, falling only 1 point short of being considered a 'full democracy'.⁶ The Nigerian government at that time was made up of a coalition of conservative parties: the Nigerian People's Congress (NCP), which drew its support from the prominently Muslim population in northern Nigeria; and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), which drew its support from the largely Christian east.⁷ Forming the opposition was the more liberal Action Group (AG), which drew its support

from Nigeria's west.⁸ Although these three parties worked well together during the first years of Nigeria's independence, the political and cultural differences between these 3 groups remained sharp.⁹ After the referendum that allowed South Cameroon to join the Republic of Cameroon was passed in 1961, Nigeria decided to part from its British legacy and announced itself as a Federal Republic.¹⁰ It was from this point that discontent began to grow which eventually cumulated in civil war in 1966 after perceived corruption of the electoral and political processes took hold of the country.¹¹ Nigeria experienced back-to-back military coups between the period of 1966 and 1978.¹²

Furthermore, in 1979 Nigeria began to move once again toward democracy when Olasegun Obasanjo, the then military ruler of Nigeria, gave up his political power to Shehu Shagari's civilian regime.¹³ While most of the Nigerian population viewed this as a positive transition, Shagari's regime did not fare any better than Obasanjo as poverty began to take hold of the country, despite the growing oil boom.¹⁴ The people, as a result of their harsh living conditions, began to view the Shagari regime as being corrupt and incompetent and shortly after his fraudulent re-election in 1984, Muhammadu Buhari successfully executed a military coup, once again reverting Nigeria into authoritarian rule.¹⁵ The Buhari regime fared a little better than its predecessor but was short lived, being overthrown by yet another military coup in 1985.¹⁶ Ibrahim Badangida, the new head of state, declared himself the new president and commander in chief of Nigeria. However, unlike most other Nigerian dictators he promised to return the country back to a democracy by the year 1992. He eventually kept his promise with elections being held on the 12th of June 1993, which effectively put in power the civilian leader Moshood Abiola.¹⁷ Although Badangida delivered on his promise of democracy, he is widely believed to be the most corrupt of all the Nigerian dictators and is attributed with being the one who instilled the culture of corruption amongst the Nigerian political elite. Despite this fact and according to

Polity IV Nigeria has been experiencing an upward trend toward democracy since 1999 and has stagnated in the year 2000 as an anocracy with a score of 4/10 on Polity IV's scale.¹⁸ Nigeria continues to be labelled as such, with Freedom House giving its political system the designation of being "partly free". After a decade of stagnation, it is unclear where Nigeria's political system will head next.¹⁹

Institutional Threats to Democracy

Although it is unclear which direction Nigeria's political system is heading in, it is clear that there exists institutional threats to Nigeria's present and future democratic progression. Nigeria suffers its gravest institutional threats from the challenges presented by its leaders. In Nigeria, the primary goal of obtaining a leadership role is self-enrichment. This is despite the fact that Nigerian leaders are both capable and have the resources available to them in order to inspire, educate, and provide the Nigerian people with policies that would benefit not only them, but the country as well.²⁰ In any country it is up to the leaders to protect and promote the social, political and economic interests of their citizens. However, a vast majority of leaders in Nigeria lack the passion, vision and character to effectively govern the country.²¹ Many do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and for that reason much of the work that needs to be done in order to grow the country and better the lives of the citizens is done incorrectly.²² For example, the Nigerian government generated a substantial amount of oil wealth for over 30 years; however, only 42% of Nigerians have access to clean drinking water.²³ The percentage of those who have access to proper sanitation facilities is even lower at 31%.²⁴ The blame for this underdevelopment rests solely with the Nigerian political leaders. Nigeria is also experiencing a substantial shortage of doctors, with only 0.39 doctors per 1,000 people.²⁵ To put this number in perspective, 39 doctors diagnose, treat and run medical facilities for approximately 100,000

people.²⁶ Also, there are only 0.53 hospital beds per 1,000 people.²⁷ This means that the vast majority of Nigerian civilians do not have access to proper health care.

