

# The relationship between constitutional preferences and perceptions

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## Outline of Paper

- 1. Introduction: Public Attitudes to Regional Autonomy**
- 2. Measuring Public Attitudes: The Continuum Question**
- 3. Explaining Perceptions and Preferences**
- 4. Exploring the Preference-Perception Relationship**
- 5. Conclusions**



## Public Attitudes to Regional Autonomy

- Massive transfer of powers from central government to national/regional governments in UK since 1999 (King, 2007)
- Consistent with widespread growth in sub-state ‘regional’ autonomy across much of world in previous 30 years(Marks et al 2008)
- Various reasons to assume that public attitudes are important
- Attitude we want to measure: How much autonomy should a



## Measuring Public Attitudes, 1

Numerous studies of identity patterns (with region/state); of attitudes to performance of regional institutions; of voting in referendums on more powers etc.

Also direct questions on broad attitudes to regional autonomy:

- Should region have distinctive governmental institutions?
- What powers should such institutions have?
- What extent of autonomy should the region possess?



## **Preferences and Perceptions, 1**

**Downsian approach**

**Ideal point in terms of degree of regional autonomy**

**Greater distance between ideal point and perceived current position = greater probability of supporting changes à ideal point**

**BUT: are preferences and perceptions independent?**



## Continuum-Type Question:

*Welsh Election Study 2011/16*

**“People sometimes talk about how Wales is governed. On the scale shown below, where one end means no devolution for Wales at all, and the other end means complete political independence for Wales, where would you place...”**



People sometimes talk about how Wales is governed. On the scale shown below, where one end means no devolution for Wales at all, and the other end means complete political independence for Wales, where would you place things as they are right now?

No Devolution

A horizontal slider scale with a red marker at the 10% mark. The scale has tick marks every 10 units, ranging from 0% to 100%. The text "No Devolution" is at the left end, and "Complete Independence" is at the right end.

Complete Independence

 Not sure

And where would you place...

Drag and drop items onto the scale to rate an item. If you are not sure about an item, drag it into the "not sure" box below.

- How you would like to see Wales being governed
- How you think the Labour Party would like to see Wales being governed
- How the Conservative Party would like to see Wales being governed
- How the Liberal Democrats would like to see Wales being governed
- How Plaid Cymru would like to see Wales being governed
- Where things would be if there was a Yes vote in the referendum

