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Public Opinion of Coyotes in Long Beach: Surveys and Interviews

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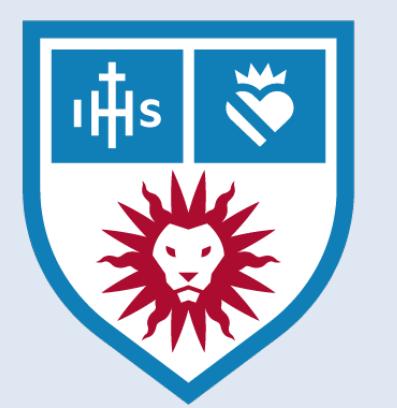
Abstract

It is important to understand public opinion on urban wildlife in order to effectively manage it. Coyotes have adapted to survive in urban environments and do not have a favorable presence in Long Beach, California due to their predatory nature. This research project seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how the residents of Long Beach feel about the coyote population and how they interact with it. The data obtained from this project will fill knowledge gaps about the types of encounters residents have with coyotes and help create management plans to effectively deal with local safety concerns. Residents were randomly mailed a survey (n=341) where they were asked about their opinions towards coyotes in the City and their satisfaction with the City's coyote management. Interviews were conducted with six different urban wildlife experts. Prevalent themes among the interviews include (1) a need for public education and awareness of coyotes and (2) higher concern among residents with pets and small children. Survey data shows that 60% of residents have encountered coyotes in their neighborhood and that the most common encounter type is "sighting only." 31% of free responses indicated concern regarding pet safety. 19% of free responses favored management practices that involve human behavior (primarily through education) and 10% of responses favored those that would involve action on coyotes. Increasing public awareness is necessary in order to promote the coexistence of wildlife with human life in an urban environment.

Introduction

Background: In order to gain a holistic understanding of public opinion on the current urban coyote situation in Long Beach, a city must understand its residents' main concerns and the types of interactions they have with coyotes. Past studies found there is a lack of public knowledge regarding coyotes and policies restricting human behavior are preferred over those that restrict coyotes (Draheim, et al. 2013).

Research Questions:
What are the city residents' opinions and concerns regarding coyotes?
What types of encounters with coyotes are most common? What concerns do experts in the urban wildlife have in regards to the matter?

