

## Danish lockdown strengthened unemployed citizens' political trust

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On March 11 at 8.30PM, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced a lockdown of big parts of the society in response to rapid increases in Covid-19 infections. It was immediately clear that the lockdown, while supported broadly by the Parliament, would have dramatic effects on growth and unemployment in Denmark.

### Trust as an indicator of support for democracy

These adverse economic developments raise the question of how the lockdown affected the political trust of the Danish population. In addition to being an important indicator of support in democracy, political trust is important for the Covid-19 crisis response. Higher political trust is associated with [a higher willingness to adhere to government social distancing recommendations](#), and may thus help contain the spread of the virus.

Did voters reward the rapid decision-making and noticeable across-the-board political backing of the shutdown? Or did the decision create mistrust due to the massive changes and potentially dire economic and social consequences it caused?

### The unemployed are especially vulnerable to economic consequences

[Colleagues at Aarhus University have found](#), that the Danish population had more trust in politicians at the end of March than in February before the lockdown and before the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic was clear to all Danes. But while everyone is affected by the pandemic, the crisis can become especially severe for those who were already unemployed at its onset. It quickly became clear that unemployment would rise dramatically as a direct consequence of the shutdown, and with an economic recession looming, unemployed Danes' road back to employment may have grown longer than before. Compared to the rest of the population, the unemployed are especially vulnerable to the economic consequences of the lockdown and the Covid-19 crisis.

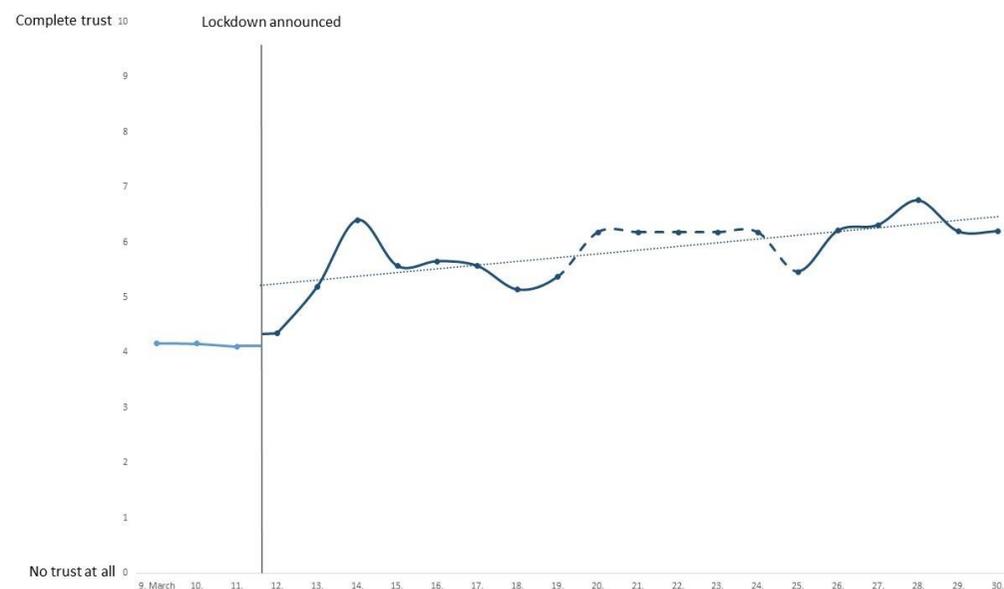
### Large increases in unemployment recipients' trust in institutions

In collaboration with 3FA, a Danish unemployment insurance fund servicing primarily blue-collar workers, we asked unemployed fund members to what extent they trust, respectively, government, parliament, and the public sector as a whole. Answers were collected from March 9 (almost three days before the lockdown) and March 30. In total, we received 852 responses prior to the announcement of the lockdown and 1,274

responses afterwards. Respondents prior to and after the shutdown are comparable on characteristics such as gender, age, and unemployment history. This provides us with an opportunity to examine to what extent trust in institutions among unemployed Danes changed when Denmark shut down. It did.

