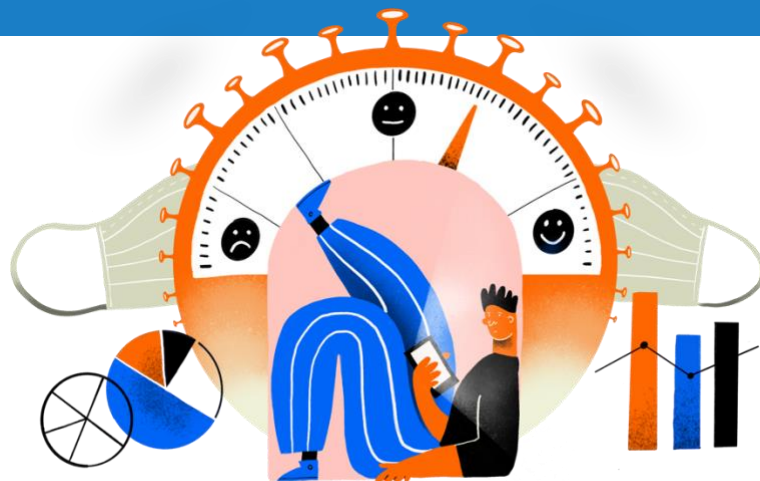# REPORT 9

Discomforts of face masks: How we carry them with a smile by encouraging voluntary responsibility.

The Motivation Barometer

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Since Mother's Day the population has been able to corona bubble and this appeared to be good for our motivation. But a few days after Mother's Day, the motivation boost seems to have worn off. Voluntary motivation has fallen back to 53%, despite the many relaxations of the measures. What is worrying is that young adults show a dependency on relaxations: the relaxations are necessary to stay motivated. Especially with regard to the wearing of face masks, the population appears to have less understanding. The obstacles, both practical and psychological, are still quite numerous. To encourage the population to engage in unpleasant but much needed behavior, such as wearing face masks or sharing personal contact information with contact tracers, motivational communication remains very crucial. Such motivational communication is especially beneficial for the motivationally vulnerable people. This is good news because calling this group to responsibility in a patronizing way only seems to amplify the resistance. Based on these results, we again formulate five concrete recommendations and call on the government to set up a broadly supported motivational campaign to keep everyone motivated during this "collective marathon".

Meandering motivation

Although the finish line of this 'collective marathon' is not yet in sight, there is light at the end of the tunnel. In the past few weeks, the population got some of its 'normal life' back. What effect do these relaxations have on the population's motivation to continue adhering to the measures? Would complying with the measures have become an anchored habit by now? Since March 19, 2012, a total number of 43,748 individuals have participated in the Ghent University's Motivation Barometer study, which provides an intriguing insight into the evolving motivation of the population. Two types of motivation are measured on a daily basis: whether participants want to follow the measures because they support them (voluntary motivation) or whether they feel that they have to follow the measures, for example to avoid criticism or a fine ('must'-ivation). Mapping the shift in voluntary motivation (Figure 1) and 'must'-ivation (Figure 2) is important because it predicts whether the population will persistently adhere to the measures or begin to show nonchalance.

The results of the motivational support for the measures in Figure 1 indicate a meandering pattern since late April. Think of the Moselle in Germany or the Ourthe in the Ardennes. There are significant fluctuations in the degree to which the population adheres to the measures out of full conviction. For example, voluntary motivation received a boost when the government confirmed the announced relaxations of the measures during the

