

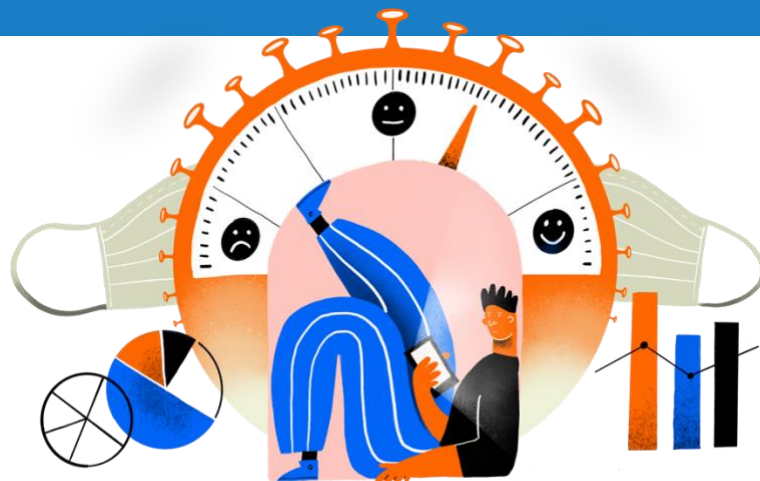
REPORT 17

What makes for a happy Christmas in 2020?

The Motivation Barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (23 November 2020). What makes for a happy Christmas in 2020? Gent, Belgium.



This second lockdown makes us yearn for prospects. The Christmas and New Year period have an extra dimension during this corona crisis. Will we be able to celebrate Christmas in family this year? Or is it better or preferable to stay in our lockdown cocoon? Is the effort worth it if we unload the current measures resulting in a 'Christmas wave' in January? In the Motivation Barometer survey (University of Ghent), four different hypothetical Christmas scenarios were presented to several thousand respondents. Four Christmas formulas with varying degrees of freedom: from maintaining the current measures to free social movement. Each scenario was evaluated for its psychological advantages and disadvantages. The overall conclusion is that the population does not wish to celebrate Christmas in the classic way, but is prepared for self-restraint. Although they even seem to want to comply with the current measures on Christmas Eve, a relaxation of the measures, with two visitors, would bring some psychological advantages (i.e., relatedness, less choice difficulties, more fun), while the disadvantages (i.e., anxiety) remain under control. In particular, more voluntarily motivated and risk-aware citizens are willing to follow stricter scenarios, while demotivated individuals and young adults favor more relaxed scenarios. In this report, we synthesize the main results using four key questions and formulate eight action points for policy to increase motivation and risk awareness.

Take home message

- The classic Christmas scenario is rejected.
- A Christmas scenario with two visitors on top of the existing hug-buddy yields the most psychological gain.
- Voluntarily motivated and risk-aware citizens are the most willing to adhere to strict Christmas scenarios.
- Voluntary motivation to follow the current corona measures has increased to 65% in the last week.
- This report contains eight concrete recommendations on how to motivate the population and keep risk awareness high.

Different Christmas Scenarios

Four different Christmas scenarios were presented to 5690 respondents (average age 48; 66% women; 71% bachelor's or master's degrees). These can be situated on a continuum of increasing freedom. The first scenario reflects the current situation, where you are allowed to invite one hug-buddy on Christmas Eve. In the second and third scenarios, in addition to the hug-buddy, you can invite, respectively, two and four visitors with whom you do have to deal corona proof (keep a distance, ventilate, meet outside). The fourth scenario reverts to the classic Christmas parties, where you can invite an unlimited number of people and you can completely abandon the corona rules for one evening. You can find the explanation of the scenarios in the open box.

Research Design

“For 8 months now, we have all been fighting this corona crisis. In October, we experienced a new increase in the number of infections and hospitalizations and now the corona crisis is threatening a classic Christmas in 2020. In order to get an accurate picture of the needs and wishes of the population, we would like to ask you some questions about how you would like to experience Christmas this year. Below you will find four possible proposals. These are hypothetical scenarios in which we propose the same set of questions each time. We would like to know what you think about these different proposals.”

