Faculty Publications

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Navigating the Politics of Health: A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, and Health in All Policies.

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Navigating the Politics of Health: A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, Health Equity, and Health in All Policies

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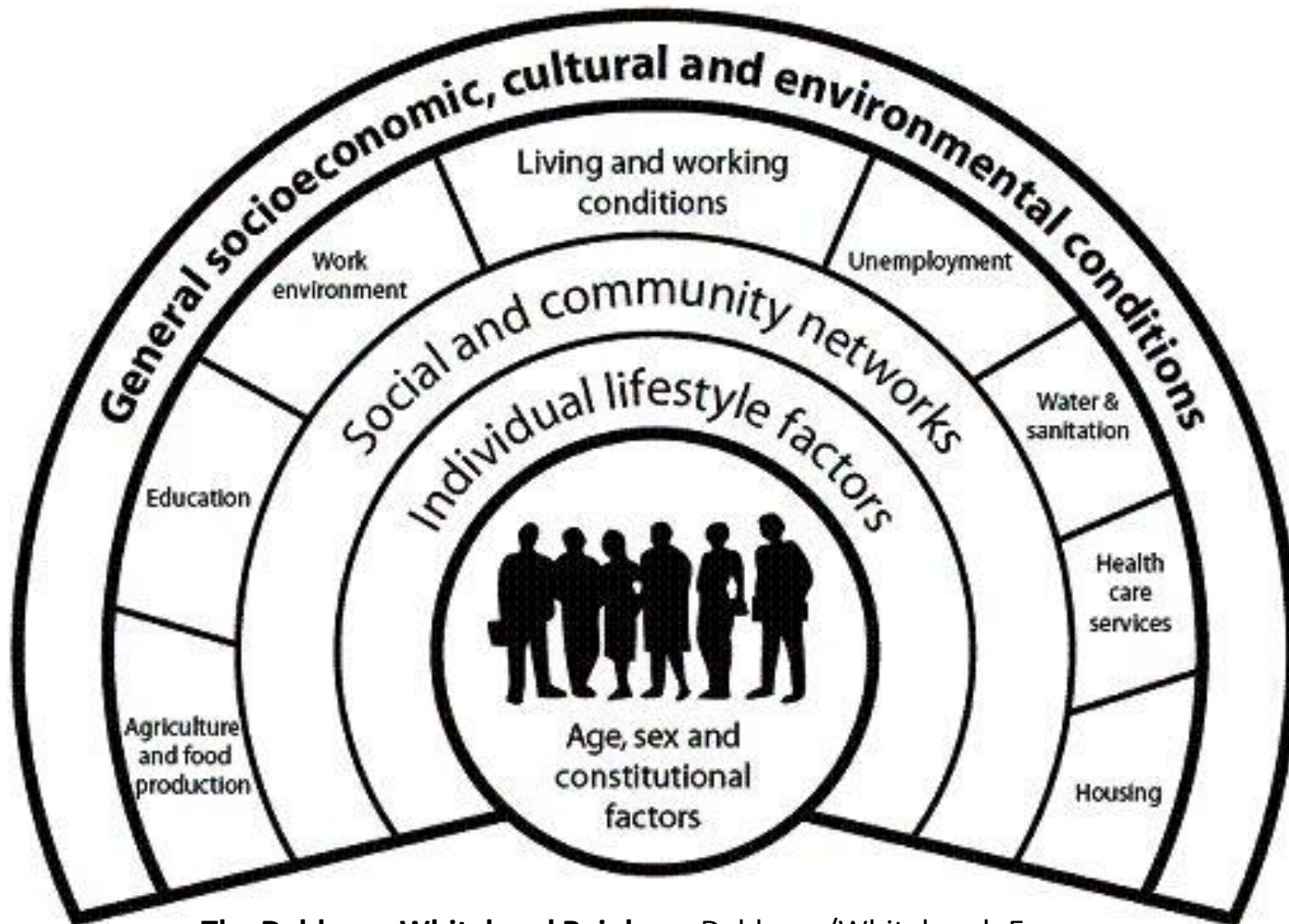
Brigham Young University