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*Figure 1.* Evolution of voluntary motivation over time.
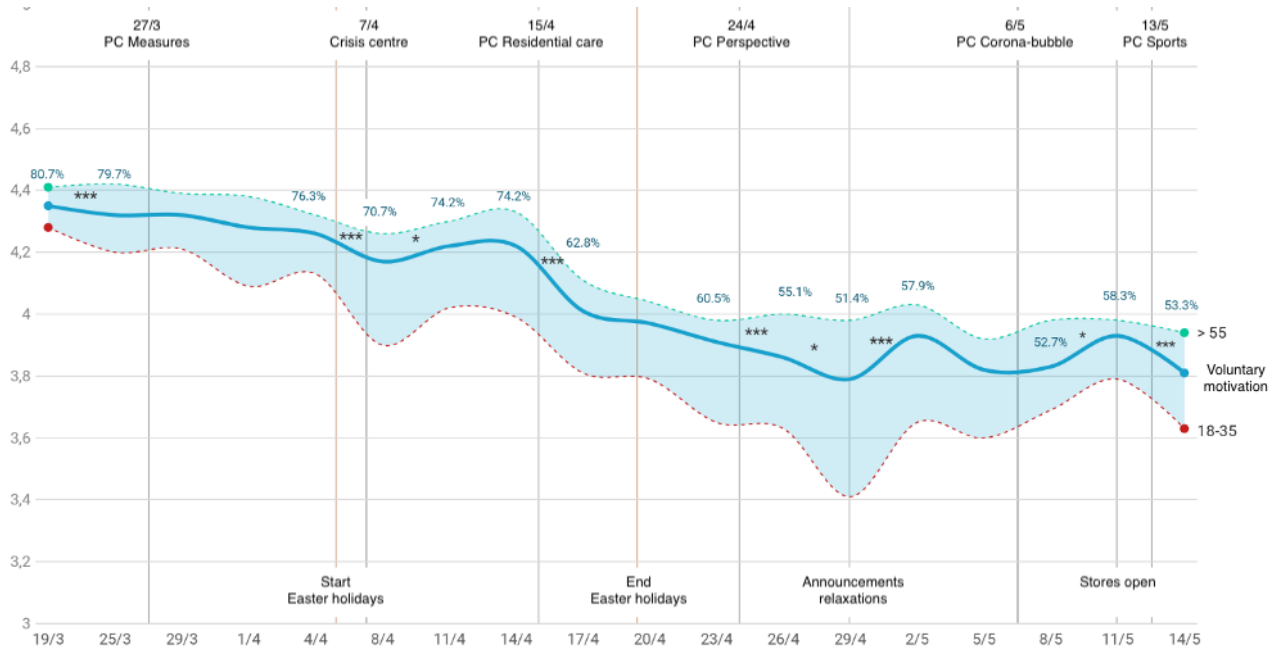
historic PowerPoint press conference of the National Security Council on Wednesday, April 29. During the first wave of relaxations as of May 4 (cf. the possibility of working at the office again), motivational support rose to 57.9% and then fell back to 52.7%. The possibility of corona bubbling as of Mother's Day again provided a slight motivational boost to 58%. However, after tasting these social benefits, motivation dropped again to 53.3%, a second low since the Motivation Barometer started.

To provide a more global picture, since the beginning of the lockdown, the motivational support decreased from 8/10 to 1/2 citizens who continue to support the measures. Parallel to this decline in voluntary motivation, the 'must'-ivation of the population increased again in recent days. Following the measures feels more strongly like a difficult job that we are supposed to do.

Dependent of relaxations

These figures are worrying because the success of this exit phase depends more than ever on our willingness to adhere to the measures for over a long time. What is particularly thought-provoking is that voluntary motivation seems to depend on the extent to which the government grants relaxations of the measures to the population. These relaxations seem to be a requirement for keeping the population motivated. But granting relaxations is of course a finite story. Even if we can return to our 'normal lives', various measures will remain essential. It is crucial that the population does not depend entirely on these relaxations to stay motivated. Such

Figure 2. Evolution of must-ivation over time.
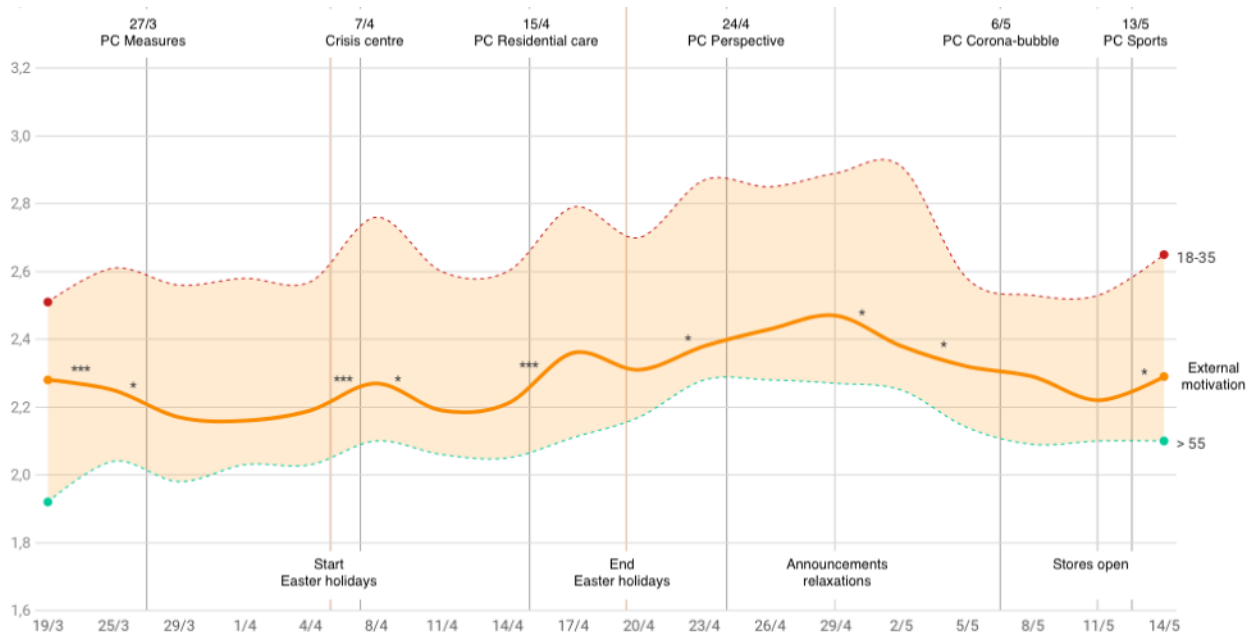
dependence on relaxations indicates motivational fragility, while solid conviction and voluntary sense of responsibility are crucial.

