

# Analyzing Public Opinion of the Silver Lake Reservoir

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## Abstract

Silver Lake, California is a diverse residential neighborhood located five miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles, with a population of approximately 32,890 people. Silver Lake was built around its local reservoir, the facilities of which provide habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic, social, and wellness benefits for visitors. Presumably, the reservoir also mitigates the urban heat island effect. Since the reservoir was recently refilled with water, the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council (SLNC) plans to update the reservoir management plan, informed by public input and assessment. A team of CUREs researchers surveyed 249 citizens in person around the Silver Lake neighborhood to gather public opinion on the reservoir's facilities, including possible improvements in water accessibility, educational opportunities, and infrastructure. This same survey was also voluntarily taken online by 1014 people. This study serves to analyze the results of the survey to conclude the main concerns of Silver Lake residents and visitors. A majority of the surveyed subjects proved to be informed about the environmental and ecological effects of the reservoir. The majority also showed certain interest and concern for public accessibility, increased traffic, and improved facilities. Acknowledgment of both societal and ecological benefits of the reservoir substantiates a diverse array of public recommendations. The collected information is hoped to play a major role in the continued development of the reservoir management plan, the outcomes of which have potential to bolster the Silver Lake reservoir as a vital, dynamic green space serving both citizens and local flora and fauna.

## Introduction

### Background

- Silver Lake ranks moderate for its park needs<sup>1</sup>
- Silver Lake Neighborhood Council (SLNC) looking to gauge public opinion on reservoir to guide the new Reservoir Master Plan
- Reservoirs potentially contribute to health and wellbeing, and provide ecological services, recreational opportunities, and community spaces<sup>2</sup>
- Similar 2016 survey\* administered by the Silver Lake Reservoirs Conservancy found that citizens were most supportive of increasing recreational opportunities and keeping water in the reservoir, and most concerned with traffic, parking, cleanliness, crowding, and disturbance to wildlife

\*survey conducted when reservoir was drained, which may have impacted responses

### Hypothesis

The majority of surveyed subjects will place more value on the reservoir's potential to serve the human community rather than its role in the environment. This will be exhibited through the majority's promotion of increased public access to the reservoir and/or reservoir conversion.

## Methods

- A survey was designed via Qualtrics software by the LMU Center for Urban Resilience and approved by the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council
- Regions of the Silver Lake Council District were identified
- A diverse set of public spaces in these areas were marked, including the dog park, Whole Foods Market 365, the 99 Cent Store, Silver Lake Branch Library, Silver Lake reservoir (walking path, meadow, recreation center, and Tesla Pocket Park), and the Silver Lake Farmer's Market
- Subjects were randomly chosen to take in person survey; participants were notified that survey was anonymous and voluntary. iPads were used to record responses
- Identical surveys were also made available online