1. **Current measures:** this year we will celebrate Christmas within the current measures. Specifically, in addition to your housemates, you may invite one additional person (one hug-buddy) to your home.
2. **Two extra visitors:** this year we celebrate Christmas with a small, temporary relaxation. In addition to your housemates and the one hug-buddy, you can invite two additional visitors with whom you must respect the corona rules (i.e., they stay at a distance, ventilate your house and preferably meet outside).
3. **Four extra visitors:** this year we celebrate Christmas with a small, temporary relaxation. In addition to your housemates and the one hug-buddy, you can invite four additional visitors with whom you must respect the corona rules (i.e., they stay at a distance, ventilate your house and preferably meet outside).
4. **Carte blanche:** this year we celebrate Christmas without having to think about corona measures for a moment. In addition to your housemates, you can therefore invite unlimited numbers of people as you like.

After each scenario, participants were asked a series of questions that allowed us to identify the psychological advantages and disadvantages of each scenario. For example, they were asked ...

- ... whether they find the scenario outlined too strict, ideal or too flexible;
- ... how likely it is that they would adhere to the scenario;
- ... to what extent they would experience choice difficulties, relatedness, autonomy, worry, and joy during Christmas;
- ... which of the four scenarios they prefer.

The results of this study were analyzed, taking into account the representativeness of the sample and background variables such as education level. We summarize them using the following four questions.

Question 1: Do people like to celebrate Christmas the classic way?

The answer to this is very clearly negative. The following results indicate this:

- Only 8% of respondents prefer the "carte blanche" Christmas formula when asked to indicate their favorite formula (see Figure 1);
- 88% find the carte blanche formula too lax (see Figure 1);
- The formula leads to a lot of worries (both to be infected, to infect others, and to evolve into an uncontrollable situation; see Figure 2);
- Respondents are the least likely of all to live up to this scenario.

Conclusion 1: Respondents are clearly aware that it will not be a classic Christmas and properly assess the risks involved. If the government would open the door to unlimited contact, the population would take responsibility for itself and not take advantage of the freedom offered. Thus, citizens are not being frivolous, but are reacting maturely and responsibly.

Figure 1. Preferences for the four Christmas scenarios.

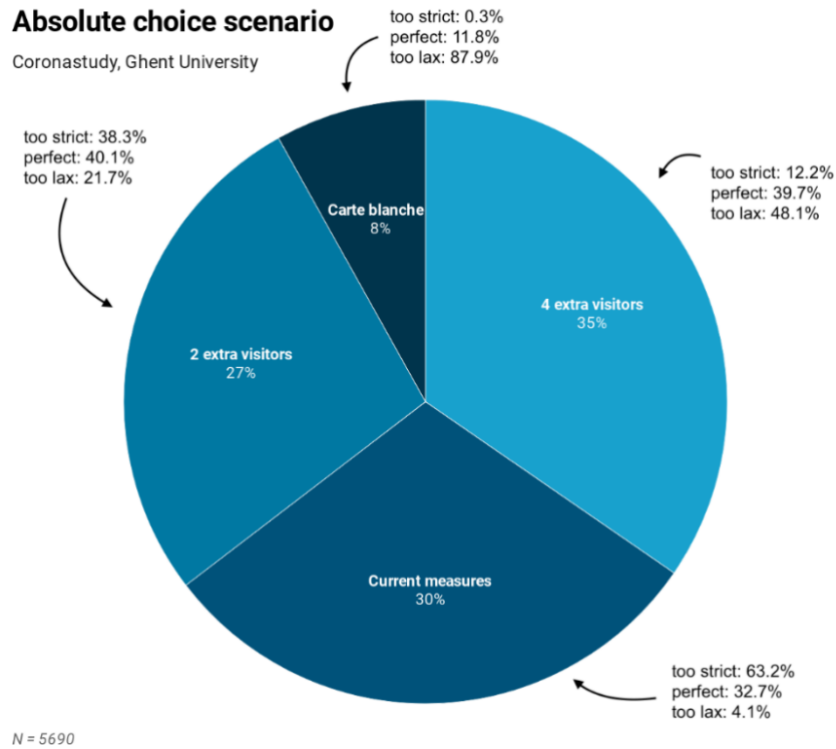
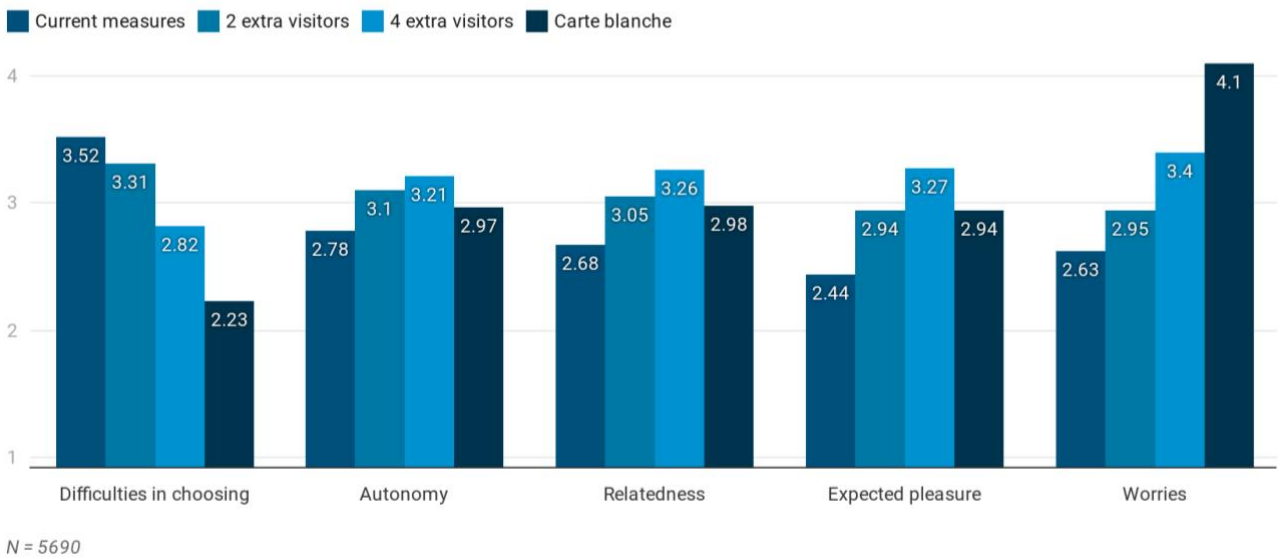