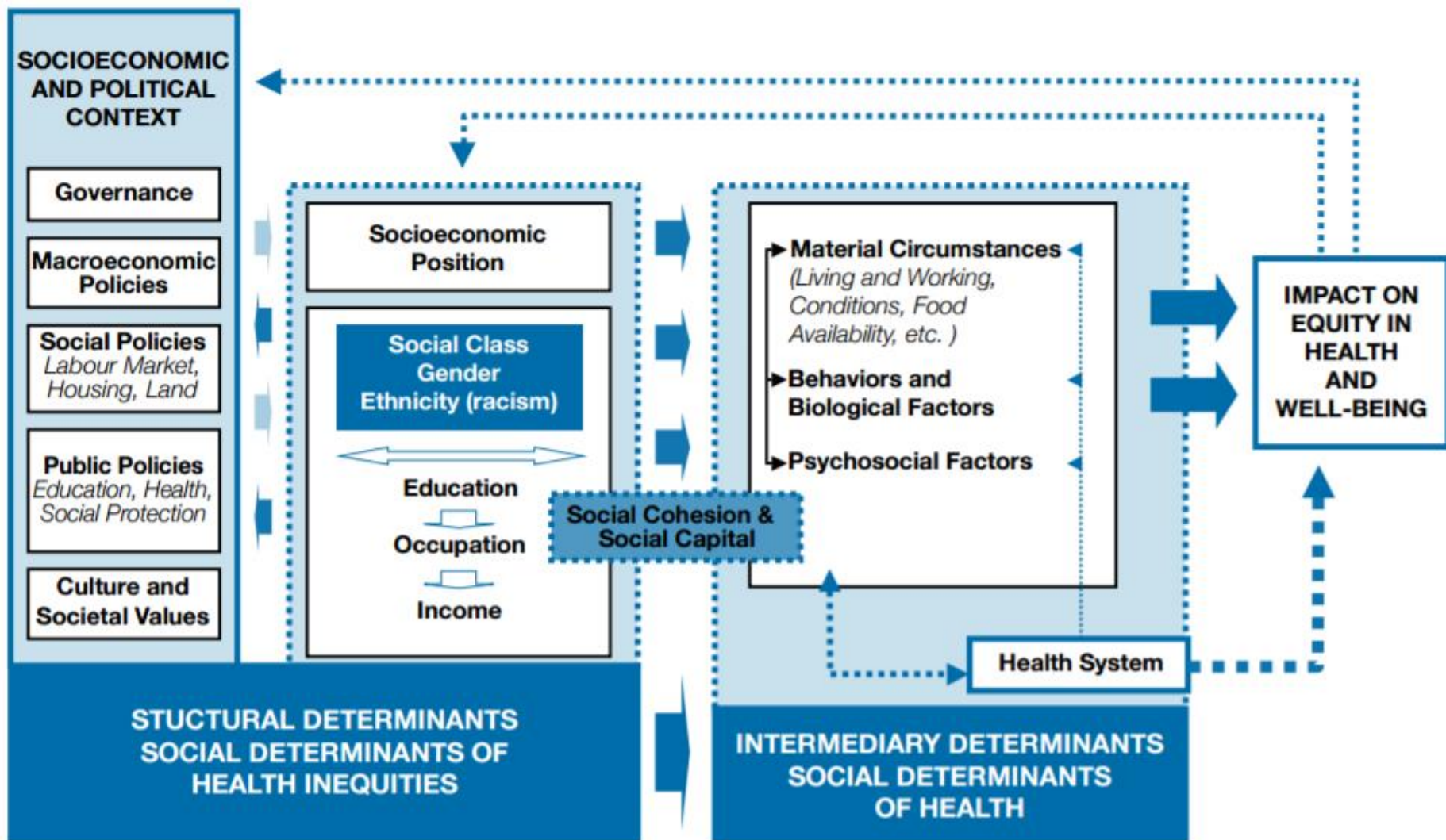1. Department of Health Science 2. Harold B. Lee Library
3. Department of Exercise Sciences