Figure 1 shows the development in trust in government (the current social democratic administration) between March 9 and 30 (see large version at end of note). The light blue line shows trust in government prior to the lockdown announcement on the evening of March 11. The dark blue line shows how trust in government developed after the shutdown announcement.<sup>2</sup> The gray line is the linear trend during the lockdown.

Figure 1: Trust in government (current administration)



From before to after the announcement, average trust in government among the 3FA unemployment insurance recipients increased from 4.2 to 5.5 on a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust).<sup>3</sup> The increase is substantial and corresponds to an average increase of 31 percent. Our results do not suggest a short-lived increase. On the contrary, we see a weakly increasing trend throughout the lockdown. We find similar patterns for trust in parliament and trust in the public sector (figures 2 and 3). The increase in trust does not seem to be isolated to one institution. Instead, our data suggests that the lockdown had a general positive effect on trust in political institutions.<sup>4</sup>

## Increasing trust despite more pessimistic employment expectations

The increase in trust among unemployed Danes is particularly noteworthy, considering the economic consequences of the lockdown and Covid-19 pandemic more broadly. Our analyses show that respondents were keenly aware of the negative effects on their chances of getting a job in the near future.

Prior to the lockdown announcement, 52 percent of our respondents indicated that they expected to get back into employment within 2 months. After the lockdown, only 46 percent expected this to happen. However, people's trust in all three political institutions has increased, even when looking only at respondents who indicate that they expect long-term unemployment.

### Why does political trust increase?

Our data does not allow us to give a definitive answer to why political trust has increased with the lockdown. It is well known that crises, such as wars, often make populations gather behind their leaders (the so-called "[rally around the flag](#)" effect). Still, it is noteworthy that trust has increased so markedly in our data given the economic vulnerability of our respondents and the relatively low trust - compared to other Danes - among this group prior to the lockdown.

Part of the increase is probably due to the fact that policymakers have been aware of the vulnerable situation of the unemployed. Immediately after the lockdown, parliament decided to close job centers temporarily and suspended a series of rules and requirements normally imposed on the unemployed as part of Denmark's active labor market policies. Later on, the eligibility period for the unemployment benefits handled by the unemployment insurance funds was extended by three months (from two years).

Our analyses suggest, that unemployed Danes are aware of these eases in rules and requirements, and have rewarded politicians for them. After the lockdown announcement, fewer of our respondents indicated that the unemployment system imposes too many burdensome and pointless rules and requirements, and respondents felt, to a larger extent, that the system allowed them be in control of their own lives. More positive views regarding the unemployment system are positively related to political trust. However, the increase in trust after the lockdown remains significant when we account for these views statistically. Therefore, we have reason to believe that the lockdown itself has had a positive impact on people's political trust.