Methods

Interviews:
- Semi-structured interviews with six urban wildlife experts regarding coyote behavior and interaction with humans in the City of Long Beach
- Transcripts were coded for the presence of the following themes: (1) Overall Public concern with coyotes, (2) Coyote and Human interaction, (3) The effect of the presence of pets/children, (4) Importance of Public Education, (5) Individual Anecdotes.
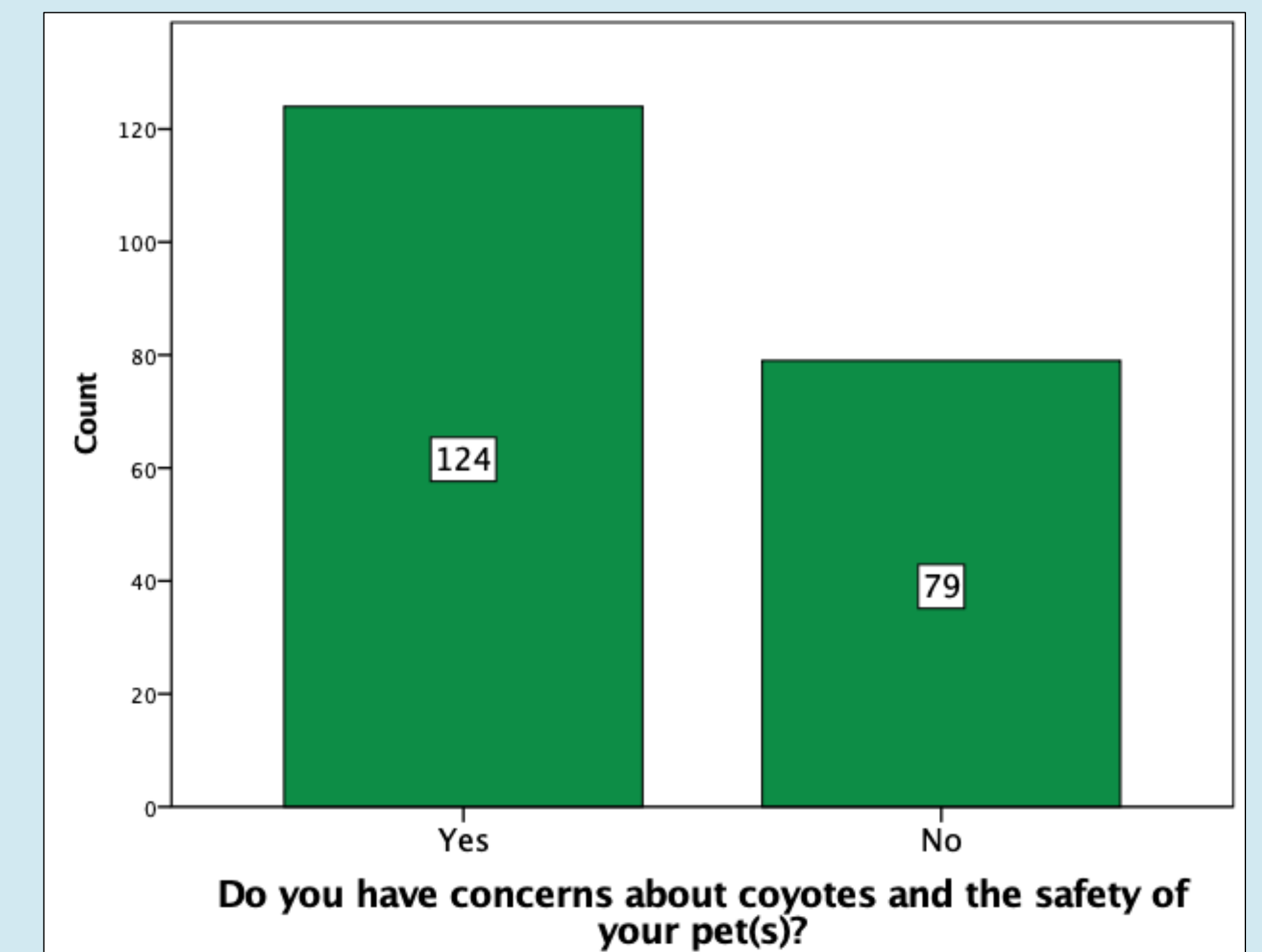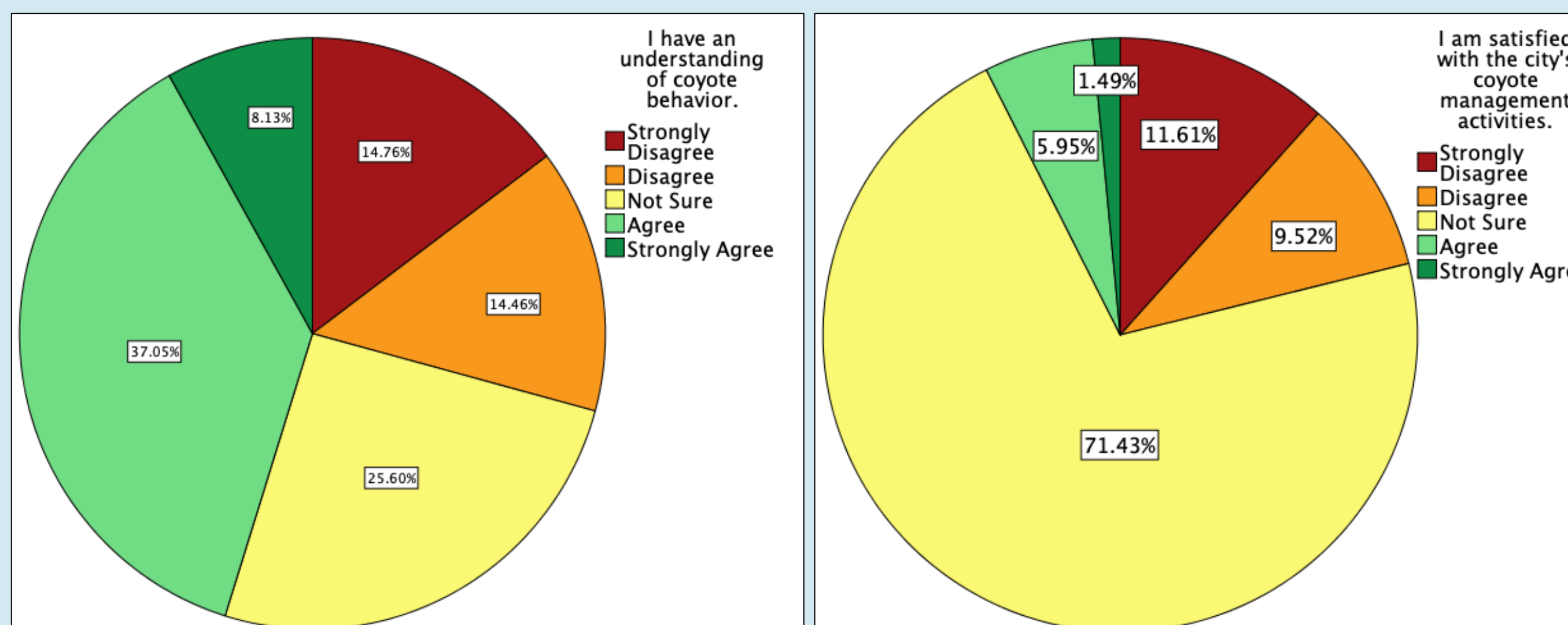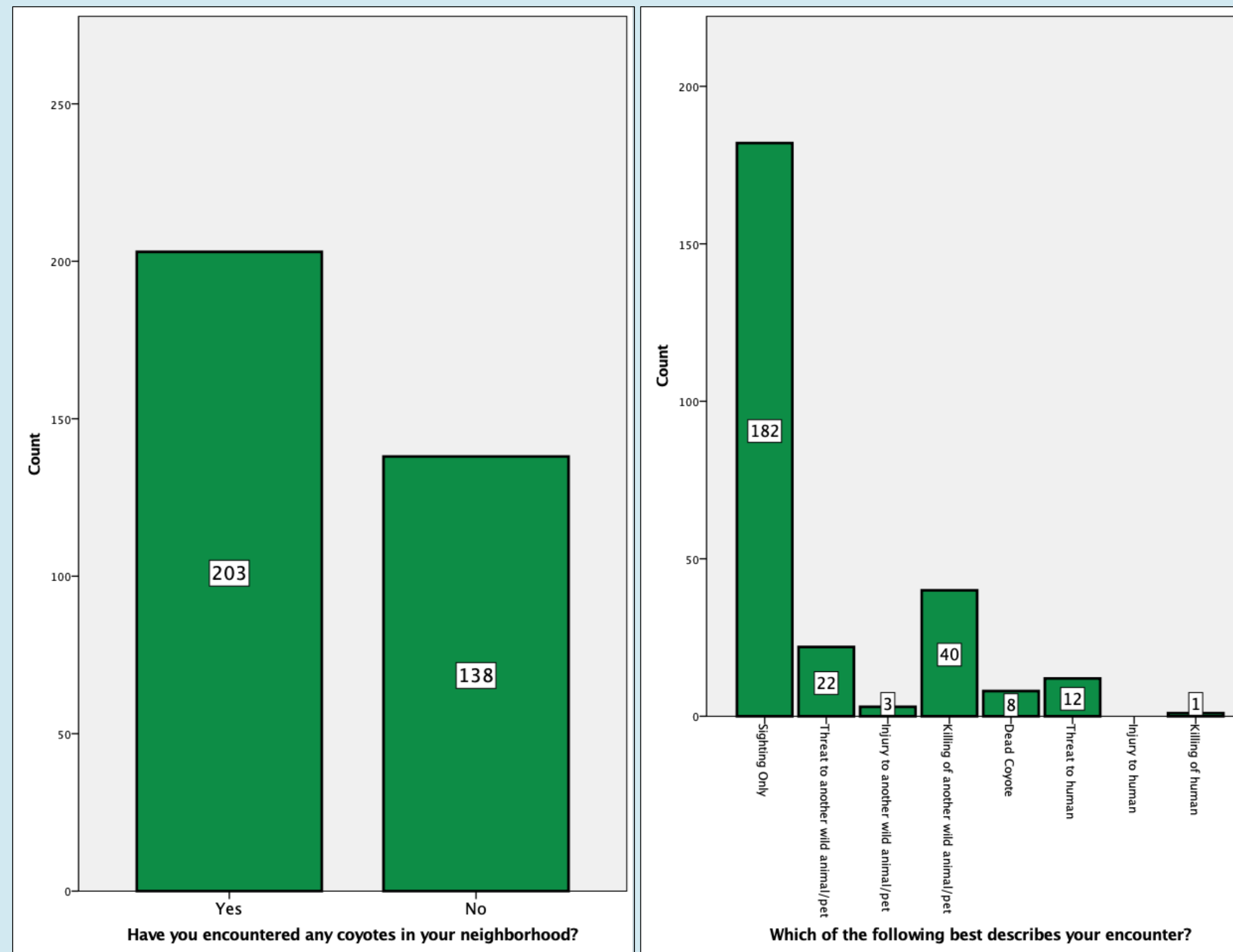