Despite the obvious lack in health care, the Nigerian government still only contributes 5.3 % of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to health care each year, which ranks Nigeria 127th out of 190 countries in health care expenditures.²⁸ Nigeria's annual GDP is \$262.6 billion per year, which is more than enough to acquire the money needed in order build the infrastructure to at least improve the areas mentioned; however, no such infrastructure projects in any area except the expansion of oil refineries have been planned.²⁹ So, it is clear that the underdevelopment in healthcare, sanitation and drinking water at the very least is the fault of Nigeria's leaders. This type of underdevelopment creates an unhappy populace. If the country moves toward democracy without any substantial improvements it becomes highly likely that this unhappy populace will view democracy as being ineffective and as such revolt or at the very least support a military coup as they did in 1984. Ultimately, because the Nigerian leaders are either incapable or unwilling to govern the country in such a way that is beneficial to the people, they unintentionally create an institutional threat to democratic progression.

An even larger democratic challenge that faces Nigeria today is corruption. Corruption can be defined as an act of "requesting, offering, giving or accepting directly or indirectly a bribe or any other undue advantage or the prospect thereof, which distorts the proper performance of any duty or behavior required of the recipient of the bribe."³⁰ Unfortunately, after decades of independence Nigerians still harbor the belief that public money belongs to no one and anyone who has access to it should use it to benefit themselves.³¹ Corruption is deeply ingrained in every facet of Nigerian society, from millions of scam emails claiming they are Nigerian princes in need of help transferring large sums of money, to the police which set up road-blocks every few hundred yards in order to extract 20 naira, which is equivalent to 15 cents, from drivers.³²

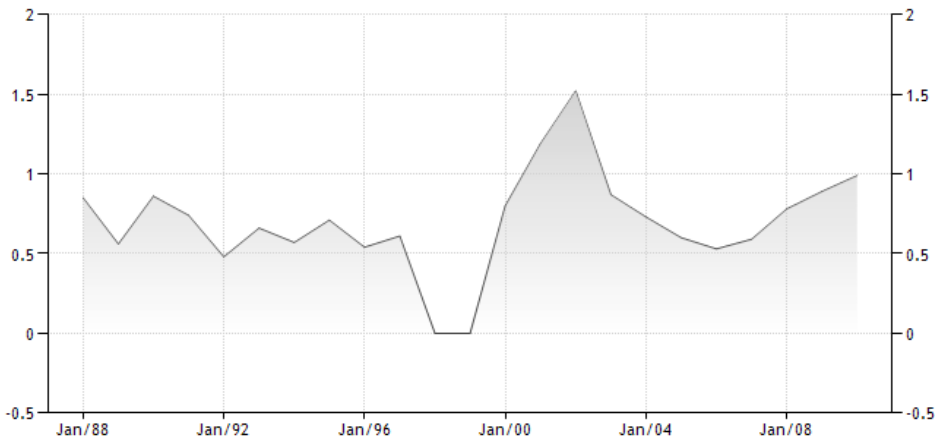
However, the worst form of corruption that takes place in Nigeria is the transfer of the country's wealth into the personal wealth of generals and political leaders. To put in prospective just how much money is laundered from and out of the country each year, this year's estimate is approximately \$3.2 billion which is on the low side.³³ Some years this number has been much higher at upwards of \$5.5 billion.³⁴

Similarly, electoral corruption is widespread. In Nigeria, many political leaders use money in order to buy votes, promise special favors, use coercion, or intimidation as a means of being elected into office.³⁵ For example, during the 2011 elections that put the current president, Goodluck Jonathan, in power votes turned up in regions of the country where they were not cast and in the days running up to the elections multiple shootings took place at polling booths in regions that opposed Jonathan.³⁶ This however was deemed by the United States State Department as being a substantial improvement from the elections that took place in 2007.³⁷ Transparency International ranked Nigeria 144th out of 177 countries in terms of corruption in 2013, with a score of 25/100, 0 being very corrupt.³⁸ This exemplifies just how much electoral corruption actually persists in the country up until now. This is also despite the fact that in the last decade Nigeria has experienced a substantial jump toward democracy. It seems as though democracy or the idea of democracy is being used as a front in order to hide the true nature of Nigeria's political system. No democracy can be label as such without first eradicating a substantial amount of corruption. Therefore, this rampant corruption that exists in Nigeria is one of the most difficult challenges to democratic progression in the country, as it shows no signs of improving anytime soon.

