



Water: Commons vs. Commodity

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INTRODUCTION

Surrounded by mountains of rock, the landscape is a smattering of yellows and browns. Farmers scrape for every last drop of water, and some are forced to sacrifice running water for the sake of survival. This is the reality of life for most central-southern California residents. This is no state of utopia, where water and resources are bountiful. This environment is not fit to be exploited for the little water it has. There is a problem with Nestle's extraction of water. Despite outrage over huge amounts of unpermitted bottling, the U.S. Forest Service just offered them a three year permit to continue bottling, even after years of unpermitted bottling at a rate of 62.5 million gallons per year (Neuman, 2018). This problem has negatively impacted the local inhabitants and the surrounding environment because of lower quantities of water. Many inhabitants must pool the remaining water and use as little water as possible to maintain a balance. A possible cause of the water shortage is overzealous bottling. Perhaps an environmental impact study done on the effects of the bottling project on the environment and a sizeable decrease in extraction rate would remedy this situation. How well do Palo Alto students know about this? What is their opinion of it, and how do they view water: as a commons or commodity?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

I used a survey to collect my data. I collected data on public opinions from San Bernardino Mountain residents and, more specifically, colleagues of a contact I made down there over the summer through a Sierra Club summer program. I acknowledge that my sample is a convenience sample and that subjects were selected mainly based on availability, due to the fact that the population of choice is so far away. I collected a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative data, but most of the data is qualitative, since I am asking about opinion. However, I used numbers while coding the responses and thus will be dealing with quantitative data as well (e.g., how many people gave a particular type of answer). I am using the coding method to find different patterns and consistencies throughout the range of qualitative responses. I used descriptive statistics to summarize other results from the survey, then I used that data to develop an overall opinion on the plant. I conducted the survey and collected the data during the first part of second semester, then used that data to determine the direction of my research. Through the survey, my hope is to better understand the problems revolving around the plant and what positive effects it has on the residents, and use both to further understand what the best solution may look like.



DATA AND FINDINGS

Figure 1: What is your gender?

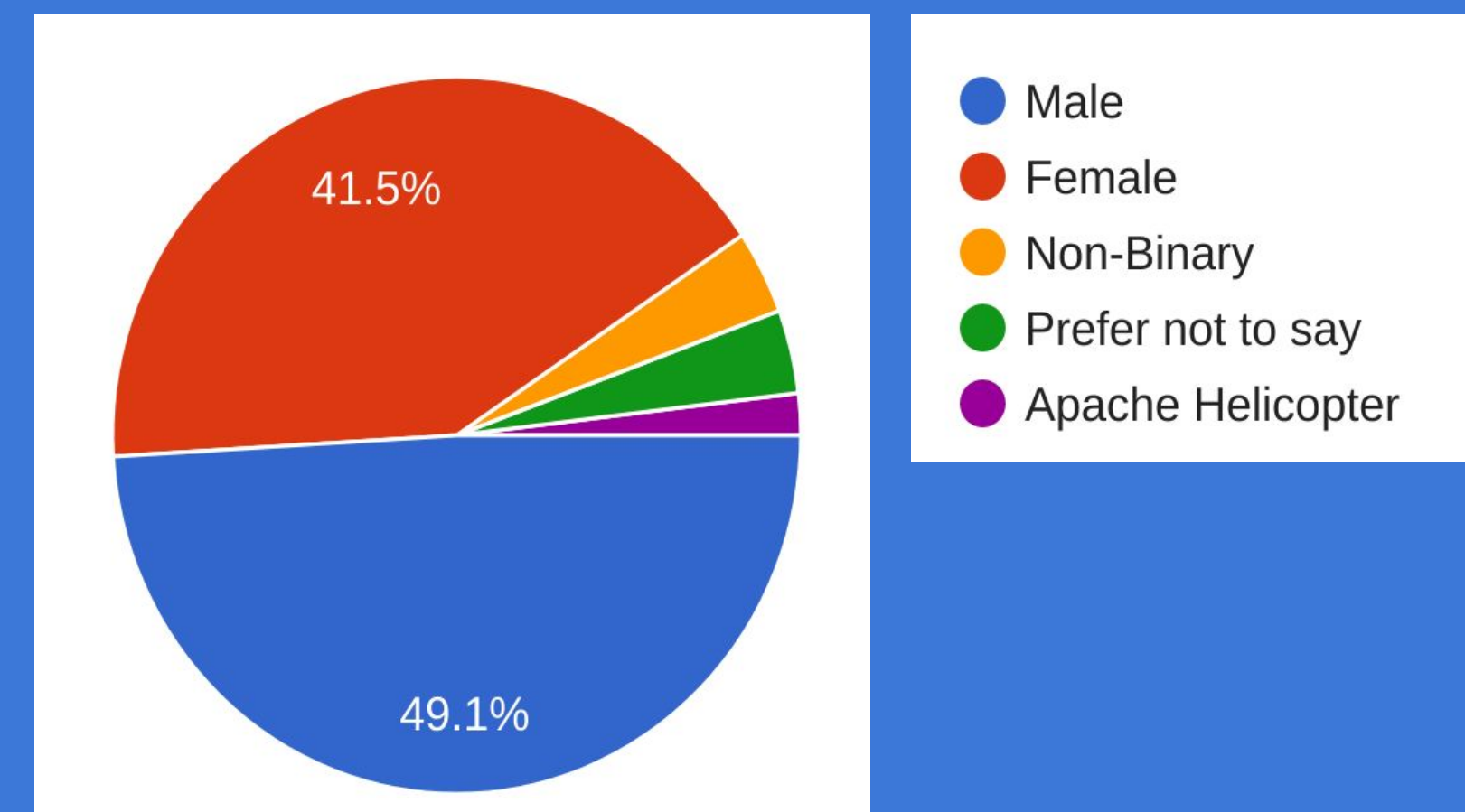


Figure 2: What grade are you in?

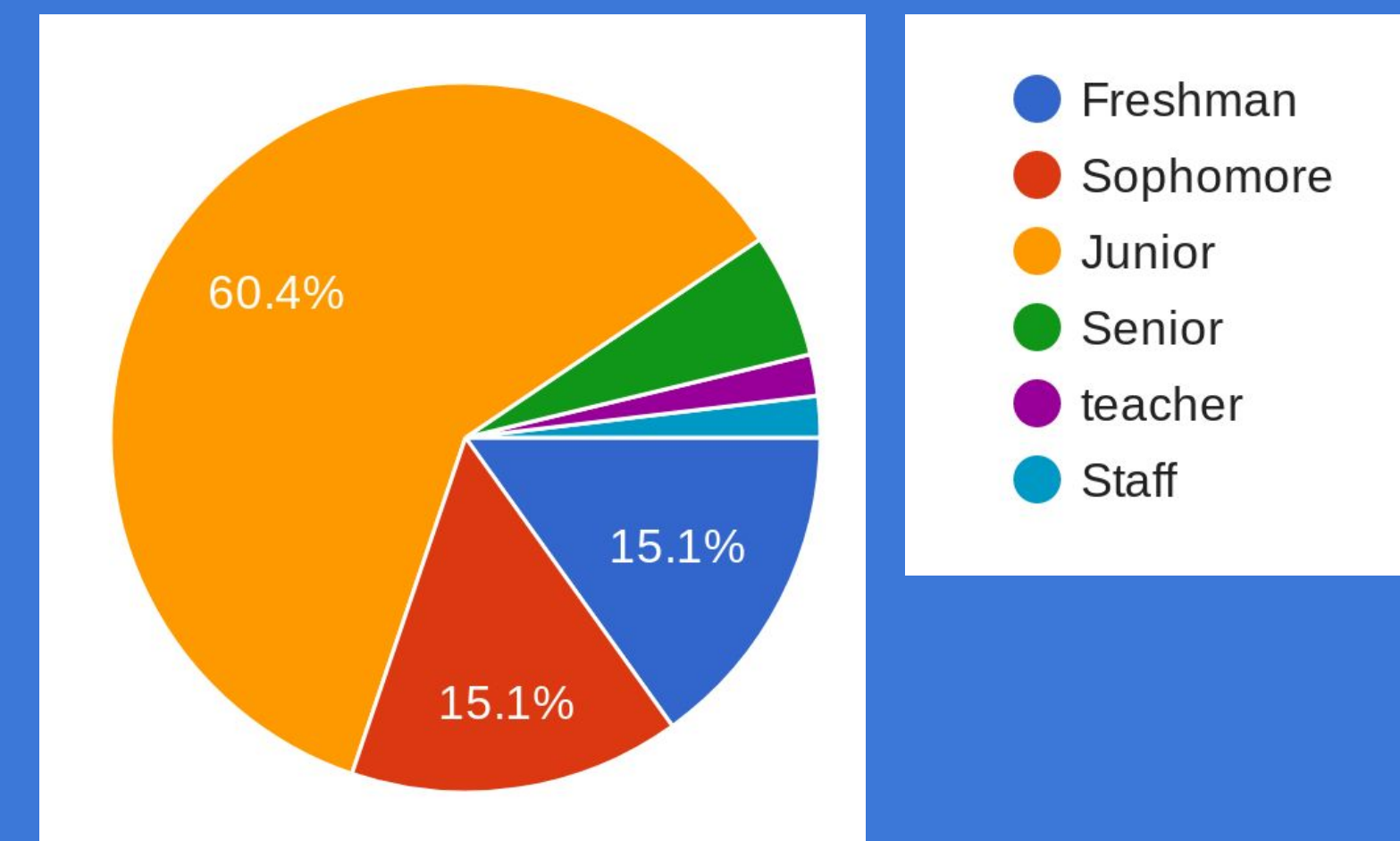
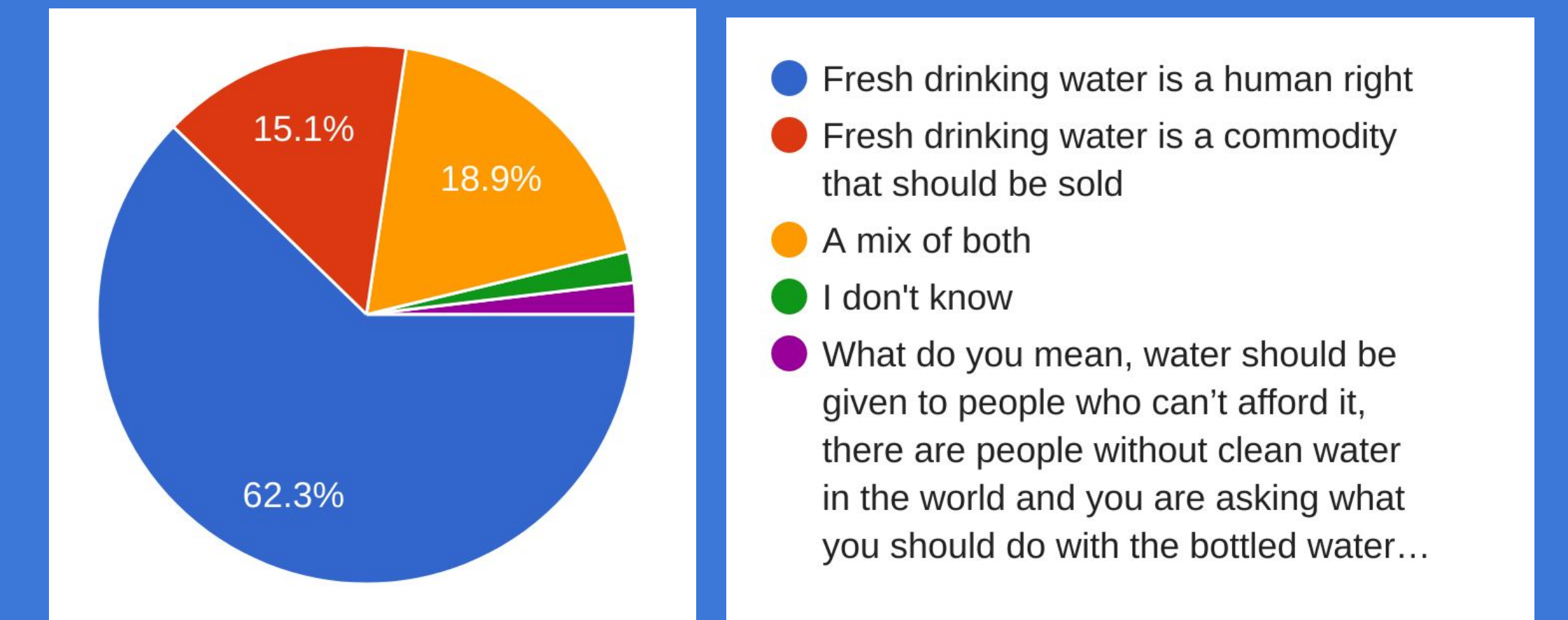


Figure 3: Nestle has led the global charge in the fight to privatize water (ie. owned by a company and sold to the public) and have been outspoken about how in the midst of dwindling water supply privatizing is the answer. Others have claimed that water is a human right and should not be given to a company to sell back to the people. How do you view drinking water?



Figures 4-7 show data disaggregated by grade level :

Figure 4:



Figure 5:

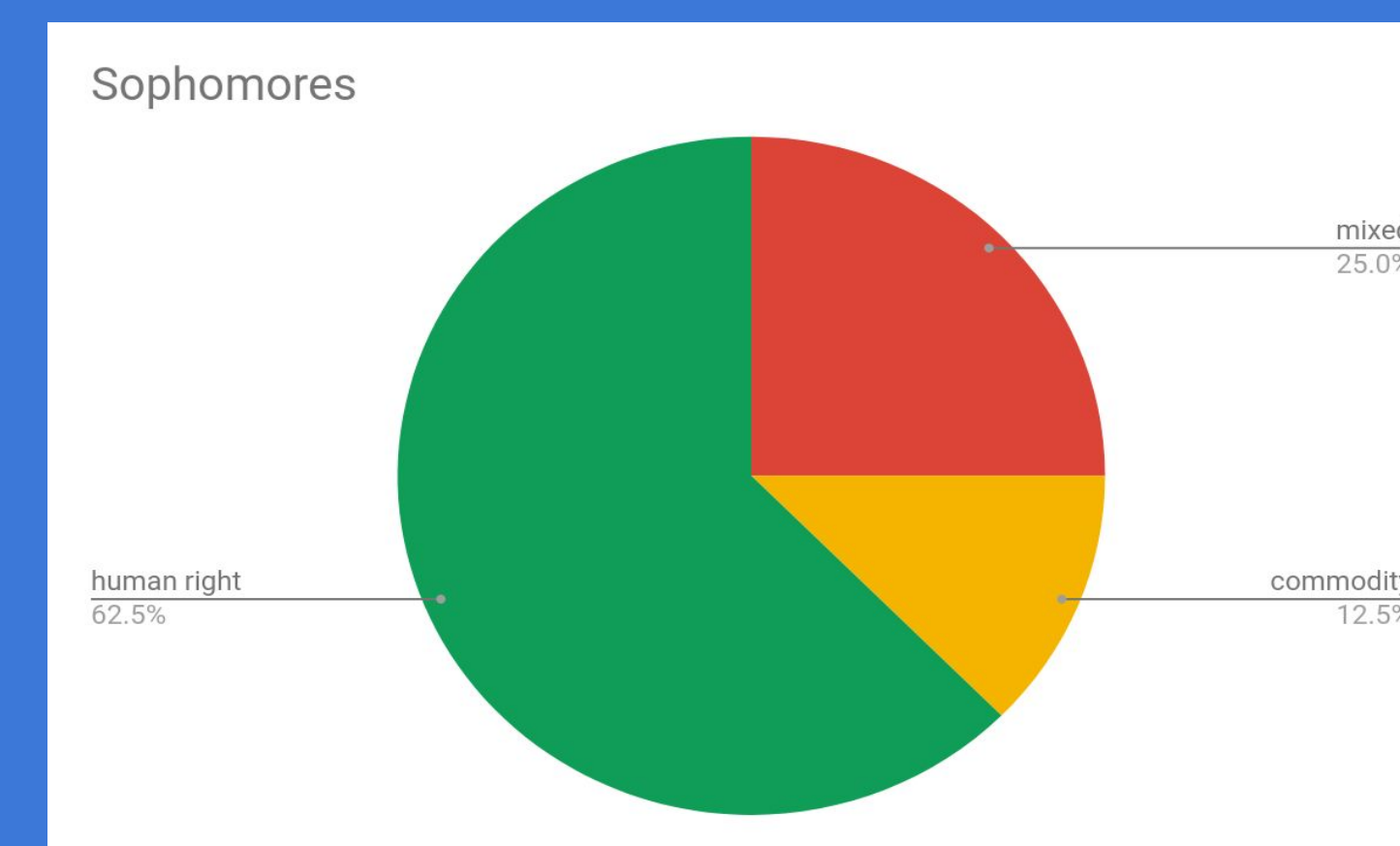


Figure 6:

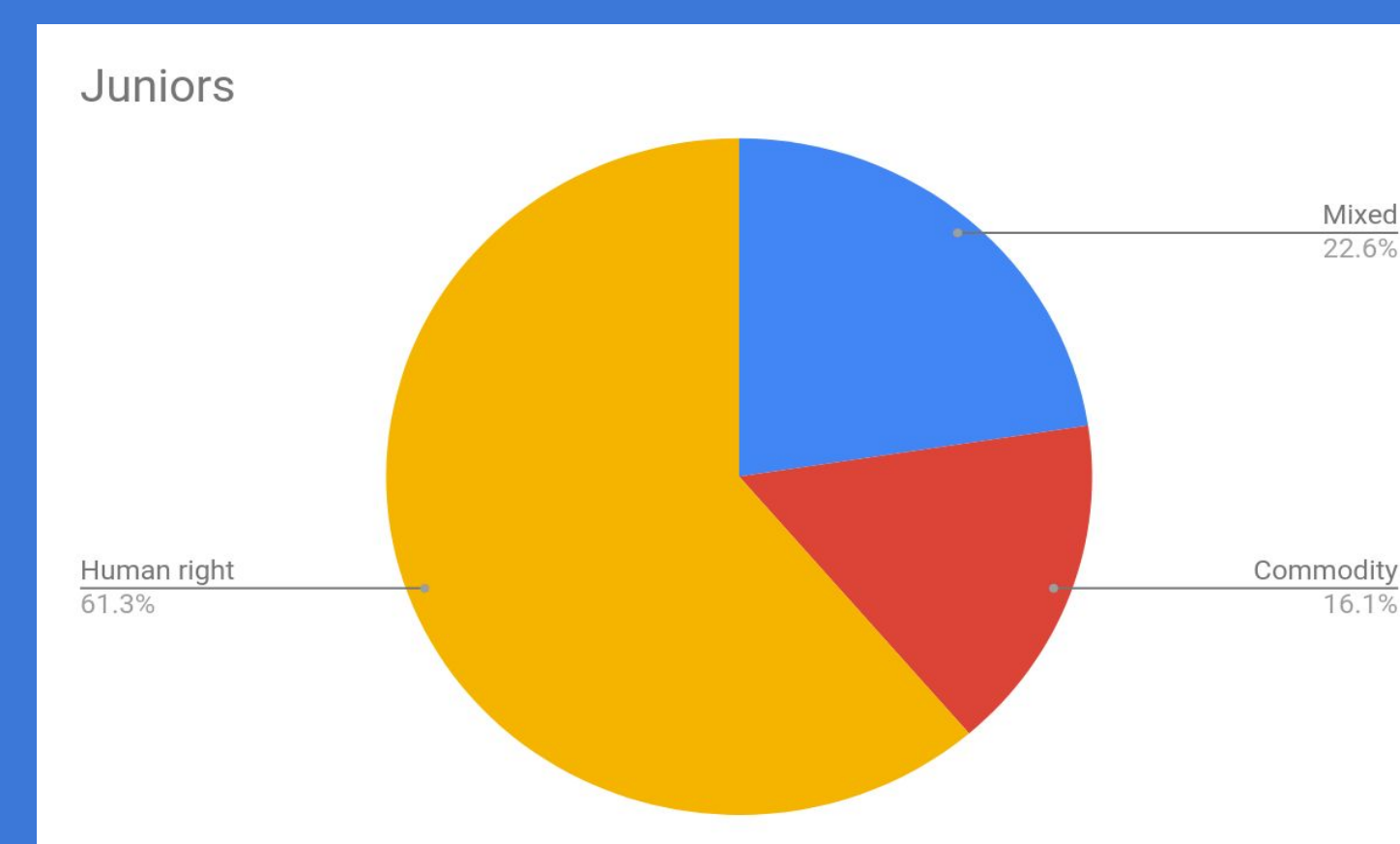
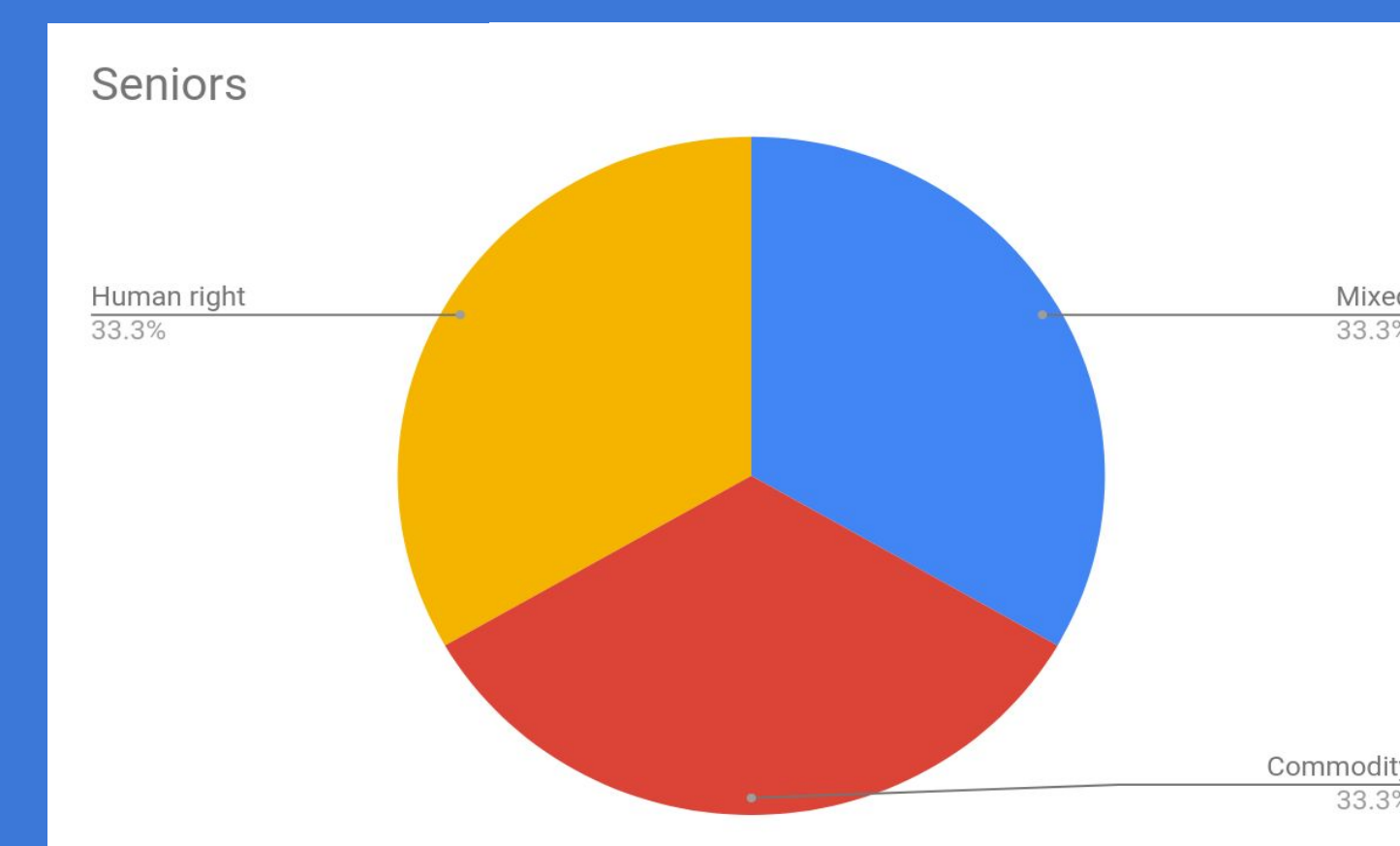


Figure 7:



Coding Open Ended Responses:

GREEN = Capitalism
"We live in a capitalist society. The good people working for Nestle deserve a paycheck just like everyone else who is employed."
(2 responses)

Orange = A company's right to sell water
"Companies should retain the right to bottle and sell "higher quality" water such as smart water or Voss water."
(2 responses)

Purple = Water's role in human survival
"Because you will die in days if you don't drink any water (or take it in from foods)"
(22 responses)

Blue = The importance of access to drinking water
"Privatizing water would also increase the disparity in health between the rich and the poor. If soda is cheaper than water, what do you expect working class individuals to drink?"
(9 responses)

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

The large majority of Paly students (around 80%) believe that water is a human right. A smaller majority (62%) also believes that it should not be sold commercially. Many who believe it should be sold hold this view because they believe that water is a resource, similar to food or shelter, and therefore can be extracted for private distribution. The clear majority of respondents from freshman through junior year believed that water was a human right. However, as respondents grew older, that majority began to shrink. The senior respondents were split, but the sample size was small. The coded open-ended responses reaffirmed that most students feel that water is a human right because it is necessary for survival.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IMPLICATIONS

If I were to do this project again, I would make sure to have solid contacts in or near the affected community so that my sample would be indicative of the inhabitants affected by the plant. Instead, I had to improvise, and this led to faulty data that may not be indicative of the larger population in question.

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