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2017-11-07

## Are Our Policymakers on Board? A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, & Health in All Policies

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### Original Publication Citation

Novilla, M. L., Goates, M. C., Calder, S. C., Galvao, L. A., Ellis, T., Eppich, K., Quintana, N. M., Mateos, D., & Doria, R. (2017, November). Are Our Policymakers on Board? A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, & Health in All Policies. Poster session presented at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.  
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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Novilla, M. Lelinneth B.; Goates, Michael C.; Calder, Spencer; Galvao, Laura A.; Ellis, Tabetha; Eppich, Kraymer; Quintana, Noyra Melissa; Mateos, David; and Doria, Russell, "Are Our Policymakers on Board? A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, & Health in All Policies" (2017). *Faculty Publications*. 2093.  
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# Are Our Policymakers on Board? A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, & Health in All Policies

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## BACKGROUND

**Policies shape our society and influence our health.** Poor social policies and bad politics create a social milieu that result in health inequities. Closing the health gap in our nation will require tackling the root causes of ill health and health inequities. But how have U.S. policymakers addressed the social conditions that negatively influence health? This research is a critical analysis of the literature on the social determinants perceived to be legislative priorities by U.S. policymakers and the factors that facilitated/hindered policymakers' intent to act on the social determinants of health.

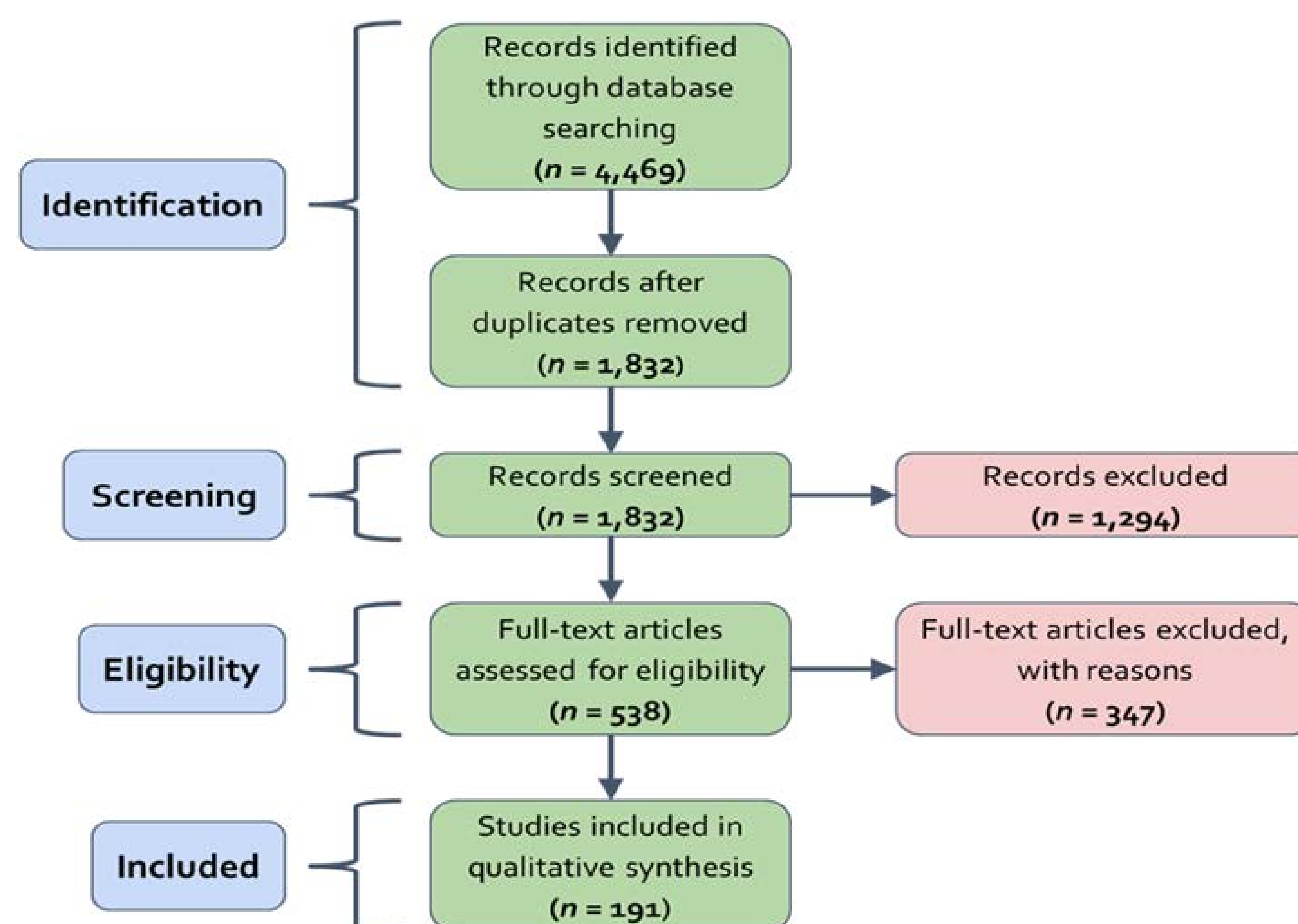
## PURPOSE

- **Research Question 1:** Which social determinants of health (SDH) and health disparities/inequities-related issues were identified/perceived by policy makers as legislative priorities?
- **Research Question 2:** What were the characteristics of policymakers that have supported or acted on SDH/health inequities-related issues?
- **Research Question 3:** Which factors facilitate or hinder political action on SDH/health-inequities-related issues?

## METHODS

### PRISMA Flow Diagram – Systematic Review

Publication date: 1 January 2000 through 31 July 31, 2016  
Scholarly literature and news media



## METHODS

### Inclusion criteria

- Articles addressing the social determinants of health
- Focus on the United States
- Mention individual U.S. policymaker or U.S. policy-making group
- Written in English

### Policymakers

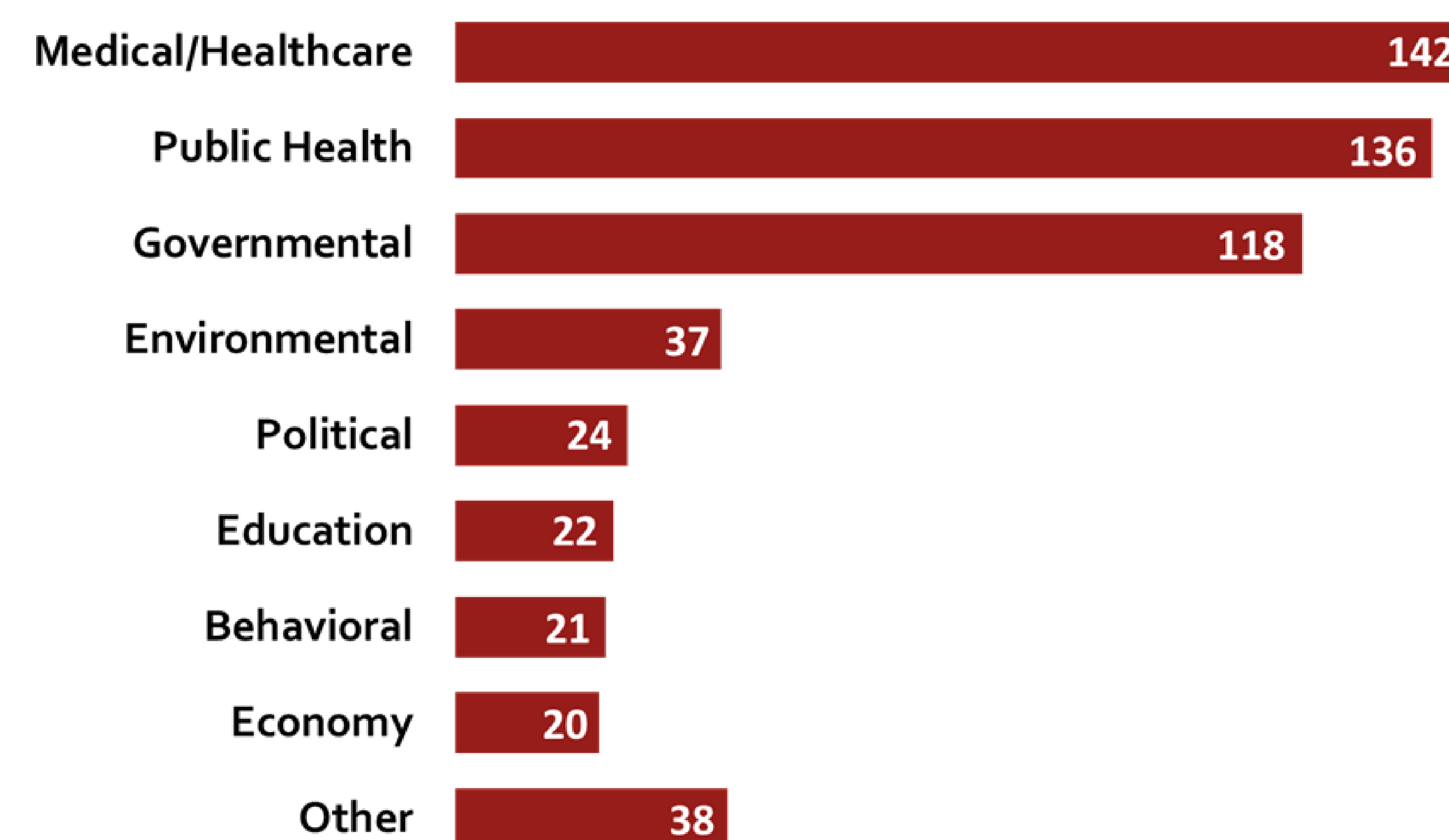
- Elected and non-elected officials
- Individuals and organizations
- National and local political levels