In particular, the motivation of young adults (-35 years) has strong ups and downs, while older adults (+55 years) appear more motivationally solid. Older adults are globally more convinced of the need to adhere to the measures from the beginning of the 'semi-lockdown'. Although their motivation also declined, this decline seems to be more unconditional in nature. Older people are, as it were, above the 'squabbling' of the outside world: whether or not they introduce relaxations and adopt motivational communication, the motivational support appears to have stabilized at around 60% since April 24. Among young adults, however, this dropped twice to 34%. Young adults therefore form a motivationally vulnerable group that deserves extra attention in a motivational campaign. As we have repeatedly argued, social influencers from this population group can act as motivational role models.

Recommendation 1: Establish a motivation campaign where social influencers testify about their motivation to follow the measures. In doing so, focus particularly on young adults, the most motivationally vulnerable group.

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Discomforts of face masks

One reason why motivational support has been eroding again in recent days is because the package of measures has also changed. During the semi-lockdown, it was relatively easy to restrict ourselves to non-essential travel or avoid social contact. However, now that public life is starting again, we are recommended or even required (on public transport) to wear face masks. This might be more burdensome for us. Figure 3 shows the extent to which participants understand why it is important to keep your distance, avoid social contact, and wear face masks. If this understanding is greater, there seems to be more voluntary motivation to do so as well.

Three things stand out. First, not all measures are equally understood. The population seems to have drawn up a priority list for itself, with the distance rule being the most strongly endorsed, followed by avoiding social contact and finally the wearing of face masks. If we are keeping our distance, why am I not allowed to interact with more family and friends or why do I necessarily still have to wear a face mask? What is the added value of these measures if I prioritize keeping my distance? It seems that this needs to be further explained.

Recommendation 2: Try to further explain the cocktail of measures: why does avoiding social contact and wearing face masks remain crucial even if one respects the distance rule? Put differently: if keeping distance is the priority rule, why is a further relaxation with regard to the social contact measures not possible?

