

SOCIOLOGY POLICY BRIEFS (/)
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POLICY BRIEFS (/BRIEFS)
WRITING BRIEFS (/WRITING)

SUBMIT A BRIEF (/SUBMIT)

A photograph of a pagoda with a spire, reflected in a body of water. The reflection is clear and detailed, showing the intricate details of the pagoda's structure. The water is calm, and the surrounding environment is reflected as well. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

Resources for
WRITING POLICY BRIEFS

Writing Policy Briefs: *A Brief* Guide for Sociologists

WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?

Policy briefs are short reports aimed at policy makers.

There are two main types of policy briefs: *advocacy briefs*, which argue for a particular course of action, and *objective briefs*, which provide balanced information on several policy options. Either are appropriate for a submission to *SPB*. If your research findings suggest one course of action, write an advocacy brief; if they suggest multiple options, write an objective brief. In either case, you will need to provide (1) background on a particular social problem, (2) a concise summary of relevant sociological research, and (3) one or more policy recommendations based on the evidence.

STRUCTURE OF A POLICY BRIEF

Policy briefs can have different formats depending on the publishing organization and its intended audience. There are nine sections to a typical *SPB* policy brief:

Title - The title should be short, descriptive, and catchy. If you are adapting your policy brief from an existing article, you may need to change the title to reflect your policy recommendations (rather than, for example, your theoretical contribution).

Under the title is the author and their affiliation.

Summary - The summary should describe the social problem; explain why it is important to address the problem; describe your research study (including methods used); explain what your research found; and explain how your findings should inform policy. A reader who reads only the summary should understand the main points of your policy brief. Like article abstracts, summaries are typically 100-200 words in length.

Introduction - The introduction grabs the reader's attention by introducing the social problem and explaining why it requires action. It should be concise and quickly get the reader interested in the problem and your solutions. Remember that your policy brief is written for an informed but non-technical audience (e.g., lawmakers, activists, executives, journalists) and so should be free of jargon and unnecessary technical language.

Main text - Once you have described the social problem in the introduction, you can format the body of your brief in one of three ways:

Problem – Causes – Effects – Solution

Explain the causes of the social problem and its effects, explain your research and findings, and propose a solution. Your solution will be in the form of one or more policy recommendations, likely placed at the end of the brief.

Problem – Subtopic 1 – Subtopic 2 – Subtopic 3 – Policy Implications

Organize your brief by subtopics (or case studies) and conclude with your policy implications. Your policy implications should be generalized from the more specific subtopics/cases. In this format, policy recommendations can be included after each subtopic or together at the end of the brief.

Problem – Intervention – Results – Policy Implications

If your research examines an intervention, describe the intervention and its results and then the implications for future policy making.

Policy briefs typically do not include a lengthy discussion of research methods. One or two sentences is usually sufficient, especially if the method is well-known. If a reader wants to read your methods section, they can read your article.

Policy recommendations - Policy recommendations should be short statements, stated clearly using action verbs. When writing recommendations, be realistic (What can policies reasonably accomplish?) and make sure that they are supported by your research. Policy recommendations can be placed anywhere in the brief; they don't necessarily go at the end. For example, they might go right after the introduction (in their own section), be distributed throughout the text (i.e., after subtopics), or integrated into the policy

implications. Recommendations that are placed in-text (rather than in their own section) should be set apart via boldface type and a carriage return.

Policy implications - You should conclude your brief with a short discussion of the policy implications of your research. This section is a link between your *research findings* and your *policy recommendations*. You should explain what your research means for existing policy and what effect your recommendations are likely to have. If you planned to put your recommendations at the end of the policy brief, they can be integrated here.

Author biography - Your biography should include your name, email address, title, and affiliation. This section should be no more than 100 words in length.

Acknowledgements - If you would like to include acknowledgements, including to funding organizations, they should go here.

Source & Further Reading - Include a 'source' citation of the article your brief is based on, as well as 3-5 references for 'further reading.' These can be references cited in-text or uncited references the reader can use to learn more. All references (including in-text citations) should be in ASA style. Wherever possible, include a link to any articles that are freely available online (e.g., open source articles or those on your website).

POLICY BRIEF EXAMPLES

Below are examples of policy briefs published by scholarly organizations and journals:

Journal of Health and Social Behavior Policy Briefs
(<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/journals/journal-health-and-social-behavior/journal-health-and-social-behavior-policy-briefs>)

Sociological Insights for Development Policy
(<https://sociologyofdevelopment.com/policybriefs/>)

UC Davis Center for Poverty Research
(<https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/policy-briefs>)

UW Madison Institute for Research on Poverty
(<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/policybriefs.htm>)

Scholars Strategy Network Research Briefs
(<https://scholars.org/briefs>)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (PDF)

Below are additional resources on how to turn your research into a policy brief:

Writing Effective Reports (FAO 2011)
(<http://www.fao.org/3/i2195e/i2195e03.pdf>)

An Essential Guide to Writing Policy Briefs (ICPA 2017)
(http://www.icpolicyadvocacy.org/sites/icpa/files/downloads/icpa_policy_briefs_essential_guide.pdf)

How to Plan, Write, and Communicate an Effective Policy Brief (R2A 2014) (<http://www.researchtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PBWeekLauraFCfinal.pdf>)

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