Roseman University Research Symposium
March 14, 2018
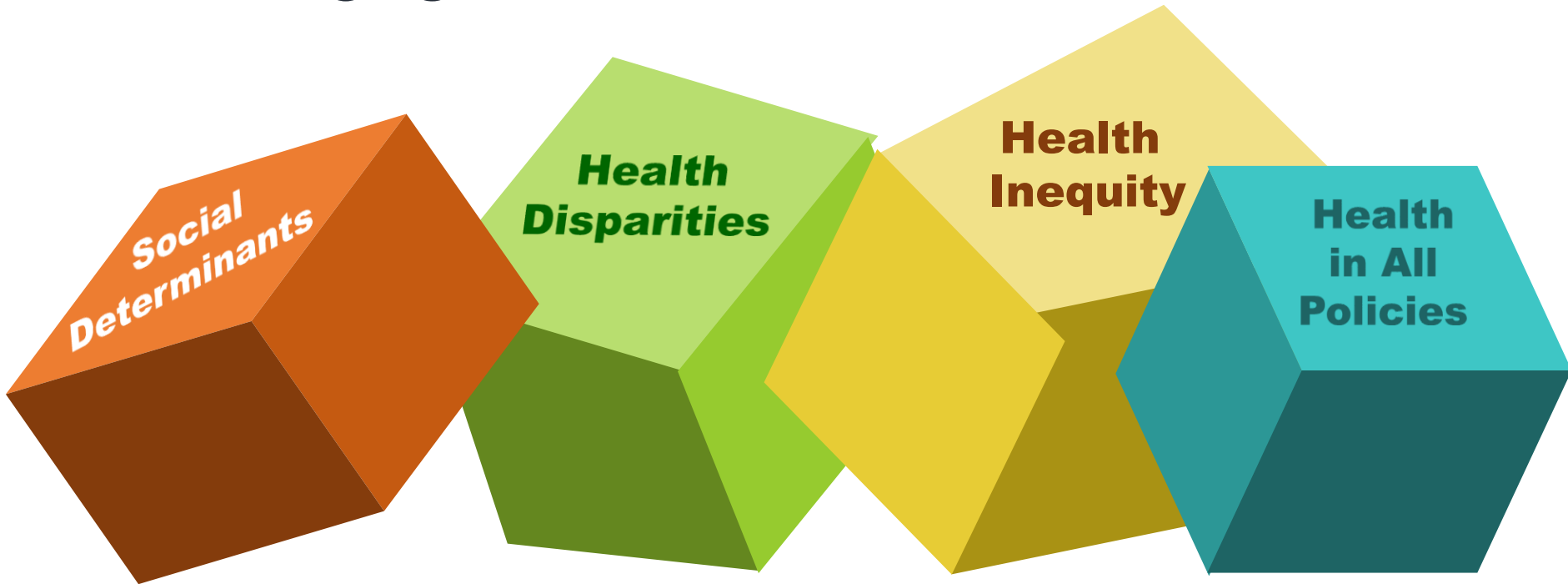
Layers of Influence on Health

The Dahlgren-Whitehead Rainbow. Dahlgren/Whitehead: European strategies for tackling social inequities in health – levelling up part 2 (World Health Organization Report 2006, reprinted 2007)

Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health

DEFINITIONS

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

The **conditions** in which people are born, grow, live, work and age… shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels… are **mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status** seen within and between countries (WHO, 2008)

HEALTH DISPARITIES

Is there a **difference** in health status rates between population groups?

HEALTH INEQUITY

Is the disparity in rates due to differences in social, economic, environmental or HC resources? Is it **fair**? Is it **preventable**?

HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES

A collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people. …recognizes that **health is created by a multitude of factors beyond healthcare** and, in many cases, beyond the scope of traditional public health activities (CDC, 2016)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

**Research Question 1
RQ1**

Which social determinants of health themes are identified by policymakers as legislative priorities?

**Research Question 2
RQ2**

What are the characteristics of policymakers that acted on the social determinants of health?

**Research Question 3
RQ3**

Among policymakers, which factors facilitated or hindered action on the social determinants of health?