Figure 3. Evolution in understanding for different measures.
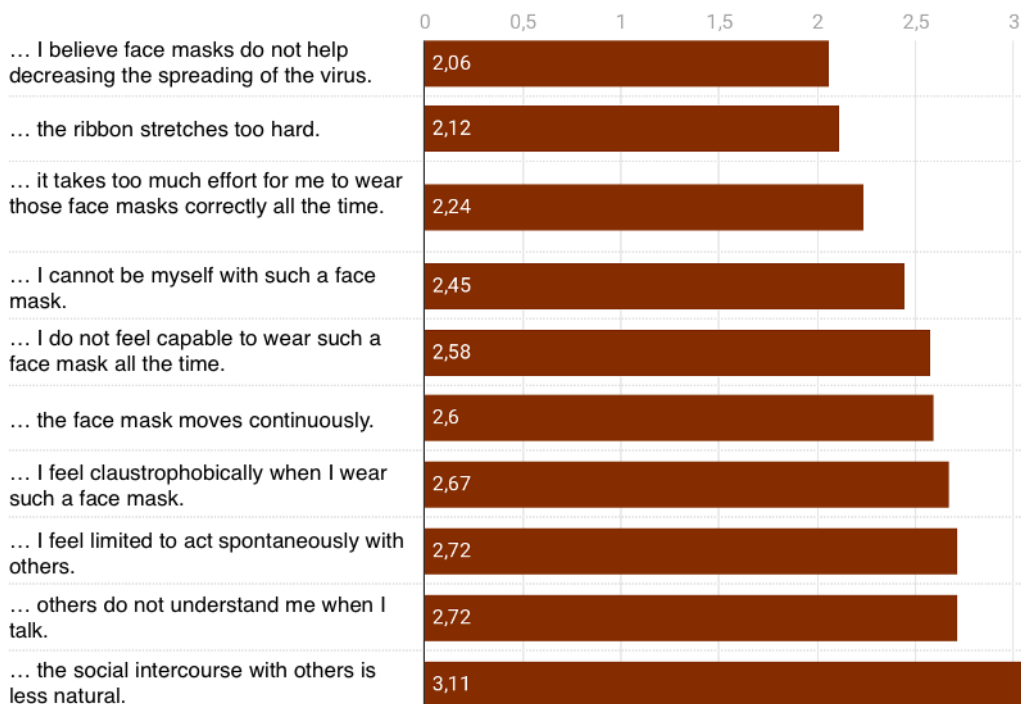
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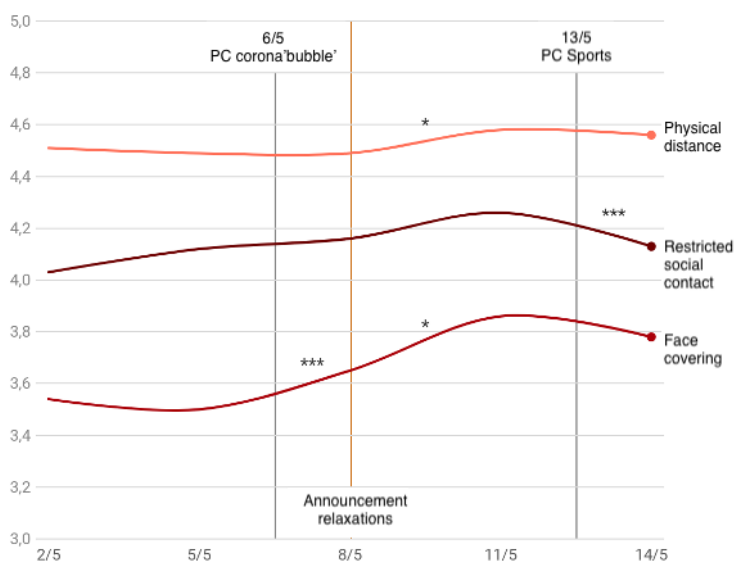
Second, keeping social distance seems to have particularly been harder on us in recent days since we were able to get a taste of social freedom during corona bubbling. Perhaps the limited social contact triggered our hunger for more. Some may also have had to make painful social choices about who they were and were not going to allow into their bubble, something they preferred to 'make up for' as quickly as possible so as not to create the impression of social exclusion. The drop for understanding of this measure helps explain why voluntary motivation for adherence fell to 53.3% overall.

Third, the wearing of face masks may be the least understood. In a limited group of participants (N = 692), a variety of practical and psychological obstacles to wearing the face masks were identified. These are listed in Figure 4. At the psychological level, wearing face masks appears to get in the way of spontaneous and authentic interaction. We are not as easily understood, and this gets in the way of connection and 'click' with others. We also feel like we can't be completely ourselves. As if we feel more like a stranger in our own body. We will of course have to get used to this new psychological reality. Compared to this moment, these psychological obstacles may be less burdensome within a few weeks.

Figure 4. Objections to wearing a face mask

I'm not looking forward to wear face covering because…

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Objection	Value
… I believe face masks do not help decreasing the spreading of the virus.	2,06
… the ribbon stretches too hard.	2,12
… it takes too much effort for me to wear those face masks correctly all the time.	2,24
… I cannot be myself with such a face mask.	2,45
… I do not feel capable to wear such a face mask all the time.	2,58
… the face mask moves continuously.	2,6
… I feel claustrophobically when I wear such a face mask.	2,67
… I feel limited to act spontaneously with others.	2,72
… others do not understand me when I talk.	2,72
… the social intercourse with others is less natural.	3,11

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But there are also practical concerns. For example, participants report that they do not feel able to continually wear the face mask properly. The elastic band irritates, or the face mask slides away. Imagine that the face mask of the cashier would no longer covers the nose. This indicates that quality masks, which stay on properly, are important for the population in order to wear them properly all the time. This will not be the case for all self-made face masks. Those who need to wear face masks continuously at work could enjoy a face mask break.