Figure 2: Trust in parliament

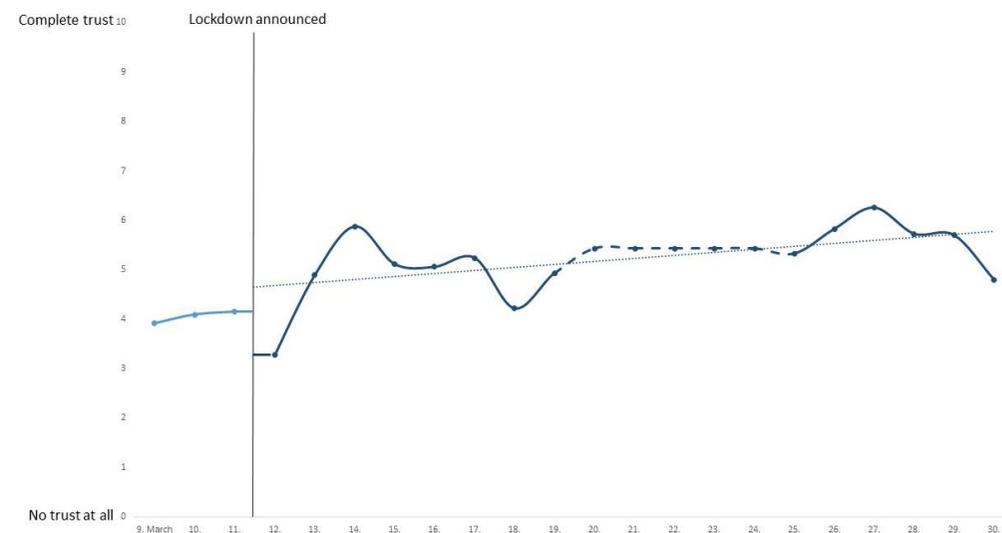
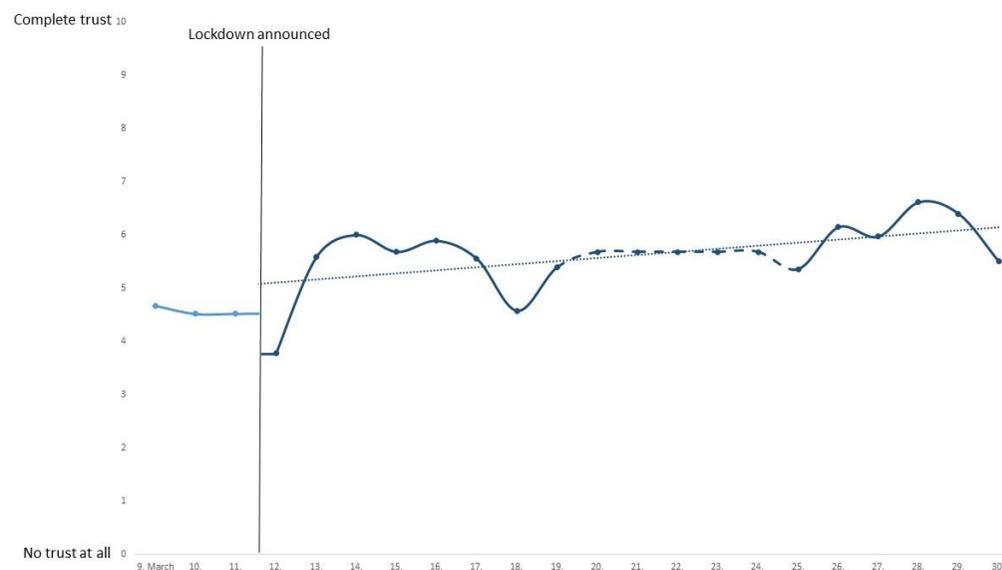


Figure 3: Trust in the public sector



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>: Jonas Krogh Madsen is a PhD fellow and Kim Sass Mikkelsen is an associate professor at the Department of Social Science and Business at Roskilde University. Julian Christensen is a post.doc and Martin Bækgaard is a professor at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University. This document has been prepared for being shared with the public April 4, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>: March 20-24 we received very few replies to the survey. Consequently, daily averages are replaced by one average for the five day period (shown in figures using a dashed line).

<sup>3</sup>: Our survey items on trust read: "Here comes a few questions about your views on selected Danish societal institutions. On a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust) how much trust to you have in each of the following institutions?"

<sup>4</sup>: Regression analyses show that the average increase in trust in government, parliament, and the public sector are all statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). This remains true when controlling for gender, age, education, family situation (number of children living at home), unemployment history (length of unemployment, full-time unemployment, and number of unemployment spells the past five years), expectations about future unemployment, and views on rules and requirements in the unemployment system (agreement with the statements that a) the system requires participation in activities that are not helpful for returning to employment, b) that unemployment insurance recipients are required to comply with too many demands in the system, and c) that the unemployment system allows people to have control over their own lives).