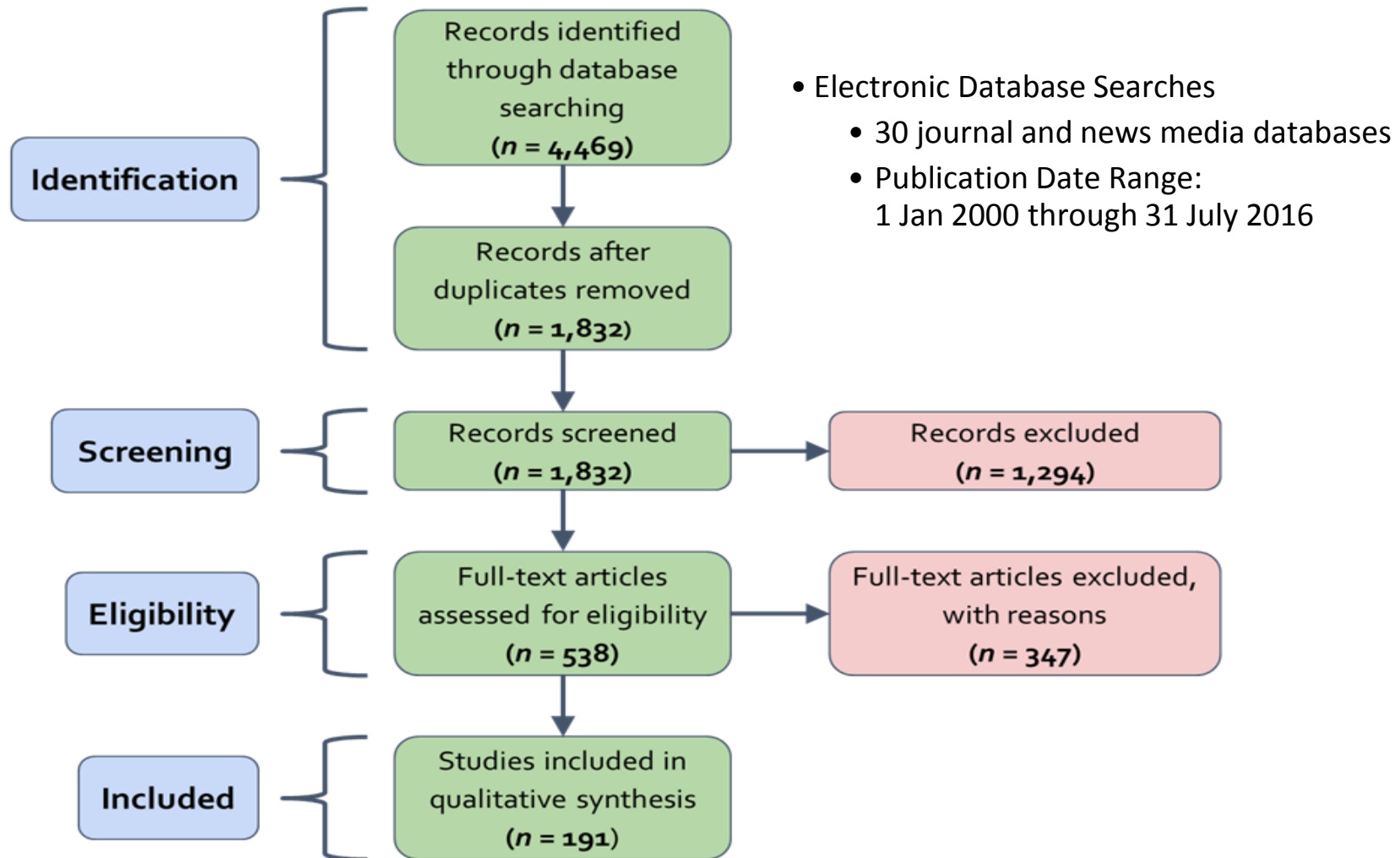# Methods

- Systematic review of scholarly and popular media sources

- **Policymakers**
  - Elected and non-elected
  - Individuals and organizations
  - Local through national political level

- **Inclusion criteria**
  - Address social determinants of health or a related topic
  - Focus on the United States
  - Written in English
  - Mention an individual U.S. policymaker or policy-making group

PRISMA Flow Diagram

Identification

Records identified through database searching
($n = 4,469$)

Records after duplicates removed
($n = 1,832$)

Screening

Records screened
($n = 1,832$)

Records excluded
($n = 1,294$)

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
($n = 538$)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons
($n = 347$)

Included

Studies included in qualitative synthesis
($n = 191$)

- Electronic Database Searches
  - 30 journal and news media databases
  - Publication Date Range:
    1 Jan 2000 through 31 July 2016