Civil-Military Threats to Democracy

With a high degree of corruption and protestors demonstrating violently against electoral results, it has been the military's non-intervention that has allowed Nigeria to maintain its current democratic standing.³⁹ In coup-prone West Africa, where "it is both rational and prudent to expect a coup attempt anywhere and anytime," the lack of military intervention should be recognized as contributing to progress toward democracy.⁴⁰ However, the Nigerian military has in the past been responsible for two instances of democratic breakdown by sacking elected governments and legislatures, suspending the constitution and then engaging in full blown military rule.⁴¹ This has happened on two separate occasions, the first lasting 13 years from 1966 to 1979 and the second lasting 16 years from 1983 to 1999.⁴² These instances demonstrate that the Nigerian military has the potential to execute a military coup and has the capability to do so successfully. However, in recent years, from 2007 on, much of the democratic stability can be attributed to the Nigerian population.⁴³ They were the ones who resisted the temptation to rise up and mass protest over the misguided and fraudulent elections held in 2007.⁴⁴ If they had not resisted this temptation, Nigeria's political structure may look much different than it does today. This suggests that even though the military's non-intervention may have contributed to democratic stability in Nigeria from 2000 to 2007, their role has taken a back seat to that of the Nigerian population's. It has been 6 years since the military had to intervene in a civil crisis in the country and for this reason it is unclear as to what they might do. Many generals and leaders of Nigeria's military that took part in the most recent 1984 coup still have very active roles.⁴⁵ Given this fact and taking into consideration their history it is reasonable and safe to assume that Nigeria's military presents a threat to the current state of Nigeria's democracy and to any future democratic progression.

Figure 2: Percent of GDP spent on Military



Graph from: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/>

itself.⁴⁶ As can be seen on Figure 2 Nigeria's military spending has hovered, more or less, around the 1% mark for over 2 decades.⁴⁷ Most of the money the military receives goes to buying new military hardware and very little is spent on the upkeep of the soldiers - wages, barracks, training etc.⁴⁸ For example, a military commander in the Nigerian military, the 4th highest ranked officer, is paid a yearly salary of approximately 3,000,000 naira, about 20,000 Canadian dollars.⁴⁹ The foot soldiers are paid much less. With such low wages the Nigerian military opens itself up to being pervious to corruption or even defection. The probability of this happening increases when it is taken into consideration that high unemployment rates and economic inequities have disproportionately impacted the northern, predominantly Muslim, part of Nigeria.⁵⁰ This is because of the presence of Boko Haram, a militant group that is funded and largely run by Al-Qaeda, in the impoverished northern part of Nigeria.⁵¹ Because the Nigerian leaders refuse to increase the military spending past 1% of GDP a year or increase wages for the lowest paid soldiers in Nigeria, Boko Haram is growing larger and more sophisticated every year.⁵² Boko Haram is well funded and can afford to pay those who join them a much better wage than the military does.⁵³ So, the high unemployment rate and impoverishment in the north increases Boko Haram's ability to recruit and the low military wages increases its ability to recruit trained soldiers. These two factors in unison explain Boko Haram's growing military power.

Moreover,
the lack of military
funding and low
military wages has
caused a threat to
Nigeria's democracy
from civil society

As Boko Haram grows its military power, the Nigerian military will begin to face more security challenges. If Boko Haram becomes big and strong enough in the near future they may pose a substantial threat to Nigeria's growing democracy. For example, in Mali in 2012 the Tuareg and other rebel groups became so powerful that the Mali government could not supply their military with enough resources to fight them effectively.⁵⁴ As a result the Malian soldiers became displeased with the management of the military and overthrew the democratically elected Malian government.⁵⁵ Similarly in Nigeria, as trained military officers and soldiers defect and join Boko Haram for the increased salaries and improved living conditions, the Nigerian military may face very much the same reality. Either the Nigerian military will overthrow the government or Boko Haram will itself be successful in doing so. Either way, the military as it exists in Nigeria today poses a threat to the growing democracy in the country.