Figure 2. Average differences in psychological advantages and disadvantages of Christmas scenarios

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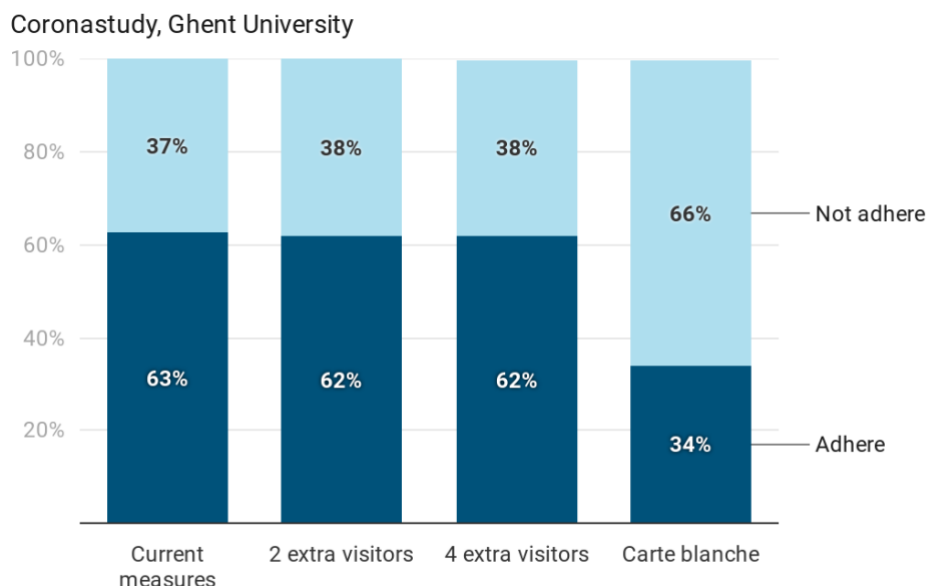
Question 2: How are the stricter scenarios evaluated?

The pattern of results for the three scenarios is mixed and not one scenario stands out. Following results indicate this:

- On average, there is no clear absolute preference for current measures (30%), 2 (27%) or 4 (35%) visitors (Figure 1);
- There is a linear relationship between the degree of freedom and the various variables measured: the more flexible the scenario, the greater the perceived autonomy, relatedness, enjoyment, and the smaller the choice difficulties, but also the greater the worries about becoming infected themselves, infecting others, or creating an uncontrollable situation (Figure 2);
- Young adults (18-35 years old) see more benefits in the more relaxed scenarios, while the differences between the scenarios for older adults (55+) are more limited.
- The percentage of respondents who say they will adhere to these stricter scenarios does almost not differ between the three scenarios: 63% vs. 62% vs. 62% (Figure 3)

This pattern of results indicates the role of intuitive analysis of the psychological advantages and disadvantages made by participants. In particular, the psychological advantages (autonomy, belonging, pleasure) are weighed against the psychological disadvantages (worry). In the stricter scenarios, part of the participants say they would be compliant because they obtain security in exchange for their obedience, while another part just refrains from following this scenario because of the lack of short-term benefits.