Recommendation 3: Deliver on the promise to provide well-fitting face masks to the population. Provide the population with practical tips on how to avoid irritation or slipping of the face masks if they made them themselves. Incorporate face mask breaks at work, if necessary.

Meddling contact tracers

Not only for wearing face masks, but also for contact tracing, the understanding of the population may be lower. Contact tracers come to peek into our daily lives. Some people will undoubtedly feel that they are interfering. They do not have the necessary legitimacy to interfere in people's personal bubble. Therefore, some shield themselves and do not honestly disclose which individuals or bubbles they came in contact with. Also, the idea that friends, family or neighbors will find out that one did not follow the prescribed rule of 4 causes us to withhold information. Their judgment evokes a sense of guilt and shame, so we don't share all the essential information with the contact tracers.

To encourage voluntary disclosure of personal information, three things are essential. First, the essential role of contact tracing should be further emphasized. Concrete, recognizable, and graphically illustrated practical examples will make this understandable to the public. It can be illustrated how sharing contact information keeps the spread of the virus under control. Thus, the population attributes greater legitimacy to contact tracers. Second, barriers to voluntary self-disclosure can be removed. For example, contacted individuals can testify about their experiences. More often, we overestimate the unpleasant nature of such matters and such testimonies bring things back to their true perspective. The reassurance that there are no fines for violating social measures already helps to dispel concerns about this. Finally, it is crucial to train the contact tracers in motivational interviewing. The openness of citizens will depend on the way in which contact tracers talk to people. Years of research with rebellious patients (e.g., alcohol-dependent individuals) shows that a motivational communication style can overcome resistance. It is worth noting that employees in call centers today are trained to do this. But after all, selling household appliances or cell phone subscriptions is something else than mapping out the social network of citizens.

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Recommendation 4: To encourage the population to voluntarily self-disclose during contact tracing, it is essential to (a) further clarify the need and legitimacy of their role, (b) remove barriers to self-disclosure, and (c) train contact tracers in motivational interviewing.

Can everyone display civility?

In recent days, the question has arisen as to whether all citizens are capable of the civic responsibility called for by the government? What about infidel individuals who lack a sense of responsibility? How do we best deal with them? Should we frighten them, threaten them with fines or are other motivational strategies desirable? Is motivational tailoring needed and if so, what could it mean?

The results from the Motivation Barometer shed light on this question. Participants indicate how motivating and demotivating they perceive the government communication. The effects of motivational communication show an interesting interplay with citizens' motivation in predicting adherence to the measures. As shown in Figures 5a and 5b, adherence to the measures depends primarily on the motivational profile of the population. Citizens who exhibit a strong dose of voluntary motivation combined with little 'must'-ivation follow the measures the most. Those who exclusively score high on 'must'-ivation do so the least of all.

Fortunately, a motivational communication style has the most favorable effect within this last group. If this group feels that the government provides good clarification, states in unison what is expected of the population, appreciates their efforts, and seeks support for new measures, then this motivationally vulnerable group is more likely to follow the measures (see Figure 5a). Conversely, this group is also the most susceptible to demotivating communication from the government. If they feel that the government provides too little support (e.g., does not provide face masks), is too 'wait-and-see' or too demanding, they are less likely to comply with the measures. Putting pressure further increases resistance in this group (Figure 5b). It drives them away from the sense of responsibility to which we want to induce them. Moreover, such pressure can also damage the voluntary motivation of those who are already convinced by the measures.