Economic Threats to Democracy

Aside from the aforementioned institutional and civil-military threats, the most substantial and worrisome threat to Nigeria's democracy is presented by the resource curse vis-à-vis the economy. More specifically, it the discovery of oil and the ensuing wealth brought forth by its discovery that is causing the most substantial threat to democracy in the country. Since oil was discovered in 1958 Nigeria's economy quickly shifted from being largely depended on agriculture to petroleum.⁵⁶ Between 1960 and 2012 Nigeria's output of oil rose dramatically from 5100 barrels per day to 2.68 million barrels per day.⁵⁷ Also, as a result of the new found oil Nigeria's government revenue spiked from 66 million naira in 1970 to 10 billion naira in 1980.⁵⁸ Oil now makes up 40% of Nigeria's GDP, 95% of exports and 83% of government revenues.⁵⁹ However, despite the sharp rise in wealth from oil, between 1965 and 2005 per-capita income fell from \$250 to \$212.⁶⁰ Also, the percentage of people living on less than a dollar a day grew from 36% in 1970 to 70% in the year 2000, from 19 million to 90 million.⁶¹ The discovery of oil

has created a large disparity in the distribution of wealth in Nigeria; with 90% of the oil wealth going to 1% of the population.⁶² It has also provided great incentives for corruption, between the years of 1960 and 1999 over \$380 billion was lost due to corruption and mismanagement.⁶³ This is money that could have been used to improve health care, sanitation, and even increase the availability of fresh drinking water to Nigeria's citizens. Instead however, Nigeria is ranked 156th out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, meaning that the Nigerian society is immensely underdeveloped.⁶⁴ It can be seen from this data that as oil revenues and oil production began to increase, the Nigerian economy, living conditions and per-capita income began declining while corruption continued to increase. Oil wealth has transformed Nigeria into a tool for corruption and has only served to increase incentives for those who seek to attempt a coup. Therefore, the resource curse is not only a threat to Nigeria's growing democracy in and of itself, it also creates favorable situations for coups and corruption, which are both in their own ways threats to democracy. This is why the resource curse is a more substantial threat than

Furthermore, conflict in the Niger Delta, where the majority of Nigeria's oil is produced, has increased in both intensity and frequency, with oil bunkering, kidnapping for ransom, electoral violence and community violence becoming a daily occurrence.⁶⁵ The acquisition of oil wealth is becoming the main motivator of violence for most of the local militias in the Niger Delta. This is creating security disaster for Nigeria's police and military, both of which are already stretched thin dealing with Boko Haram.⁶⁶ With the large absence of the military and police, these militias are creating a large black market dealing in the sale of illicit drugs and other contraband, which is causing a heroin and moonshine epidemic.⁶⁷ Addiction and lack of proper care is causing the output of many farms in the Niger delta to decrease significantly.⁶⁸ Also, oil accounts for 95 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings replacing agriculture almost entirely.⁶⁹ This has caused the agricultural industry in Nigeria to decline so drastically that it is

now at a point where Nigeria depends almost entirely on imported food to feed its population.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as poverty worsens, more people are moving from their rural villages and into the cities, which only helps to further decrease agricultural production.⁷¹ A display of the severity of this problem is the example of the drastic increase in the price of food in Nigeria in 2011, where the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), an agency of the United Nations declared a food crisis warning in Nigeria.⁷² Food such as maize, sugar, rice, and wheat increased by close to 25 percent and FAO warned that if it was not urgently addressed some of the worst food riots would ensue.⁷³ With the major unbalanced shift in Nigeria's economy toward the oil industry, Nigeria's economy may be growing but it is definitely not improving. Also, Nigeria has been moving toward democracy, yet, the people have not seen any real improvements, and this means they have no reason to believe that democracy is the solution to their problems. The finding oil was most certainly a curse disguised as a blessing and Nigeria is sure to relapse into an authoritarian regime soon if nothing is done.

Can Civil Society Protect Nigerian Democracy

If it is a question of ability, the answer to the question of whether or not Nigerian civil society can protect democracy is simply yes. However, the question is not only of ability but also of whether or not they are and should be willing to protect it. Nigerian's have in the past put aside their cultural and religious differences in order to work together and maintain a democratic state. However, in recent years they have seen democracy fail them in more ways than one. Poverty is at an all time high, per-capita income does not show signs of improving and neither does healthcare. The only thing Nigerians have been experiencing recently is widespread hunger, violence and disease. The Nigerian political system vows that it is progressing toward being a full democracy. This type of front instills in the population a sense of discontent with the current system and to transition away from democracy Nigerian's do not need to view authoritarian rule

as the answer, but simply as being better than what they have now; when that is the case democracy in Nigeria will diminish. So, the question should not be whether civil society in Nigeria can protect democracy, but whether or not civil society wants to. The answer to that question is unfortunately no.