Figure 3. Percentage who would (not) adhere to Christmas scenarios



N = 5690

Conversely, in the case of flexible scenarios, the increasing worries and uncertainty is a reason for some participants not to follow the measures, while the increasing psychological benefits just entices another part to comply with the scenario.

A relative balance is found with the "two visitors" scenario. Indeed, it provides the most psychological gain because it involves more benefits than today and its psychological disadvantages are still under control.

Conclusion 2: The population is not against strict measures. The 'two visitors' scenario is the best balanced. It is associated with the most psychological gain: the psychological benefits (autonomy, relatedness, pleasure) are greater than if the current measures were retained, while the worries and uncertainty are smaller than if more relaxations were allowed.

Question 3: Who adheres to the different scenarios?

The percentages by which citizens say they will comply with the three strict scenarios are analogous (Figure 3). In each of the three cases, there is about 1/3rd that say they will not comply. So, who are the respondents who say they will adhere to the different scenarios more or less than average? The answer depends on the differences in cost-benefit consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the different scenarios. Three factors appear to play a fundamental role:

- **Motivation:** voluntarily motivated citizens say they are more likely than average to adhere to the strict scenarios (Figure 4):
 - 79% vs. 63% for "current measures" scenario;
 - 71% vs. 62% for "two visitors" scenario;
 - 57% vs. 62% for "four visitors" scenario;
 - 23% vs. 34% for "carte blanche".

In terms of probabilities, it appears that voluntarily motivated individuals are, respectively, 3 times and 1.8 times more likely to adhere to the current measures and to the scenario with two visitors. Figure 4 shows that an inverse pattern holds for 'must'-ivated and demotivated respondents: the stricter, the less likely to follow the scenario; the more relaxed, the more likely. Specifically, 'must'-ivated respondents appear to be 1.3 times more likely to adhere to the four-visitor scenario and demotivated respondents are 2.3 times more likely to adhere to the carte blanche scenario.

- **Risk perception:** citizens who rate the risk of infection higher say they adhere to strict scenarios more than the average (Figure 4)
 - 77% vs. 63% for "current measures" scenario;
 - 68% vs. 62% for "two visitors" scenario;
 - 54% vs. 62% for "four visitors" scenario;
 - 22% vs. 34% for "carte blanche".

In terms of probabilities, it appears that risk-aware individuals are, respectively, 2 and 1.4 times more likely to adhere to the current measures and to the two-visitor scenario.

- **Age:** While young adults would be more likely to adhere to the most relaxed scenario and older adults to the strictest scenario, there seems to be no noticeable age difference for the "two visitors" scenario (see Figure 5). It should also be noted that only half of young adults say they would follow the carte blanche scenario.

Figure 4. Different degrees of obedience scenarios as a function of motivation and risk awareness

