**Information Literacy/Finding Sources Exercise –   
Democratic (De-)Consolidation in Poland**

This information literacy exercise is designed to elaborate on the concept of democratic consolidation and deconsolidation. It uses a set of Washington Post articles from 2016-2017 to start discussion about the state of democracy in Poland. It then requires students to seek out new information from a variety of sources to determine what they think has happened in the years since these were written, and to assess the current state of democracy on their own. Students then compare what they found based on the kind of source they were assigned.

While only relatively credible sources are used, students get a feel for how to use at least one type of source carefully, and the class is not only able to discuss the underlying topic but also to discuss how different kinds of sources may approach the same question in different ways.

**Articles assigned for reading ahead of class**:

* Kamil Marcinkiewicz and Mary Stegmaier. “Poland appears to be dismantling its own hard-won democracy.” July 21, 2017.
* Mary Stegmaier and Kamil Marcinkiewicz. “So Poland’s president surprised everyone, vetoing two bills that threatened the courts’ independence. Here’s what that means.” July 25, 2017.
* Hubert Tworzecki and Radoslaw Markowski. “Why is Poland’s Law and Justice Party trying to rein in the judiciary?” July 26, 2017.
* Michal Bilewicz. “Poland’s ruling party tried a judicial power grab — and then saw it backfire. Here’s why.” July 31, 2017.
* Anna Grzymala-Busse and Monika Nalepa. “Why are there protests in Poland? Here are the five things you need to know.” December 19, 2017.

**Instructions:**

**Part 1:** Framing Discussion (10-15 minutes, whole class OR pair and share):

1. Why are the authors of these articles concerned about Polish democracy? What is going on that seems to threaten democracy as we’ve been defining it in this class?
2. Are these threats to democracy or only to liberal democracy? Would a majoritarian view of democracy see these actions as acceptable or even justifiable?
3. Is there evidence of aspects of democracy that are strengthening instead, and is there any reason in these accounts to be hopeful for the recovery or expansion of Polish democracy?

**Part 2:** Media search (30 minutes, in small groups):

With your group, find out what’s happened in the meantime. Are political scientists, journalists, and others as concerned now as they were in 2016-2017? Are they more concerned, and/or did their fears come to pass? What are the important trends in democratization in Poland since the assigned articles were written?

* Group 1: Academic journals – search on Google Scholar, skim abstracts/conclusions, figure out what search terms to look for.
* Group 2: Newspapers (via Proquest)
* Group 3: Democracy indexes – Freedom House, V-Dem, IDEA Global State of Democracy
* Group 4: Wikipedia (make sure to read the cited sources and not just Wikipedia!)

**Part 3:** Before the whole class debriefs from the exercise, work with your group to rate changes in Polish democracy since 2017 on a scale from 1 to 5. Share your answer with the class.

* 1 = Became much less democratic.  
  3 = about the same  
  5 = became much more democratic.

**Part 4:** Debriefing Questions (10-15 minutes, whole class):

1. How did you figure out what evidence you needed to find?
   1. When you were searching, what terms did you use? Why did you choose those?
2. How did you determine whether your sources were trustworthy or not?
3. If we got different scores across groups, why? Did we just have different interpretations, or did the different sources affect our views?