## Data

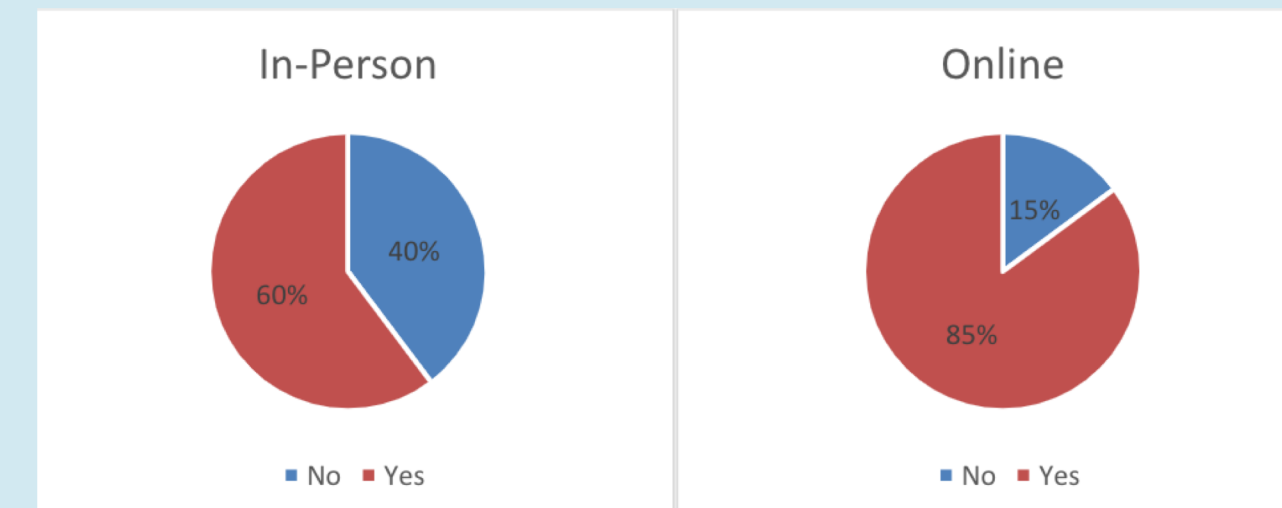


Figure 1: responses for “Do you think anything needs to be improved in the reservoir area” from in person and online respondents

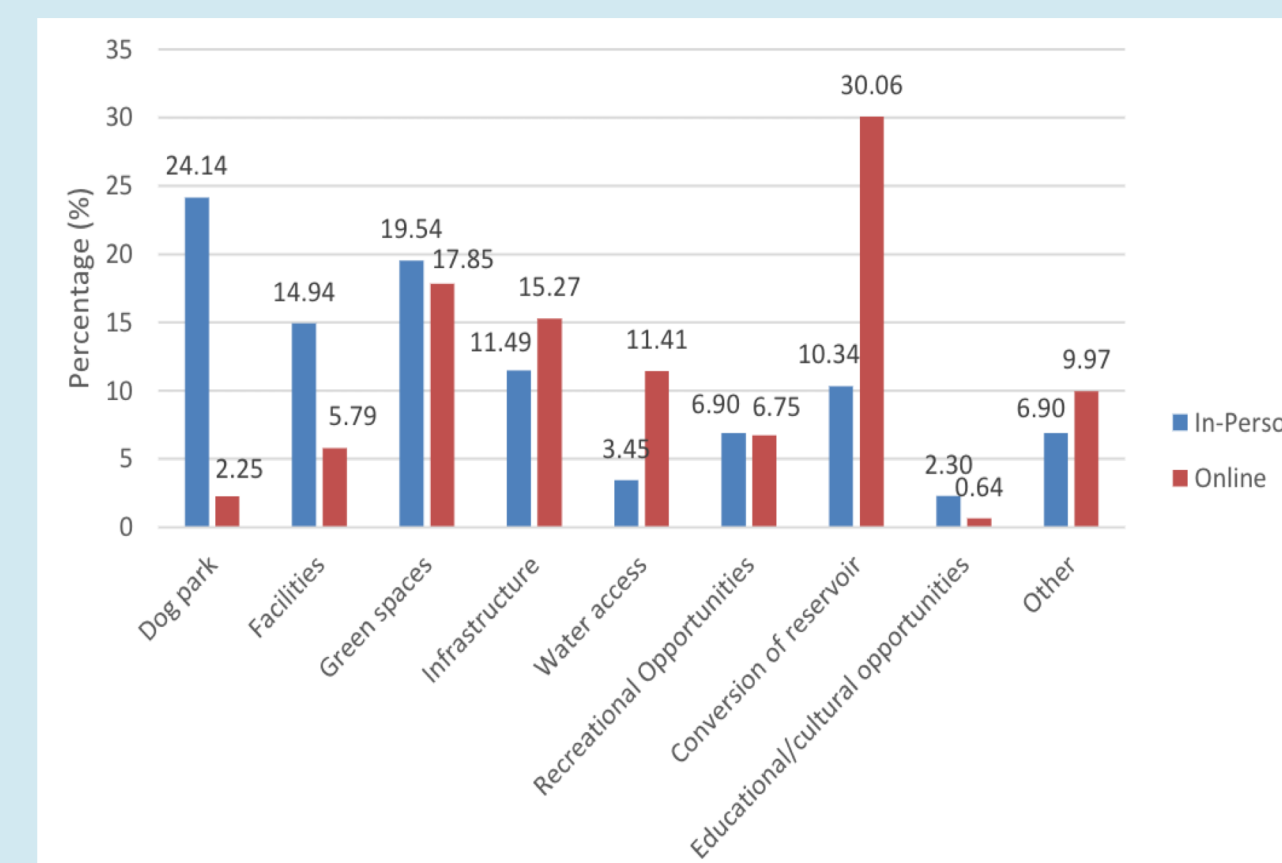


Figure 2: most important reservoir improvement, as ranked by in person and online respondents