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Figure 5. Relationship between motivational communication and tracking measures for motivationally resilient and vulnerable groups
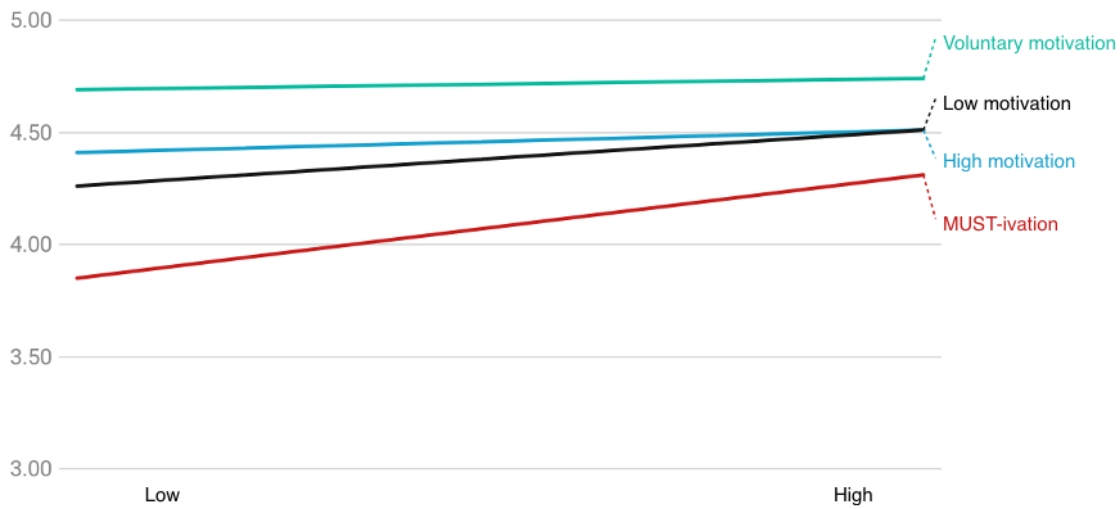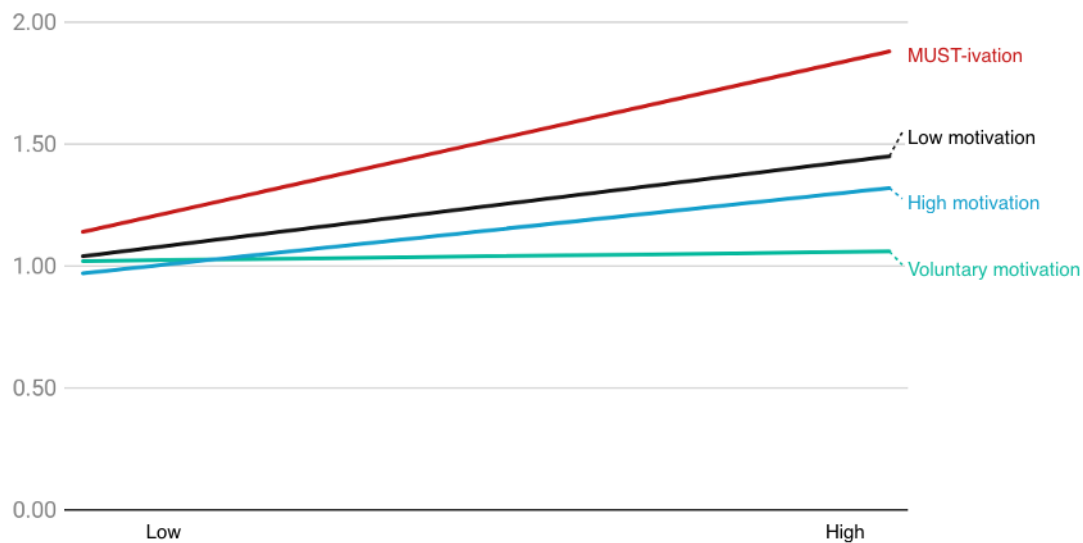

Figure 5b. Relationship between demotivating communication and resistance for motivationally resilient and vulnerable groups

This sensitivity to motivational and demotivational communication on the part of the government appears to be much less for those who are voluntarily motivated. They sail their own course. They themselves are already convinced of the need for the measures and are therefore less dependent on the way the government communicates to stay motivated. The question arises, of course, whether you can lift every citizen to this point of unconditional commitment. Aren't people naturally lazy or focused on self-interest? These are legitimate questions. However, more than assuming such a negative perspective on human beings, belief in the growth potential of people and confidence in their capacity for self-reflection and making informed decisions in this crisis is essential. Of course, the population must be supported in this process of reflection: interpretation, motivating

testimonies, concrete examples, positive feedback and the presentation of a unifying, collective goal are all strategies that can increase voluntary motivation among the population, and apparently, especially among the least motivated.

Recommendation 5: Continue to invest in interpretation, motivating testimonies, concrete examples, positive feedback and putting binding, collective action first. You don't build motivational policies on distrust and cynicism.

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