### Article Coding

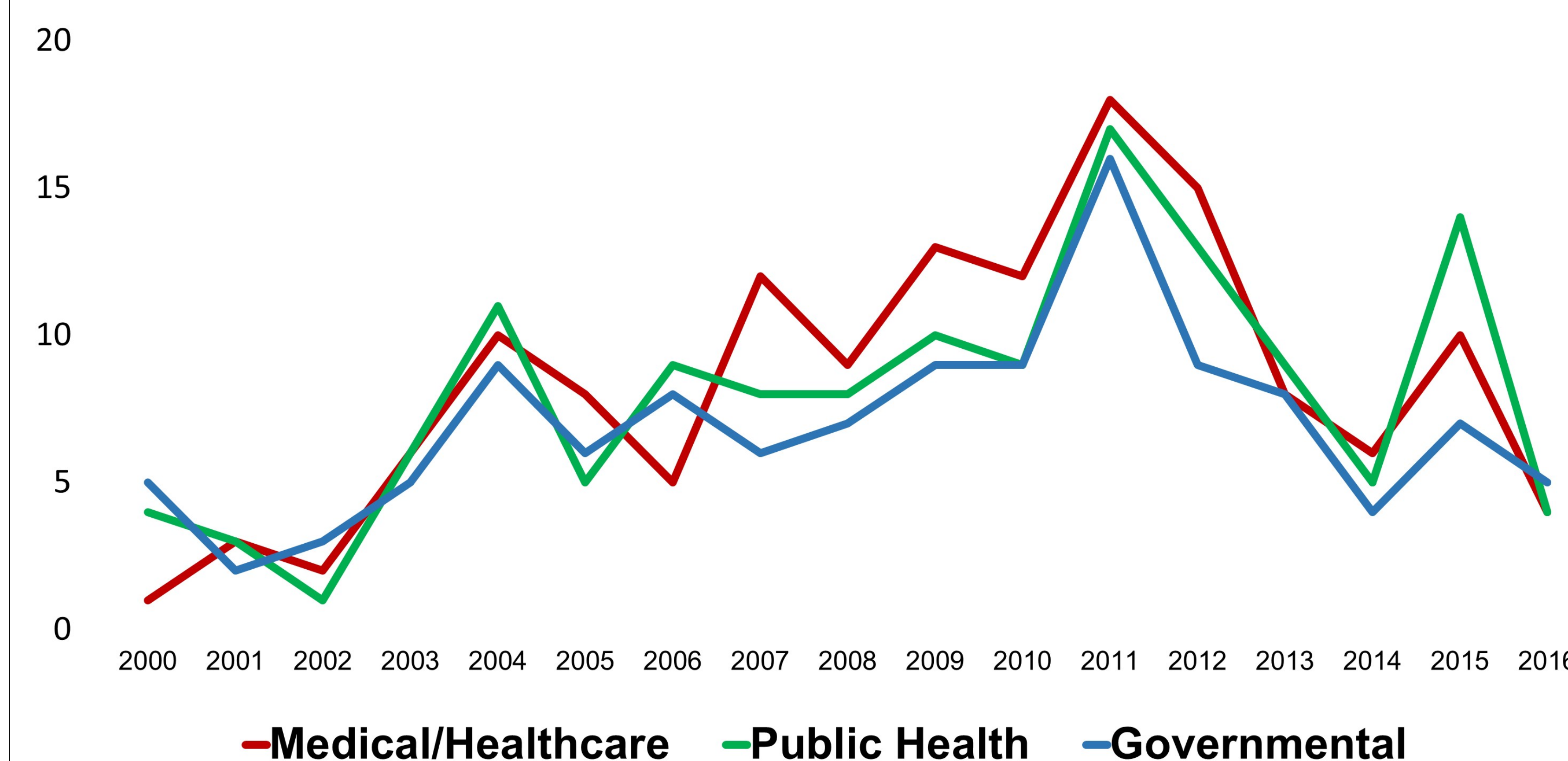
- Major SDH themes
- Policymaker demographics
- Action/Policy impact