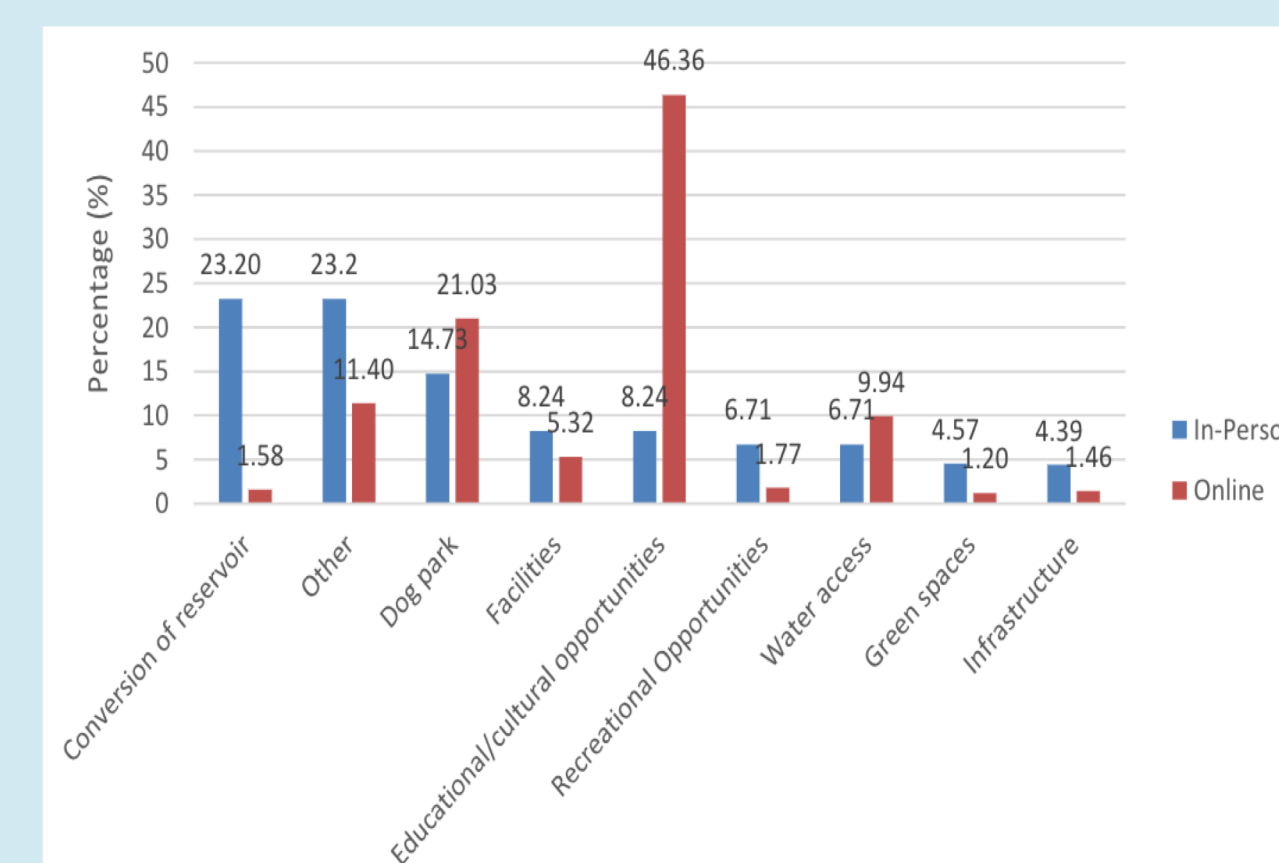


Figure 3: least important reservoir improvement, as ranked by in person and online respondents

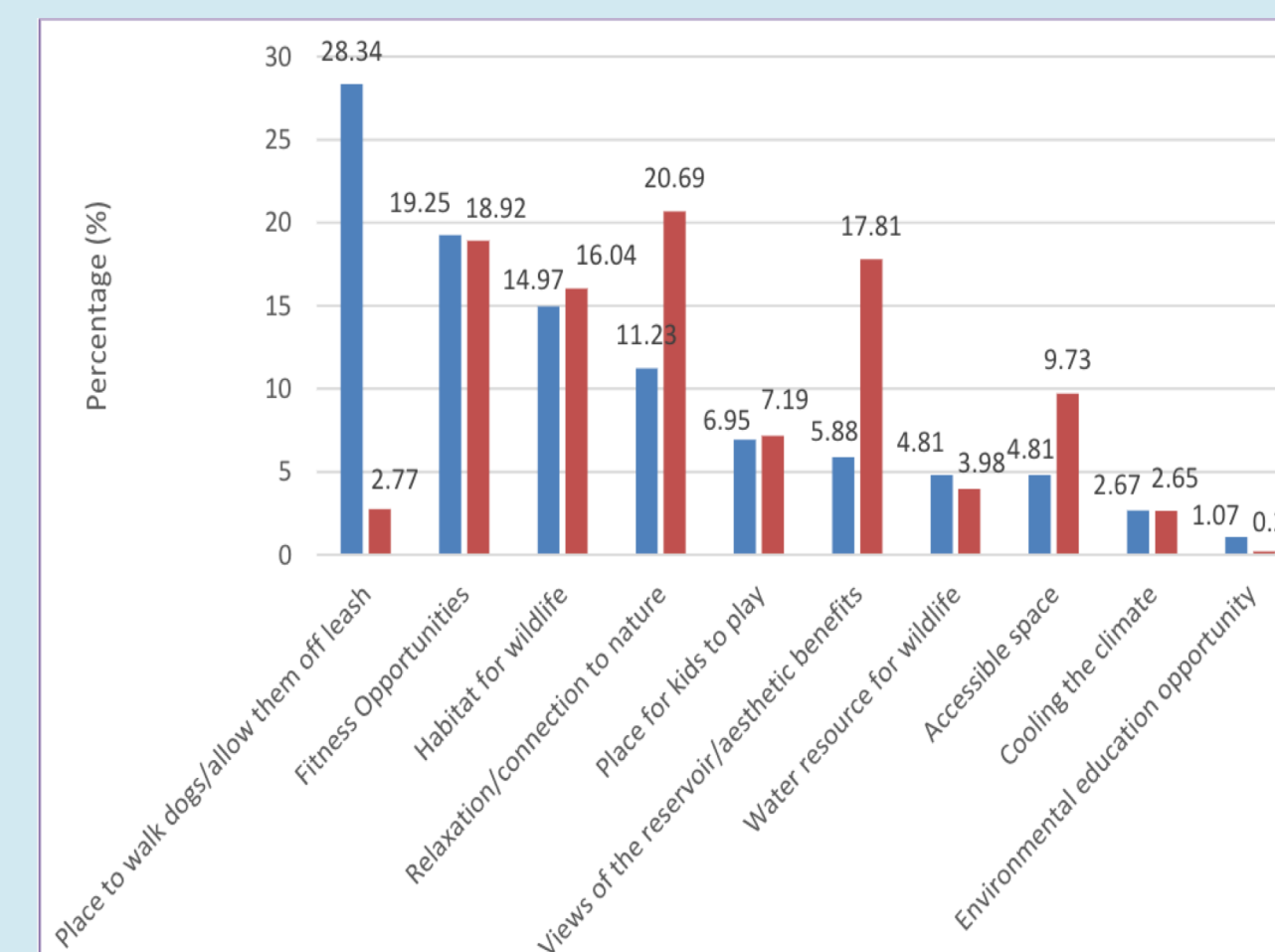


Figure 4: most important reservoir benefit, as ranked by in person and online respondents

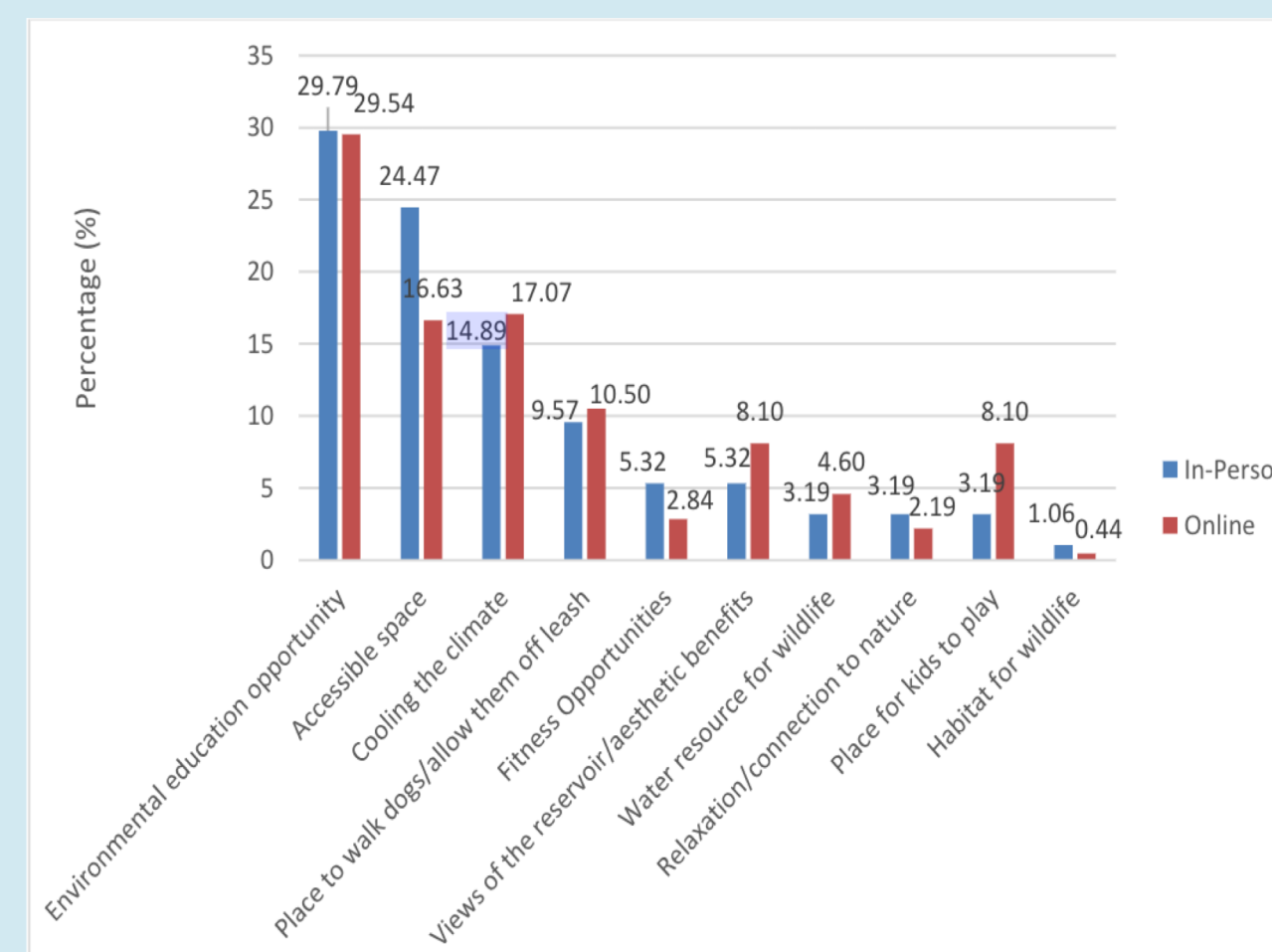


Figure 5: least important reservoir benefit, as ranked by in person and online respondents

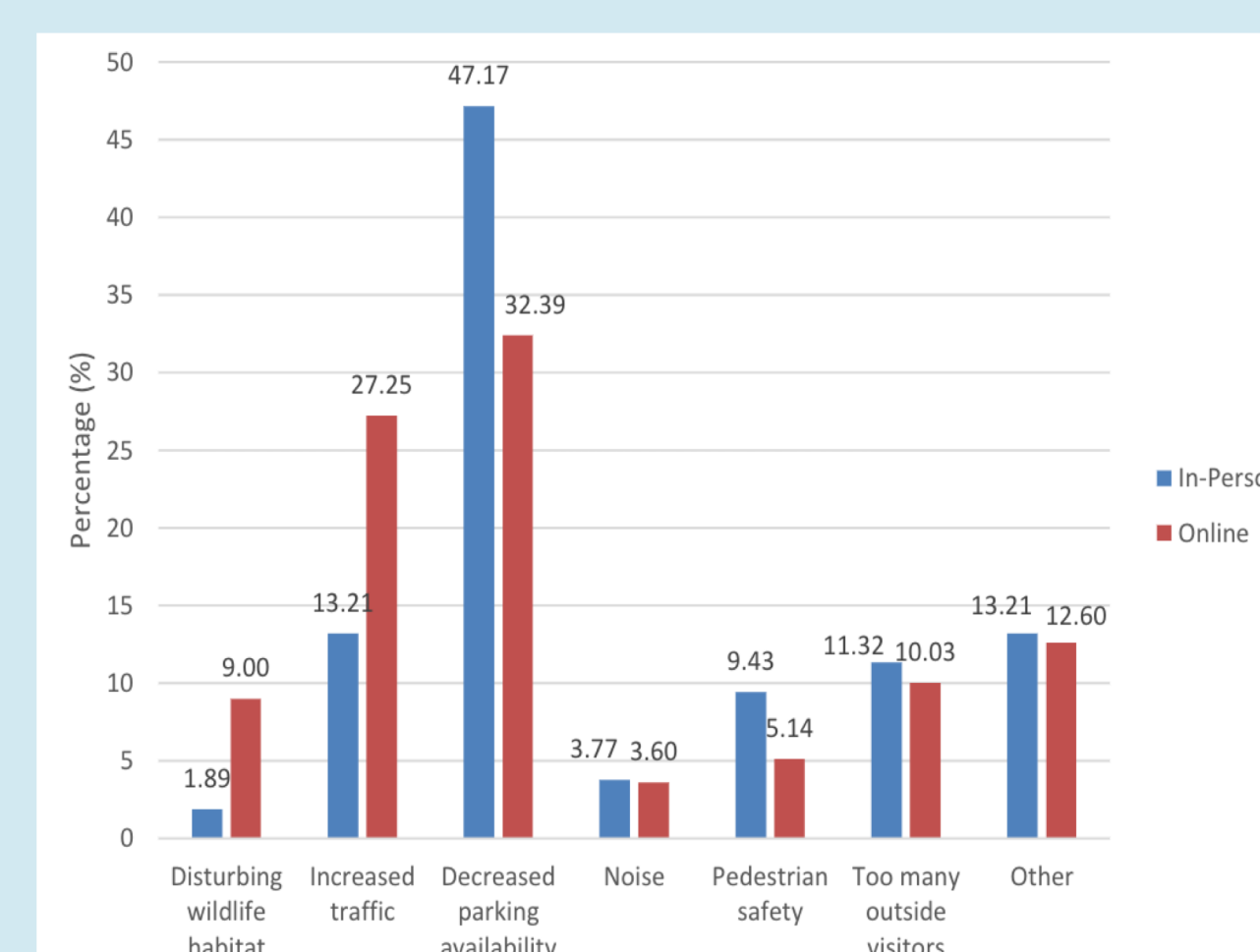


Figure 6: most important reservoir change concern, as ranked by in person and online respondents

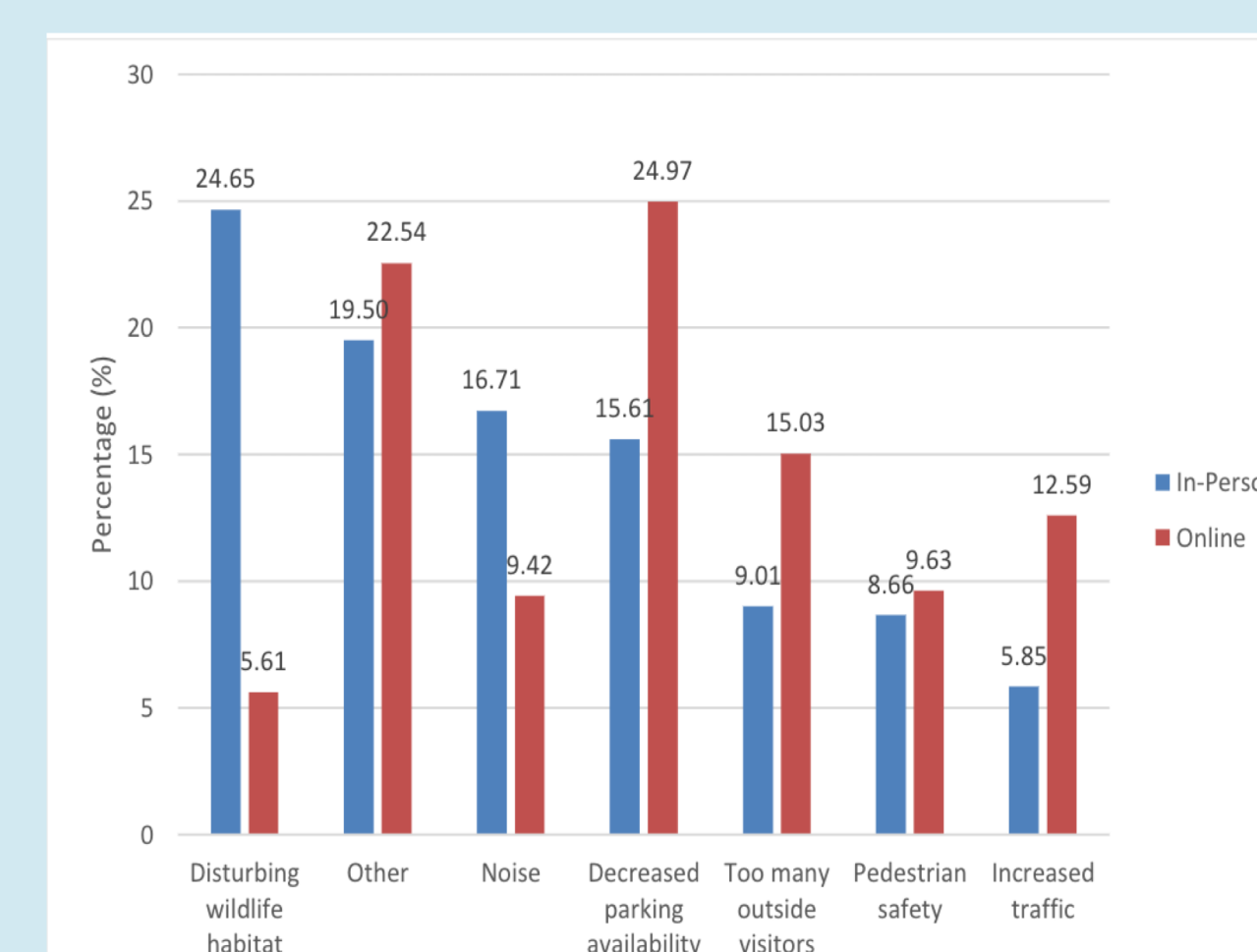


Figure 7: least important reservoir change concern, as ranked by in person and online respondents