Survey:
- Residents randomly selected through city database and mailed a survey
- Survey included questions regarding opinions about coyotes in Long Beach and their satisfaction with Coyote Management.
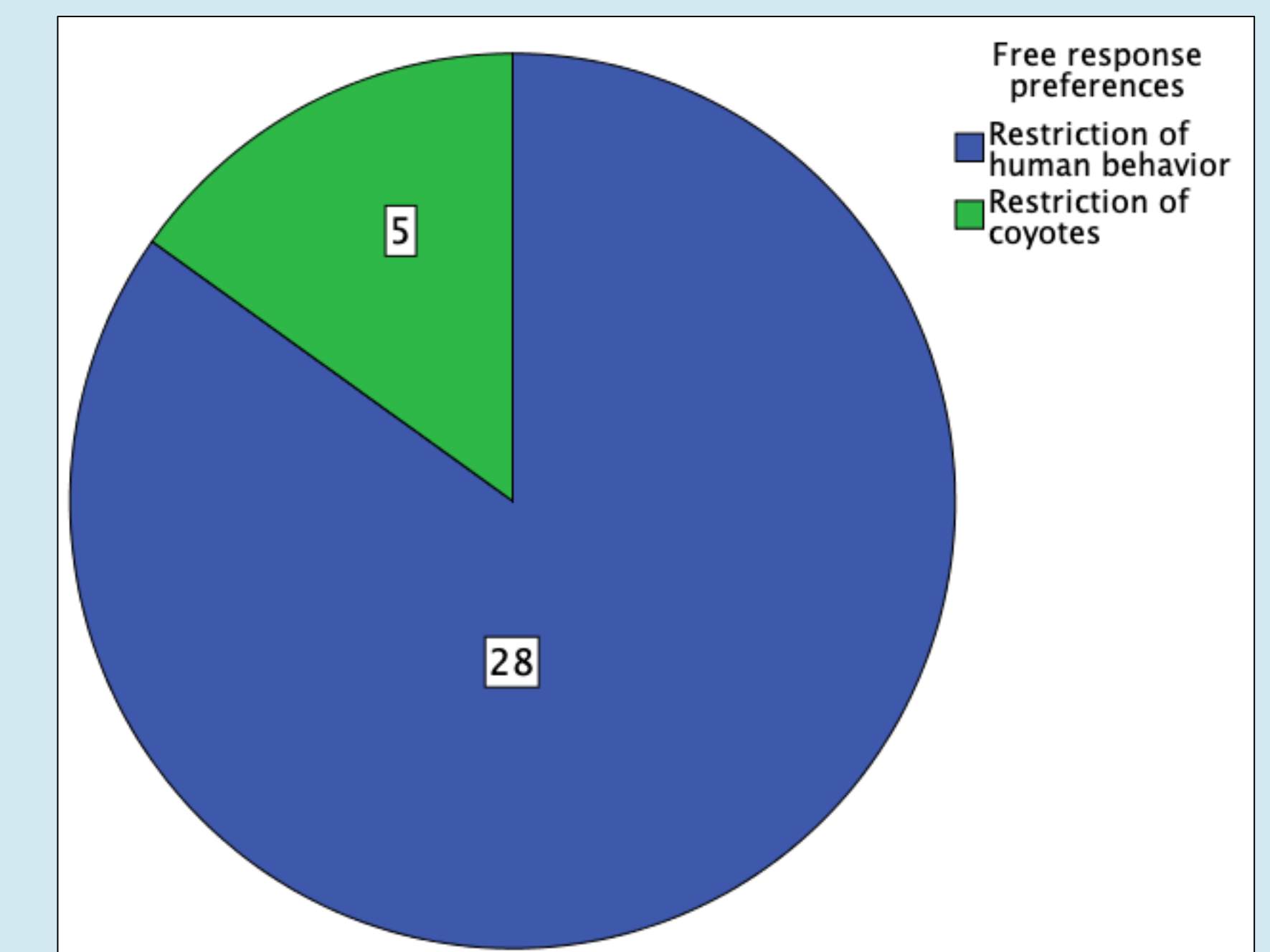
Data