Methods – Coding

- Type of Article

- Geographic Focus

- Study Design

- Major SDH Theme

- Gaps Mentioned

- Level of Policymaking

- Policymaker Job

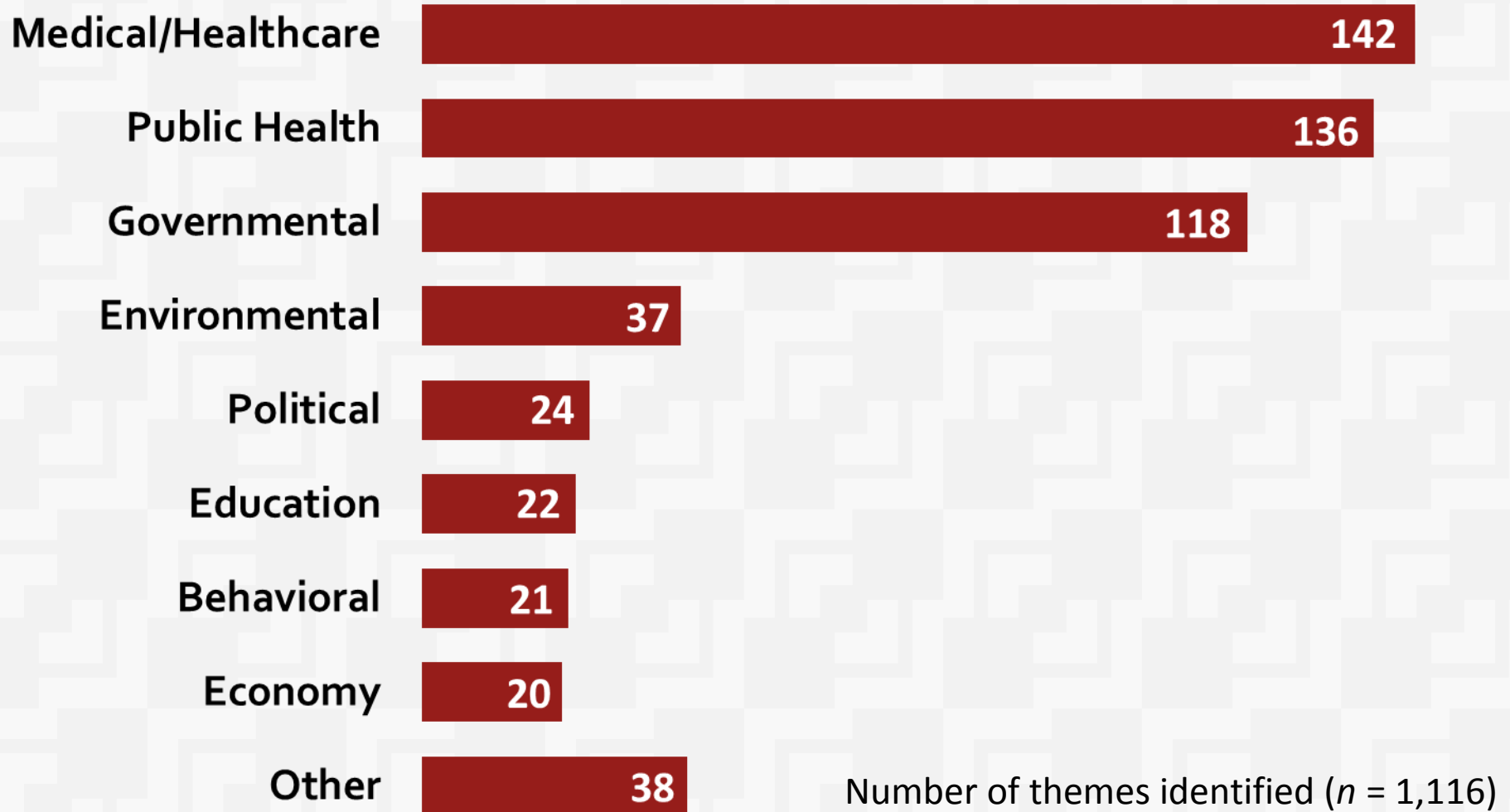Photo by Blake Bolinger. License: CC-BY-2.0
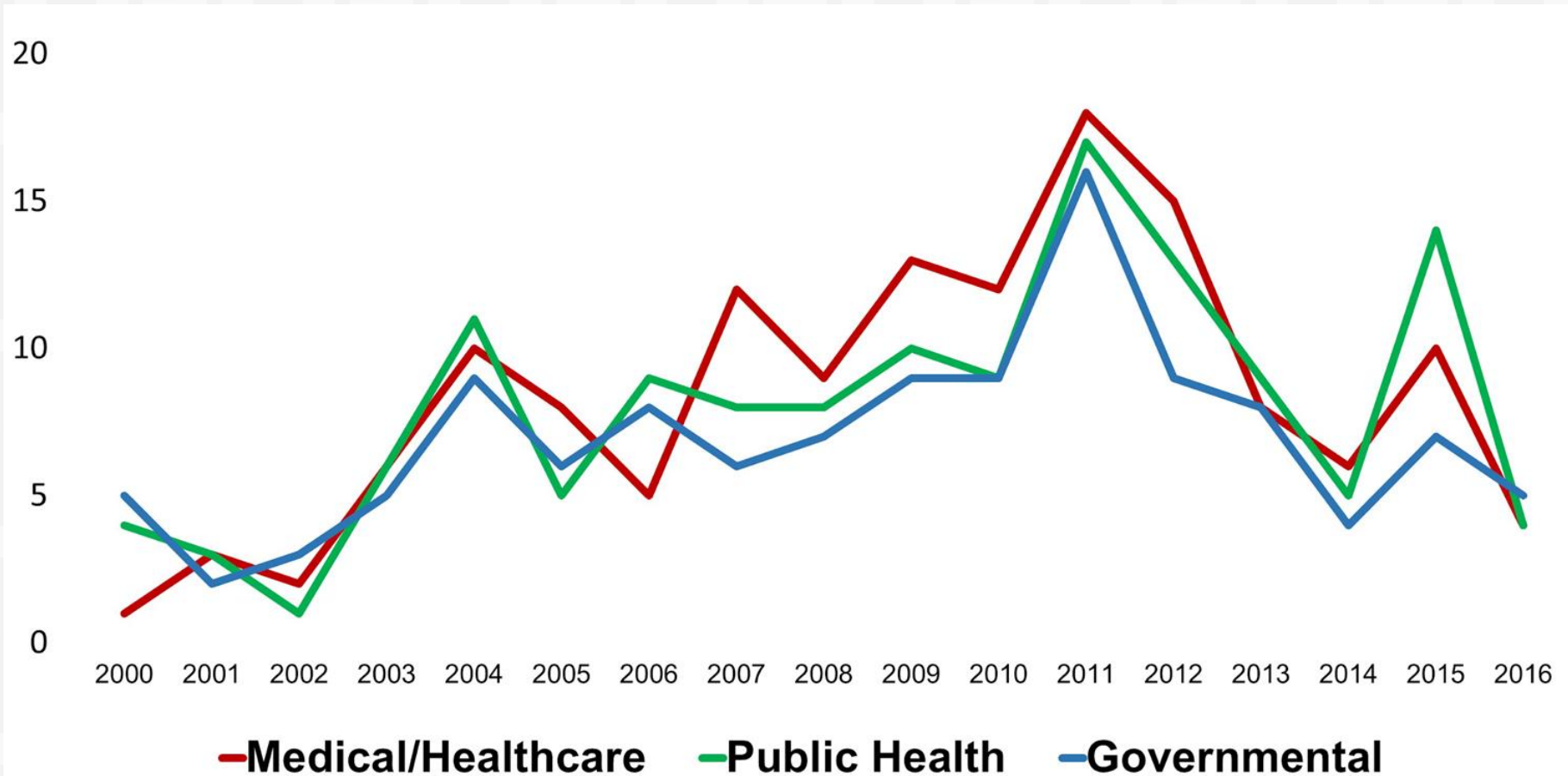
Qualitative Results
- Research Questions