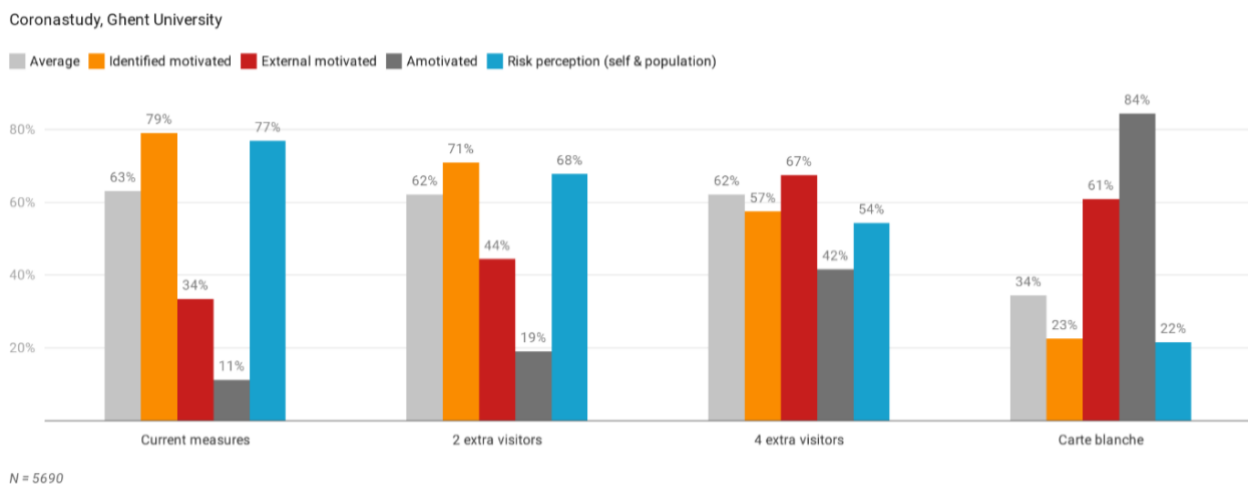
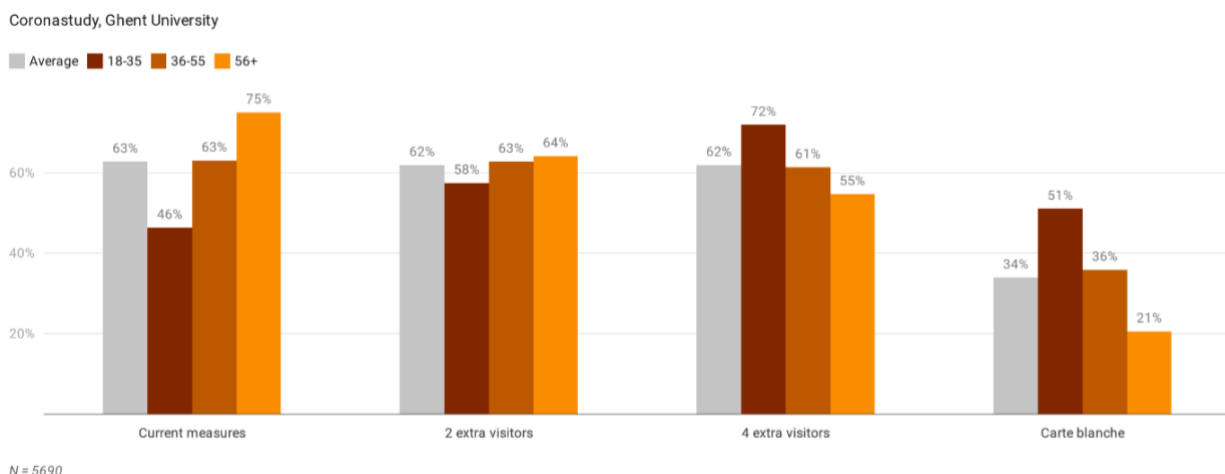


Figure 5. Different degrees of obedience scenarios across age groups



These results help to explain why the adherence rates are analogous across the three scenarios. Motivated and risk-aware citizens wish to adhere to stricter scenarios, while demotivated citizens do not. The reverse is true for the more relaxed scenarios. This is because motivated and risk-aware citizens take a long-term perspective: they understand that with increasing relaxations, worries and uncertainty also increase. Therefore, in exchange for more certainty, they voluntarily wish to comply with stricter measures at Christmas. Motivated and demotivated citizens, on the other hand, focus more on the short-term benefits and are therefore more positive towards more flexible scenarios. It therefore can be concluded that non-adherence to the measures in the first two scenarios is more likely to be due to demotivation. In turn, more flexible scenarios are less followed by motivated and risk-aware individuals because they do not consider them strict enough.

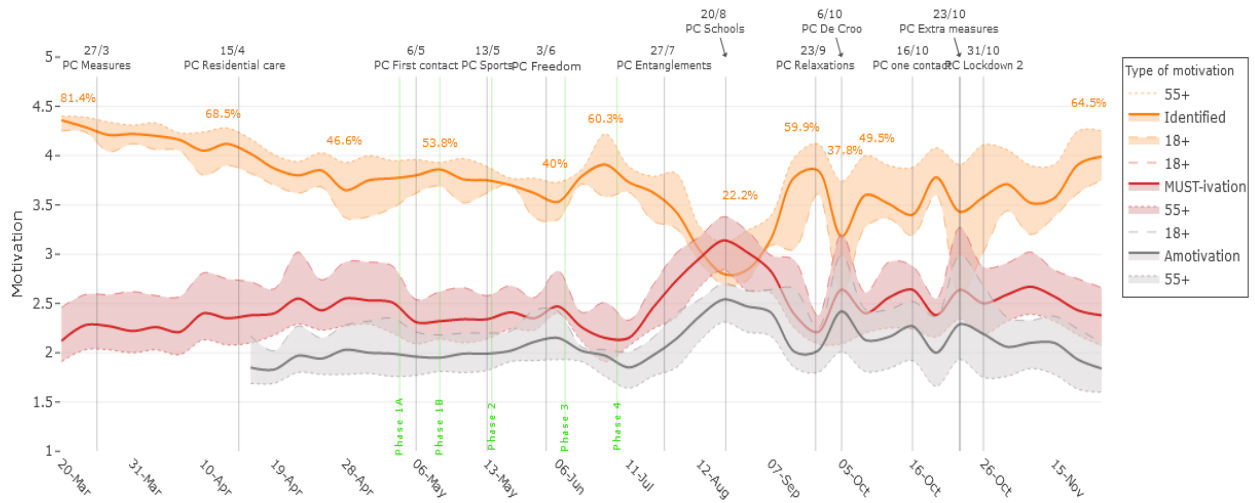
Conclusion 3: Voluntarily motivated and risk-aware citizens - more than the average citizens - are willing to adhere to the stricter Christmas scenarios. Instead of focusing on the short-term benefits of grouping together for Christmas, they are more likely to see the long-term drawbacks such as increasing infections and an out-of-control situation.