A summary of predominant themes in interviews with wildlife experts.

Position	Lack of Public Awareness	Predominantly Unconcerned Citizens	Concern for Pets/kids	Importance of Coexistence/ Awareness
Bureau Manager, Animal Control	✓	✓	✓	
Community Service Supervisor, Regional Park in Long Beach	✓		✓	✓
Associate Prof. Biology, CSLB		✓	✓	
Neighborhood Council Affiliate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wildlife Ecologists, National Park Service	✓	✓	✓	✓

Results from 5 of the 13 Questions on the Survey.

Have you encountered any coyotes in your neighborhood? (Yes: 203, No: 138)

Which of the following best describes your encounter? (Sighting Only: 182, Threat to another wild animal/pet: 22, Injury to another wild animal/pet: 3, Killing of another wild animal/pet: 40, Dead Coyote: 8, Threat to human: 12, Injury to human: 0, Killing of human: 1)

I have an understanding of coyote behavior. (Strongly Disagree: 14.76%, Disagree: 14.46%, Not Sure: 25.60%, Agree: 37.05%, Strongly Agree: 8.13%)

I am satisfied with the city's coyote management activities. (Strongly Disagree: 11.61%, Disagree: 9.52%, Not Sure: 71.43%, Agree: 5.95%, Strongly Agree: 1.49%)

Do you have concerns about coyotes and the safety of your pet(s)? (Yes: 124, No: 79)

33 of the 108 Free responses included a preference for type of management policy.

Free response preferences — Restriction of human behavior: 28, Restriction of coyotes: 5

Results and Discussion

- The survey data shows that residents are unsure about the City's coyote management policies.
- The survey data and interviews indicate that there is a greater need for educational programs and awareness about coyote behavior and pet safety.
- A majority (85%) of reported interactions with coyotes are sightings only.
- Survey data is not likely to be representative of the entire population—those who feel strongly about the issue are more likely to respond.
- Future research would include explicit questions regarding whether they prefer policies that restrict human behavior or those that restrict coyotes.
- A greater number of responses would help find a correlation between demographics and opinions.

Literature Cited

Draheim, Megan, et al. "Attitudes of College Undergraduates Towards Coyotes (Canis Latrans) in an Urban Landscape: Management and Public Outreach Implications." *Animals*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1–18., doi:10.3390/ani3010001.

Acknowledgements