## RESULTS

### Major SDH Themes Identified in the Literature



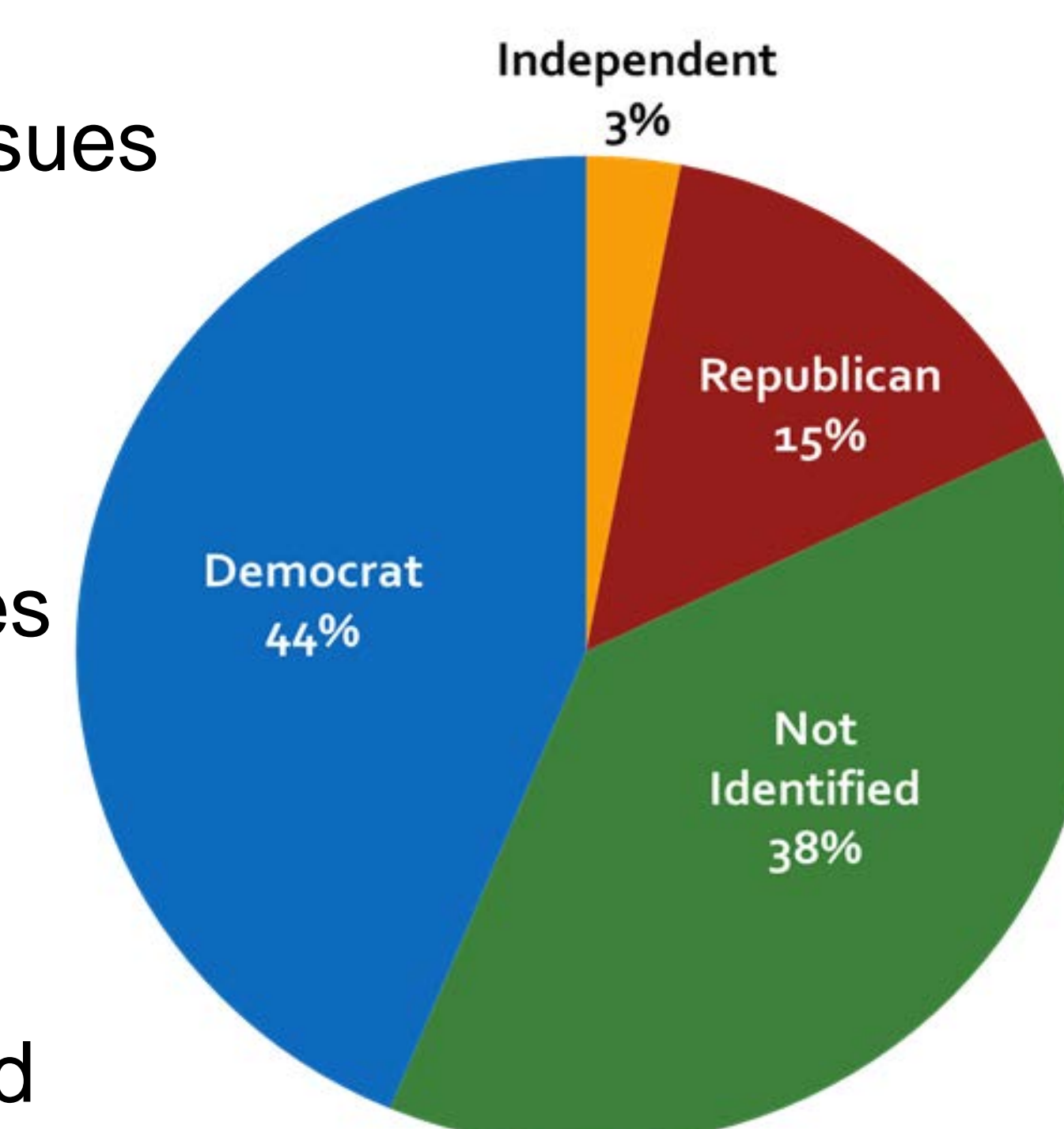
### Top Three SDH Themes by Year of Article Publication



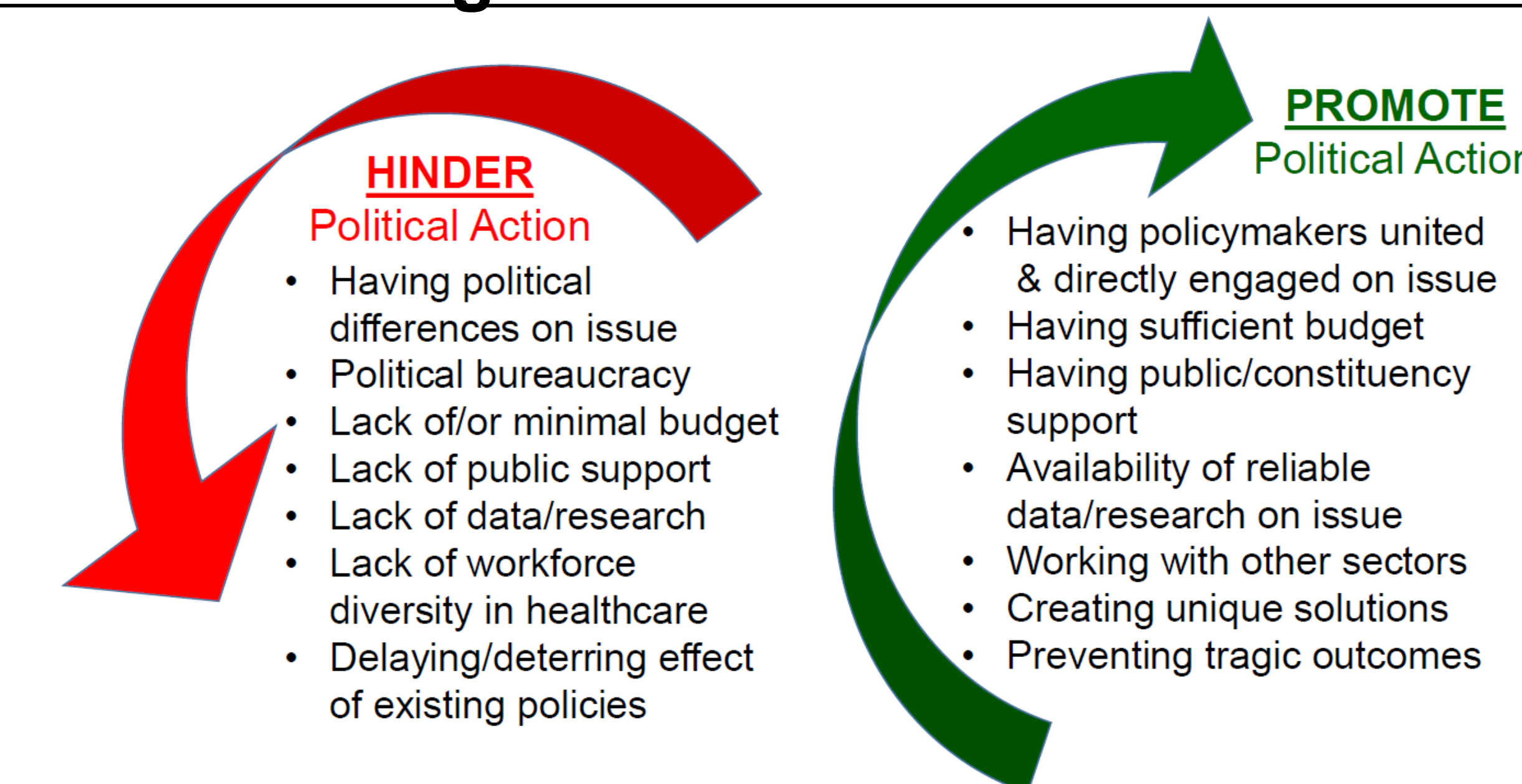
## RESULTS

### Policymaker Characteristics

- Informed policymakers placed SDH issues higher on their political agenda.
- Policymakers with a high level of SDH interest and awareness have:
  - Previous experience with SDH issues
  - Personal connection with the issue
  - Been actively engaged in legislative health committees and groups
- Political affiliation in this study reflected more democratic involvement in SDH issues.



### Factors Influencing Political Action on SDH issues



## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Policy Points

- **U.S. policymakers focused mainly on healthcare access, cost, and quality** but did not systematically integrate the broader root causes of health inequities in the discussion.
- **U.S. policymakers lacked a comprehensive & collaborative “health in all policies” approach.**
- **U.S. policymakers need to break down complex SDH problems into politically actionable short- & long-term components** achievable within their term of office.

### Moving Forward

- **Build a culture of shared accountability for health** among legislators, public health, government and private sectors.
- **Advocate for a “health in all policies” approach among legislators**– a systematic framework that accounts for the impact of policies, programs, & sector decisions on health.
- **Share data and establish common metrics** for assessing community health to inform policy, practice, & research.
- **Engage policymakers and increase political understanding & buy-in** through joint training, cross-sectoral communication, and collaborative action.