- RQ 1 – SDH Themes

- RQ 2 – Policymakers' Characteristics

- RQ 3 – Factors Influencing Action on SDH

Results – RQ1 on SDH Themes

Theme	Number
Medical/Healthcare	142
Public Health	136
Governmental	118
Environmental	37
Political	24
Education	22
Behavioral	21
Economy	20
Other	38

Number of themes identified (n = 1,116)

Results – Top SDH Themes by Year
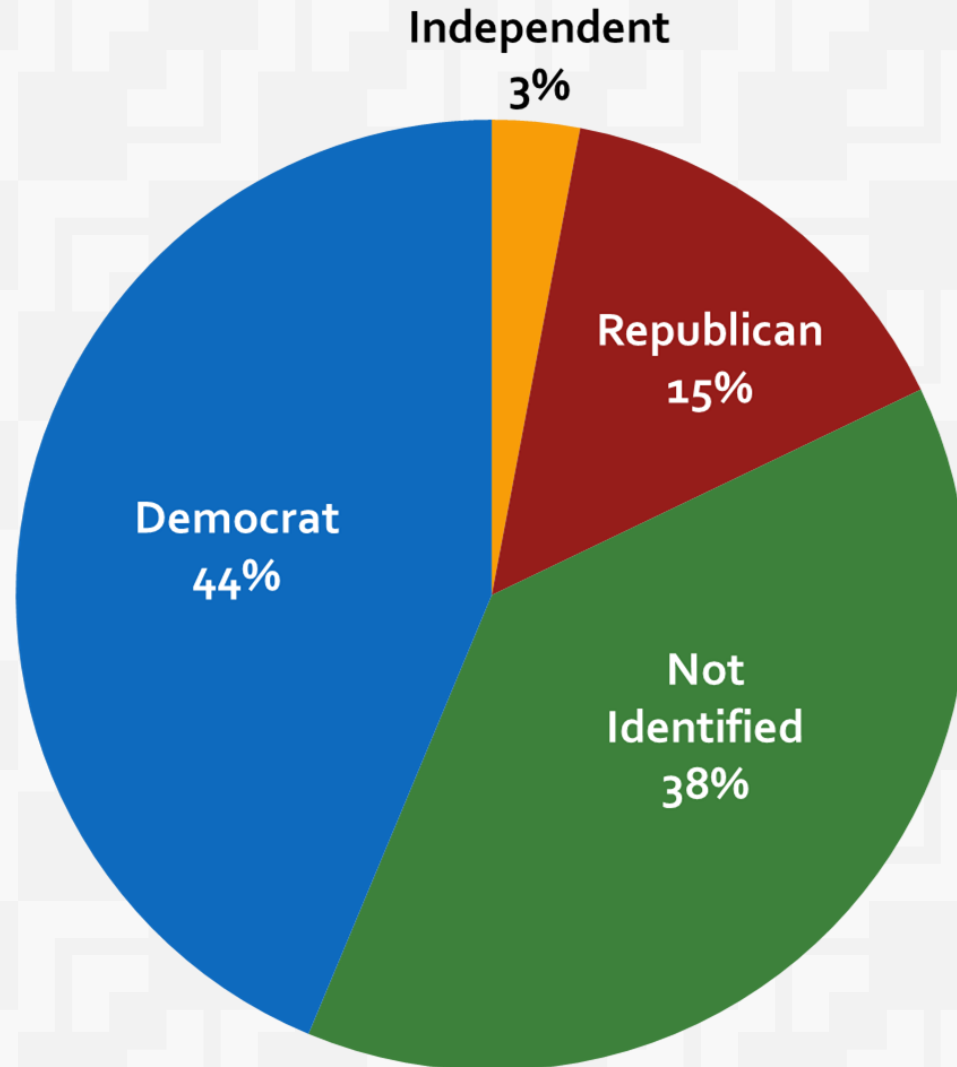
Results – RQ1 on SDH Themes

Why these Themes?

- National Spotlight
  - Healthcare most talked about theme over the past 16 years among policymakers

- Greatest Change in Shortest Time
  - Screenings prevent cancer and early deaths

- Re-election
  - Motive for some policymaker advocacy for change

Results – RQ2 on Policymakers' 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

Results – RQ2 on Political Affiliation

Results – RQ3 on Factors Influencing Action on SDH

HINDER
Political Action

- Having political differences on issue
- Political bureaucracy
- Lack of/or minimal budget
- Lack of public support
- Lack of data/research
- Lack of workforce diversity in healthcare
- Delaying/deterring effect of existing policies

PROMOTE
Political Action

- Having policymakers united & directly engaged on issue
- Having sufficient budget
- Having public/constituency support
- Availability of reliable data/research on issue
- Working with other sectors
- Creating unique solutions
- Preventing tragic outcomes

Conclusions - Key Policy Points

- U.S. policymakers focused mainly on healthcare access, cost, and quality. However, policy actions **did not have a systematic integration of 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.

Conclusions - 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** to have a systematic framework that accounts for the impact of policies, programs, & sector decisions on health

- **Share data and establish common metrics** on assessing community health to inform policy, practice, & research

- Engage policymakers and increase political understanding & buy-in by having **joint training, cross-sectoral communication, and collaborative action**

What Does this Mean for Utah?

Lessons Learned

LESSON 1

**Collaborate for Health.
Build Relationships.**

LESSON 2

Use health as a uniting factor across policies & sectors.

LESSON 3

Make public health a policy priority – access, cost, & quality health care.

LESSON 4

Use data as a bridge between science & policy decision-making.

LESSON 5

Create & communicate effective health messages.

Questions?