**Important:** *The analyses above have not been subject to peer review and should be interpreted with the appropriate level of caution.*

Figure 1: Trust in government (current administration)

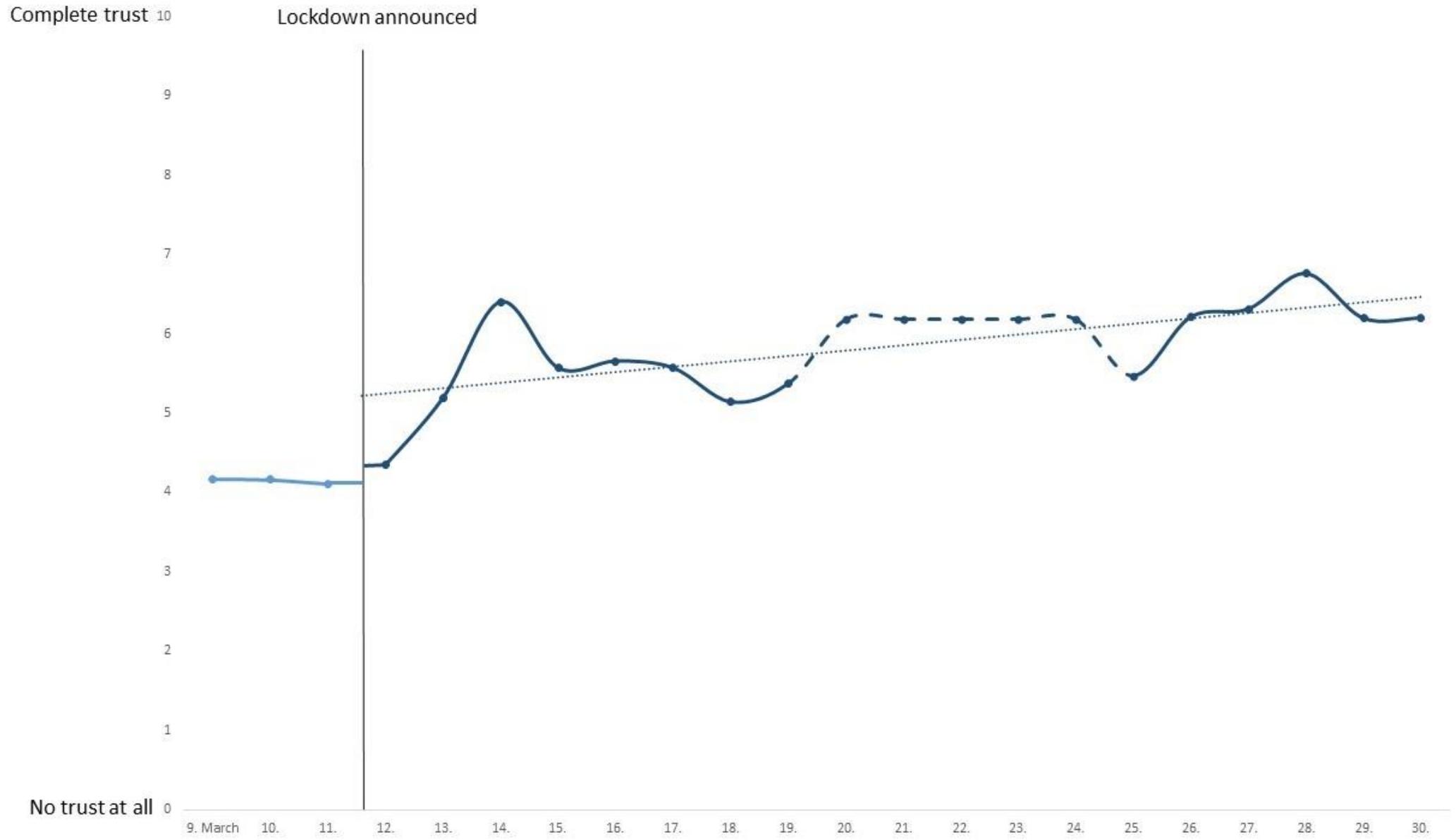


Figure 2: Trust in parliament

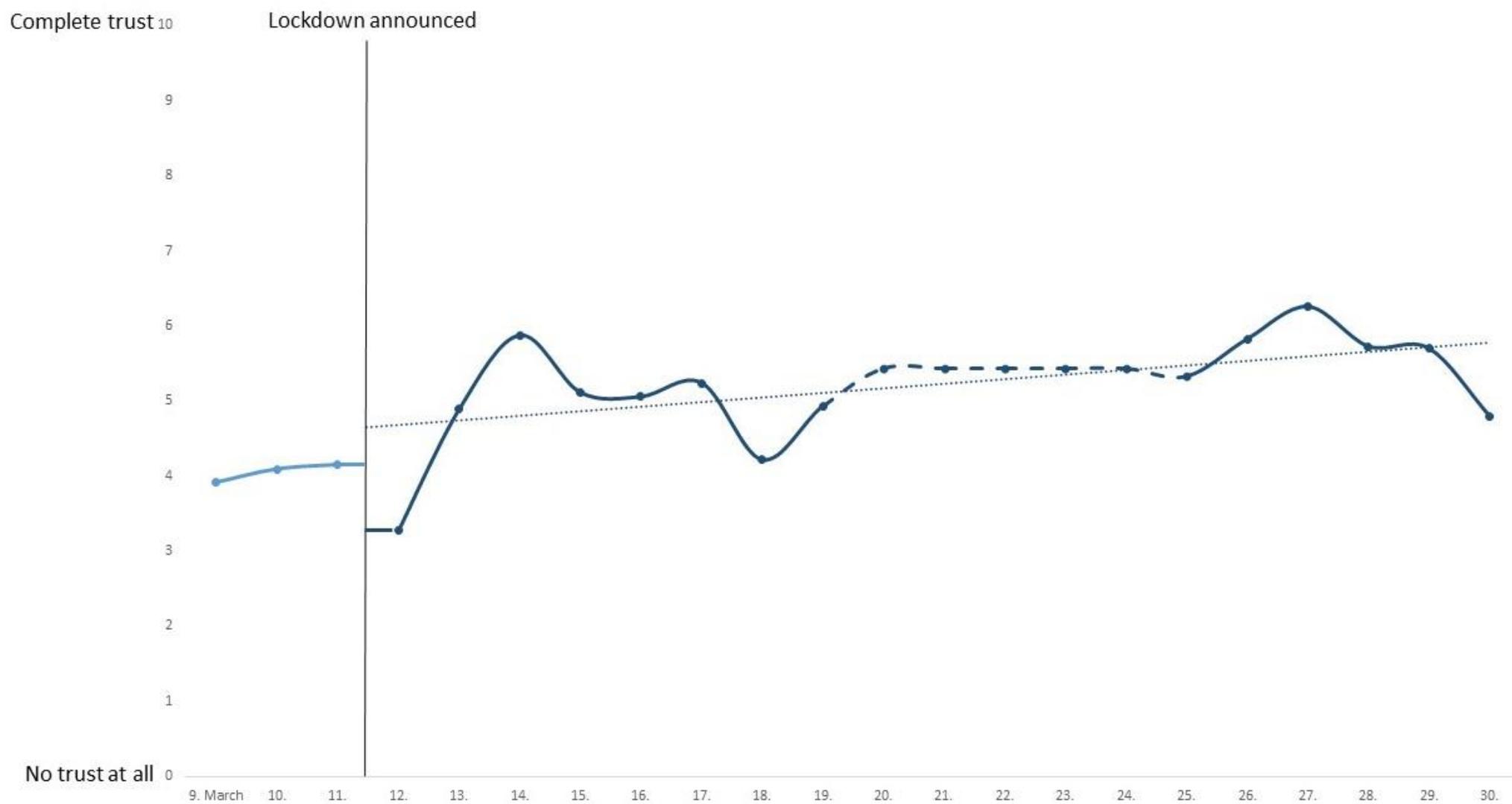


Figure 3: Trust in the public sector:

