

The Christian Life Survey 2014-2015 Administration at 22 Christian Colleges



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Students' relation of self to others: God, family, and friends

How do devout students at Christian colleges relate themselves to others? Do they believe life is about their own purposes, or do others' purposes matter as much or more than personal purposes?

To explore this, the students were asked three sets of questions that approached the issue from three different directions. They were asked who had a right to make demands of them (with options to say their own purposes mattered more), they were asked who they considered when making major decisions, and they were asked who others would think they put a lot of their time and money toward (with options to indicate they put it toward self).

The three different approaches found some differences in the students' perceptions of whose purposes matter (and when), but the general pattern is that they ranked the purposes of God, family, and friends above self—but which ones mattered more than self differed depending on which questions were being answered.

Chart One shows their answers for seven questions about who had a right to make demands of them. Clearly, and overwhelmingly, they reported that God has a right to make demands of them (96 percent agreed or strongly agreed), while only a small proportion (29 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that they have a right to live for their own happiness. Nearly half of the students agreed or strongly agreed that family (47 percent), self-development (43 percent), and the Christian community (44 percent) have a right to make demands of them. Only small proportions believed that their country (25 percent) or friends (21 percent) have a right to make demands of them.

When asked whose outcomes they consider when making major decisions (Chart Two), self mattered more. God was still of greatest concern (86 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and this is the only item where more than half strongly agreed), but personal development was second (80 percent agreed or strongly agreed), while family was third (79 percent). Personal happiness (70 percent agreed or strongly agreed) and friends (65 percent) were also important. They were much less likely to think of how the outcomes of major decisions would affect the Christian community (48 percent), social or political causes (30 percent), or their country (20 percent).

The results were quite different when the students were asked where they think strangers would say they put most of their time and money. The students indicated that they think observers would say they spend their time and money on friends (65 percent agreed or strongly agreed), family (64 percent), and God's purposes (62 percent). Self-development was also identified as a place they spend their time and money (55 percent agreed or strongly agreed), while personal happiness (40 percent) and the Christian community (42 percent) were lower and social or political causes were ranked quite low (only 14 percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed).

The 6,000-plus students studied here, then, report that God, family, and self-development matter the most in their priorities, except when their actual time and money are considered—in which case, friends are their top priority. They appear to have some disconnect in their conceptual priorities and their practiced priorities.

Chart One: Who can make demands (percents)

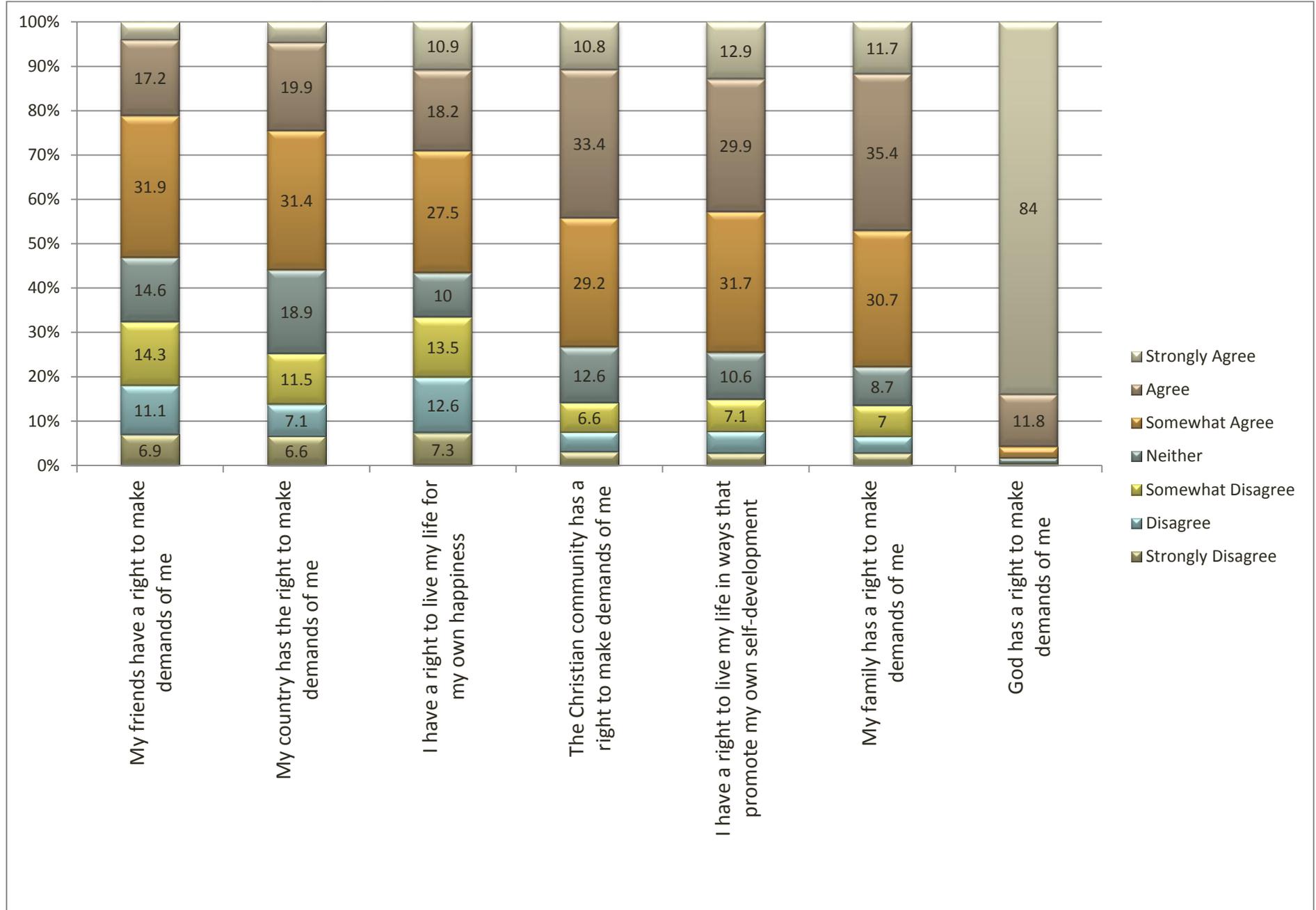


Chart Two: When I make major decisions in my life, I think about what the outcomes will mean for... (percents)

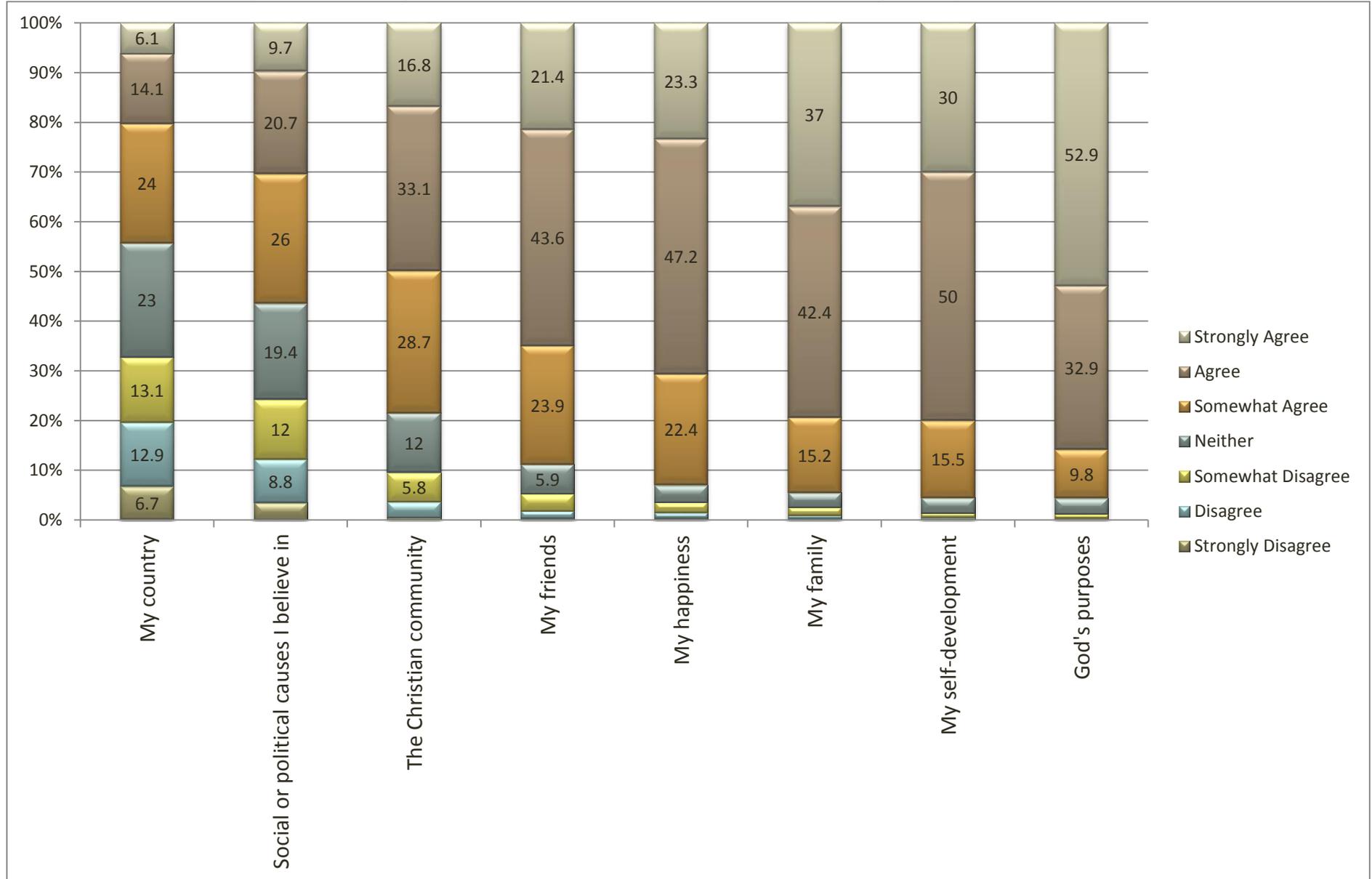
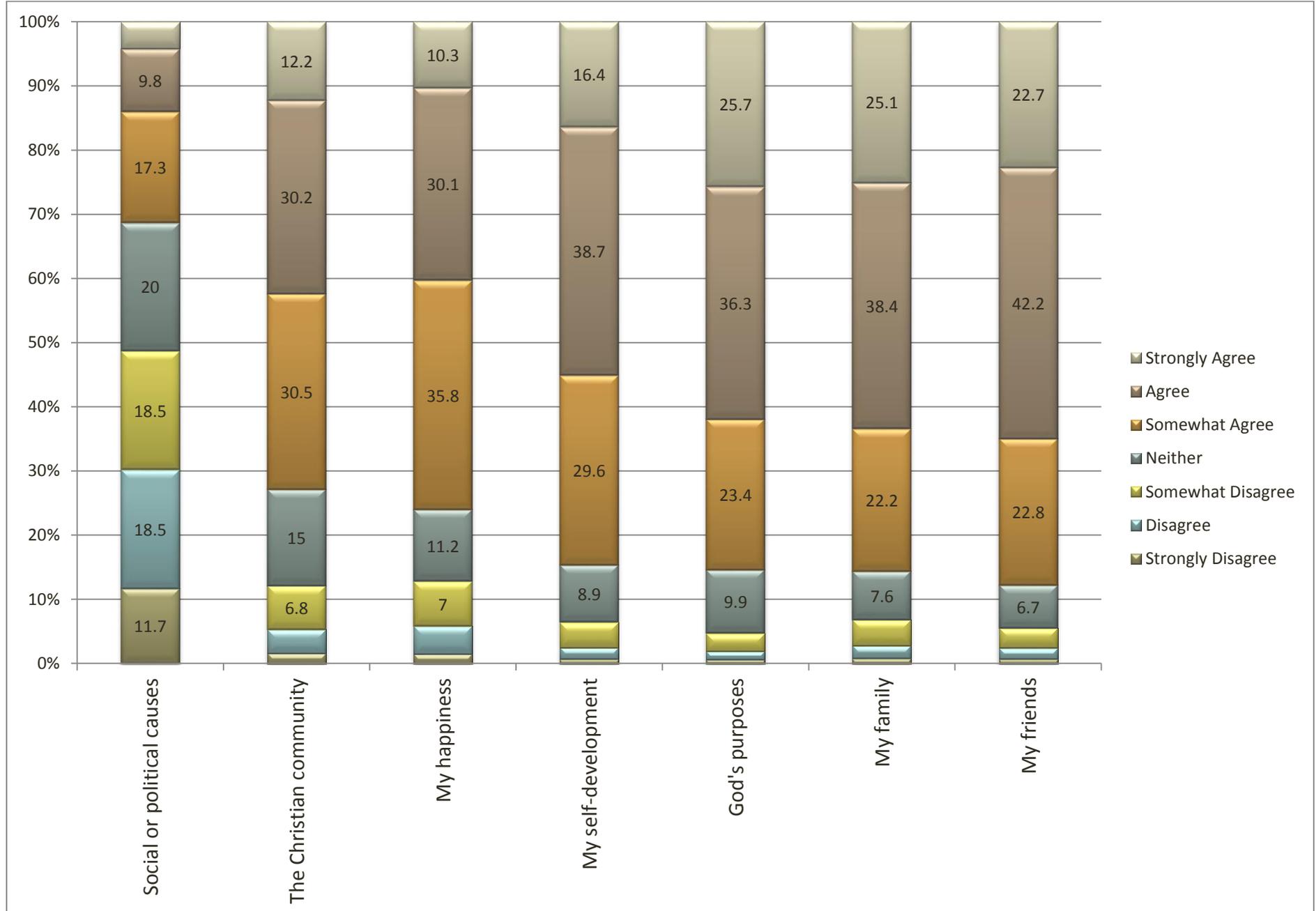


Chart Three: If someone who doesn't know me was to watch the way I live every day, I think they would conclude that I put a lot of my time and money toward... (percents)



Who are the students in this study?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Christian Life Survey was administered to students at 25 Christian colleges in the United States. The results shown in this summary brief, however, are only for the traditional-age, traditional-program freshmen through seniors from the 22 colleges that provided population proportions that allowed representative weighting to be used. Students are weighted to be proportionately representative for sex and year in school for their colleges.

These results are for 6,074 students from 22 Christian colleges in the United States.

The students are overwhelmingly Protestant Christians who are serious about their spiritual life (they chose to attend a Christian college and they agreed to participate in a half-hour survey about their spiritual life).

The students represented here, then, are traditional-age, devout Christians attending 22 Christian colleges in the USA. Great care should be employed when generalizing these results to any other groups.

How was this topic measured?

The survey questions used:

Participants were asked seven questions about who has a right to make demands of them, offered eight statements about who they consider when making major decisions, and offered seven statements about who others would say they put their time and money toward.

The survey:

The Christian Life Survey (CLS) is an online, half-hour survey on Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Orientation (lifestyle), and Scripture Engagement and was conducted in the 2014-2015 school year at the following Christian colleges: Bethel; Biola; California Baptist; Charleston Southern; Corban; Cornerstone; Crown; Fresno Pacific; George Fox; Gordon; Houghton; Judson; The Kings; LeTourneau; Northwest Nazarene; Nyack; Patrick Henry College; Spring Arbor; Tabor; Taylor; Union; Wheaton.



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