Question 4: How does general motivation evolve during this crisis?

Since March, we have been registering how the population's motivation is evolving to adhere to the corona measures via the Motivation Barometer. Given the positive effects of voluntary motivation for stricter Christmas scenarios, the question arises how general motivation has evolved during the last few weeks. Figure 6 shows a positive trend. This is interesting because since the start of the first lockdown, motivation has been steadily declining and there is currently no certainty whether the current lockdown light will suffice. On the other hand, the number of infections is decreasing and the pressure on the hospitals seems to be decreasing, which boosts confidence and therefore motivation. The population gets the impression that the efforts made are having an effect. There is also the cautiously positive news of the vaccines, which offers the population some perspective.

Conclusion 4: Voluntary motivation continues to increase during this lockdown, an encouraging result!

Figure 6. Evolution in voluntary motivation.



Policy actions

Based on these results, it appears more crucial than ever to continue to increase voluntary motivation and risk awareness. Indeed, these are associated with a better acceptance of stricter scenarios. To this end, we formulate 8 concrete action points.

1. Explain well the added value of stricter measures. In this way, they will not be perceived as "strict" and autonomy-restricting, but as logical and risk-reducing. Also in previous research, giving a convincing rationale appeared to motivate demotivated people. For example, this can be done by indicating, using an infographic, how people expect the situation to evolve when stricter measures are enforced versus more lenient measures are introduced.
2. Be clear enough what measures are in effect during the holidays. By communicating this early and clearly enough, you create predictability, avoid loopholes and give the population perspective and time to prepare for the holidays. Make a distinction between Christmas and New Year, between evening-night-day and whether contact persons should be the same over the entire period.
3. Introduce the term risk reducing measures and stop talking about strict or relaxed measures. The public is willing to adhere to measures that are appropriate to the risks of the situation, whether they are strict or relaxed.

4. If a relaxation (e.g., two visitors) is granted, it is crucial to make this an outcome commitment. Push forward an achievable interim goal to which we can collectively aspire. Communicate this intermediate goal in the short term so that it can exert a motivating effect and provide perspective.
5. Make an estimate of whether and when we will reach the intended intermediate target and communicate weekly how the hospitalization curve compares to the estimated curve and the intended target. In doing so, provide positive feedback and express gratitude to the population for sustaining the effort.
6. Frame the efforts to achieve our goals in a solidarity project, where everyone can inspire and support each other. Make calls to share creative ideas to celebrate Christmas and New Year corona proof in a pleasant atmosphere (so that the focus is on what we can do rather than what we cannot).
7. Pay special attention in communication to younger audiences for whom stricter Christmas and New Year scenarios will be seen as more autonomy-denying. Address them directly and in an empathetic manner. This does not mean that this target group should be privileged by granting them more relaxed measures, as this would break the solidarity spirit and flare-ups in this target group would encourage polarization.
8. Keep the risk awareness of the population high. This can be done using the barometer, which clearly indicates the risky situation we are still in, or by means of informative testimonies from the health care sector. It is important that doctors and nurses from hospitals and residential care centers give an insight into their job in a neutral, informative and narrative manner and do not do this in a reproachful, threatening and fear-inducing way. Only in the first case is empathy aroused among citizens, prompting them to make more voluntary efforts.

Conclusion 5: Develop a systematic communication plan to deliver these various motivational messages to the population.

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