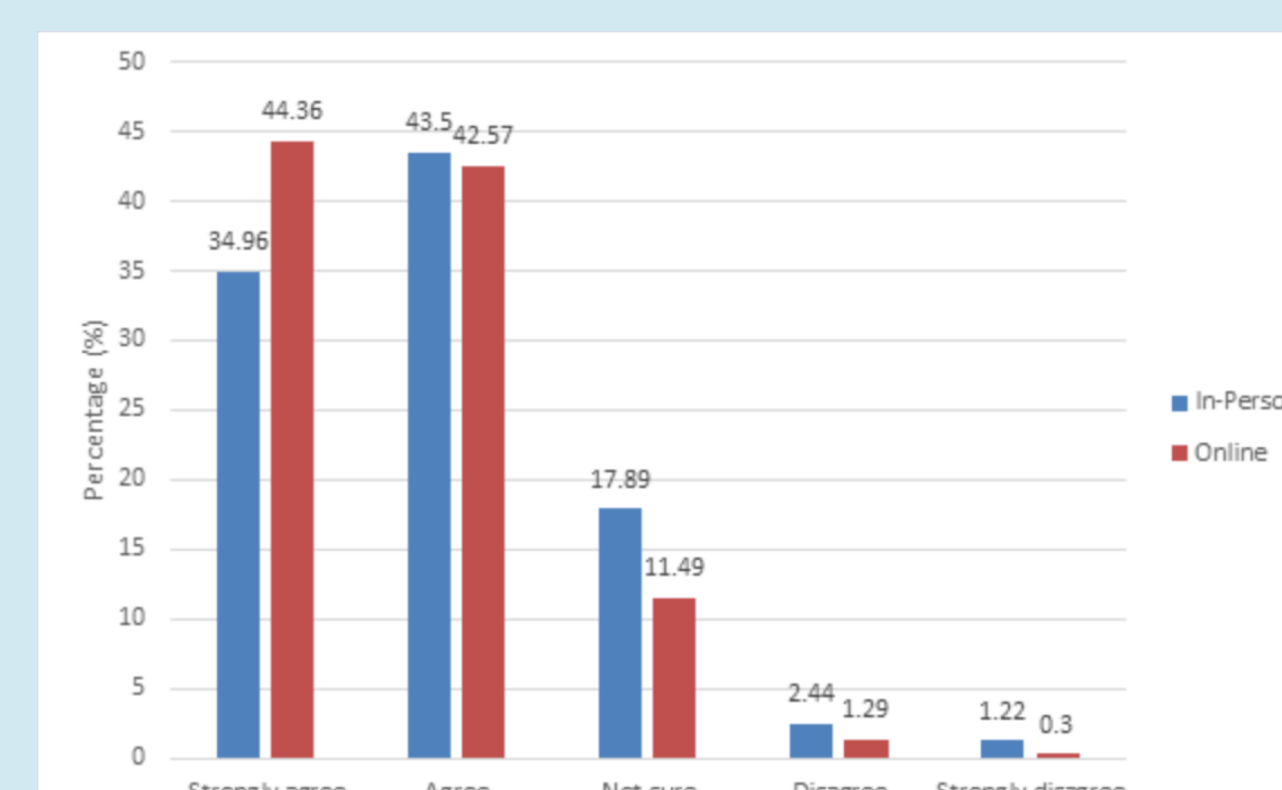


Figure 8: responses for “I am aware of the factors involved in a healthy and balanced environment” from in person and online respondents

## Results

- The majority of respondents believe that certain areas or aspects of the reservoir and its facilities need to be improved
- The two most important reservoir improvement areas to in person and online respondents are the dog park and conversion of the reservoir, respectively
- The three least important reservoir improvement areas to in person and online respondents are the conversion of the reservoir and “other,” and educational/cultural opportunities, respectively
- The two most important reservoir benefits to in person and online respondents are it being a place to walk dogs/allow them off leash and relaxation/connection to nature, respectively
- The least important reservoir benefit to both in person and online respondents is it being an environmental education opportunity
- The most important reservoir change concern to both in person and online respondents is decreased parking availability
- The two least important reservoir change concerns to in person and online respondents are disturbing wildlife habitat and decreased parking availability
- The majority of both in person and online respondents either strongly agree or agree with the statement of “I am aware of the factors involved in a healthy and balanced urban environment”

## Discussion

Though the majority of respondents claimed to be aware of the factors involved in maintaining a healthy urban environment and valued the reservoir as a connection to nature, a majority of respondents also believed the reservoir's role in environmental education was least important to them.

Similar to what was predicted, a majority of respondents placed more importance on recreational access to the reservoir and its facilities rather than the health of the ecosystem.

These findings demonstrate the duality of a green space or water body in its serving both the environment and the people. The reservoir's benefits on visitors' health and mental wellbeing as a place of leisure, recreation, contemplation, and community may, for some citizens, outweigh its benefits as a habitat for wildlife and cooling body.

It is found that in times of stress, economic stress especially, people place less of an importance on environmental issues.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, access to a green space such as the reservoir can help alleviate stress. From this one can understand the appreciation for nature for human benefit.

An anthropocentric view of environmental health may jeopardize the future of our natural resources and ultimately, in the future, be detrimental to unsustainably-growing human needs and desires.<sup>4</sup>

## Literature Cited

- <sup>1</sup>Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation. “Los Angeles Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment.” *Placemarks*, 9 May 2016.
- <sup>2</sup>Konijnendijk, Cecil C, et al. “Benefits of Urban Parks: A Systematic Review - A Report for the IFPRA.” *Copenhagen & Alnarp*, Jan. 2013.
- <sup>3</sup>Bowen, Alex, and Nicholas Stern. “Environmental Policy and the Economic Downturn.” *The Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy*. Version 18, Jan 2010.
- <sup>4</sup>Cochrane, Alasdair. “Environmental Ethics.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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