Moreover, Nigerian civil society's ability to change their present situation is diminishing, as a result of violence, disease and poverty. As more people live in poverty their daily worries shift and are concentrated on where they will get food to feed themselves and their families. This means that people have less time to worry about the country's politics, which results in a disenfranchised populace. A disenfranchised populace has less of an ability to make the right political decisions. This means that even if the Nigerian populace decided to elect a new president or protest in the streets for change, they will not have the energy or knowledge to do so effectively. This does not mean that they should not do so however, it just means that it may take a little bit longer. While this may be the case in Nigeria now, it does not need to remain as such.

Recommended Solutions and Protections Against Threats to Democracy

By protecting against the democratic threats that exist in Nigeria, Nigeria's ailments will also be resolved. This is because some of democracy's fundamental traits – human rights, low levels of corruption, security etc. – are being blocked in Nigeria by the same phenomena that threaten the rest of Nigeria's democracy, namely the resource curse. So by resolving the resource curse Nigeria should experience lower levels of corruption. As Nigeria's political structure becomes less corrupt more money will remain in the country which could be used to increase health care expenditures and/or to alleviate poverty. In order to do this, Nigeria should implement Oil Producing Area Development Commissions (oil commissions) and agriculture commissions. While there has never been an agricultural commission in Nigeria before there is however an oil commission.⁷⁴ This oil commission is located in the Cross River state, which is

located in the Niger Delta.⁷⁵ This oil commission has experienced substantial success in reducing violence and poverty in its own state. Cross Rivers state has seen a 32% decrease in all violent activities since the implementation of the oil commission in 2005 and poverty in the state has been reduced by upwards of 24% in the same time period.⁷⁶ This suggests that oil commissions can work. It is therefore suggested that these types of oil commissions be set-up in every other area in Nigeria that produces oil. By doing this, violence and poverty should decrease. Also by instilling a watchdog the embezzlement of oil revenues should also decrease, effectively reducing corruption. By reducing corruption there will be more money in the country and with more money the rest of Nigeria should start to benefit the same as those with an oil commission.

Also, for the purpose of boosting food security, Nigeria should set up an agricultural commission. This commission should concentrate solely on increasing the production of agricultural goods. By boosting agricultural goods, Nigeria can move away from its reliance on purely petroleum exports. This should also begin to alleviate poverty as well, by increasing supply and therefore decreasing prices. These two commissions then working in unison can therefore help not only improve the lives of the Nigerian population but also protect against the most substantial threat to democracy- the resource curse.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore threats to democracy that exist in Nigeria and emphasize that the resource curse is the most substantial. Institutional threats were shown to exist in Nigeria through the lack of effective leadership and the high rate of corruption. Leaders in Nigeria pursue political power for the sole purpose of self-enrichment and as a result democracy in Nigeria suffers. Also, corruption is deep rooted in Nigeria and present in almost every facet of Nigerian society. Corruption has caused the loss of over \$380 billion over a period of 39 years. This massive amount of corruption has inhibited development in Nigeria and as a

result the majority of the Nigerian population does not have access to food, fresh drinking water or healthcare, which creates an unhappy populace. An unhappy populace is more likely to revolt or support a coup, which ultimately means that corruption is a direct threat to democracy in Nigeria.

Civil-military threats were also discussed and it was shown that because the Nigerian military neglects to pay reasonable living wages to foot soldiers, the military is at risk of empowering the Boko Haram militant group. The widespread impoverishment in northern Nigeria also aids Boko Haram in recruiting soldiers which ultimately creates a security disaster and increases the risk of civil war and another coup. While the civil-military and institutional threats that exist in Nigeria are serious the most substantial threat comes from the resource curse. The resource curse, namely the acquisition of oil, has allowed a situation in which the incentives for corruption are highly tempting and an economic situation that causes the citizens to suffer. While the Nigeria's GDP has increased, per-capita income has actually decreased and there are more people living under the poverty line in Nigeria today than ever, close to 90 million. The resource curse creates a situation where corruption and coups are favourable, aside from creating an impoverished and unhappy citizenry. This is why the resource curse is the most substantial and dangerous threat to democracy in Nigeria.

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