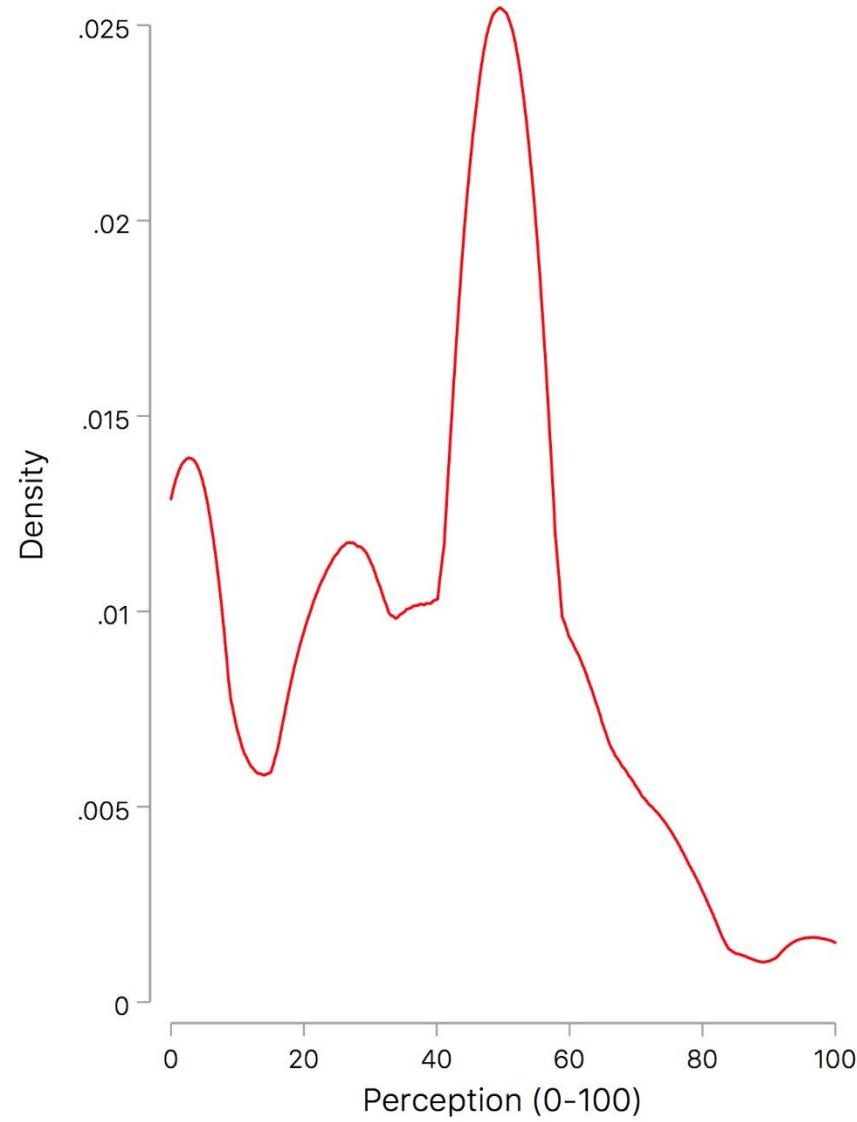
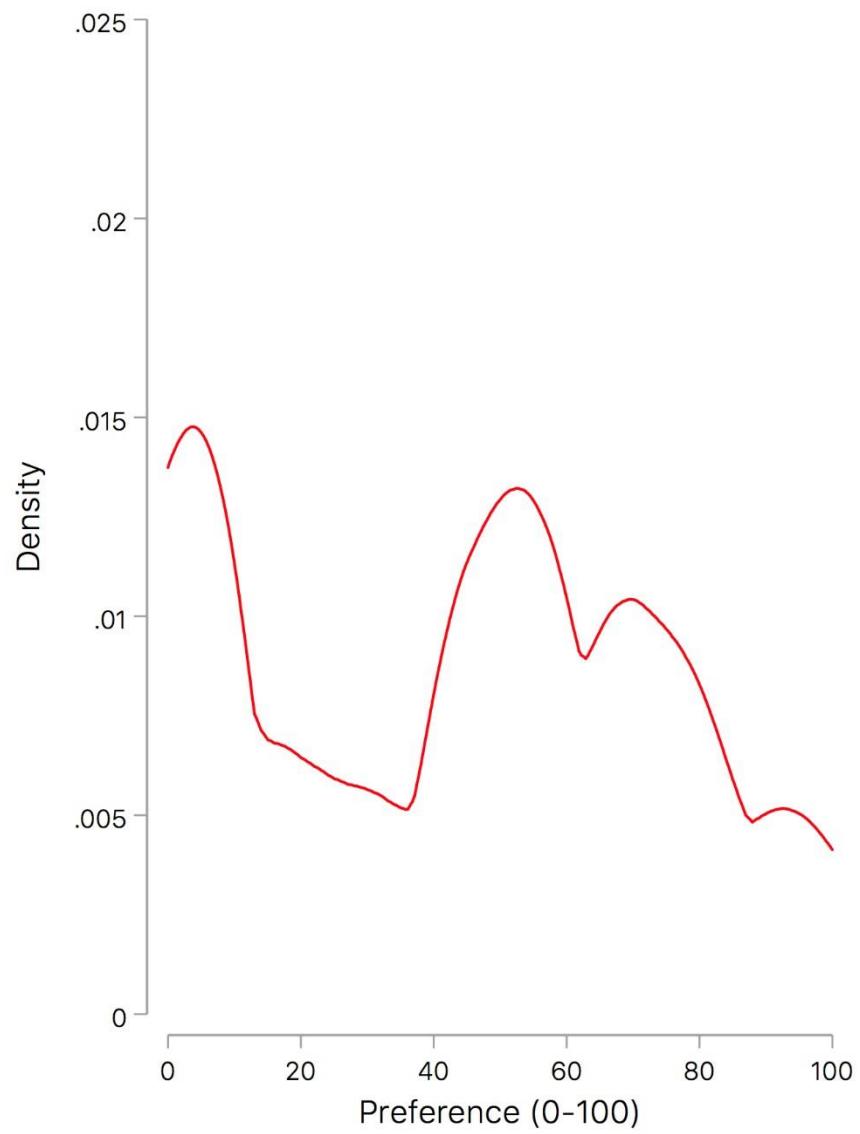
No Devolution

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Complete Independence

Not sure







## Data for this Paper:

- **2016 Welsh Election Study: three-wave panel study around May 2016 election to National Assembly for Wales**
- **Autumn 2017: Parallel short surveys in Wales and Scotland**

All fieldwork by YouGov.



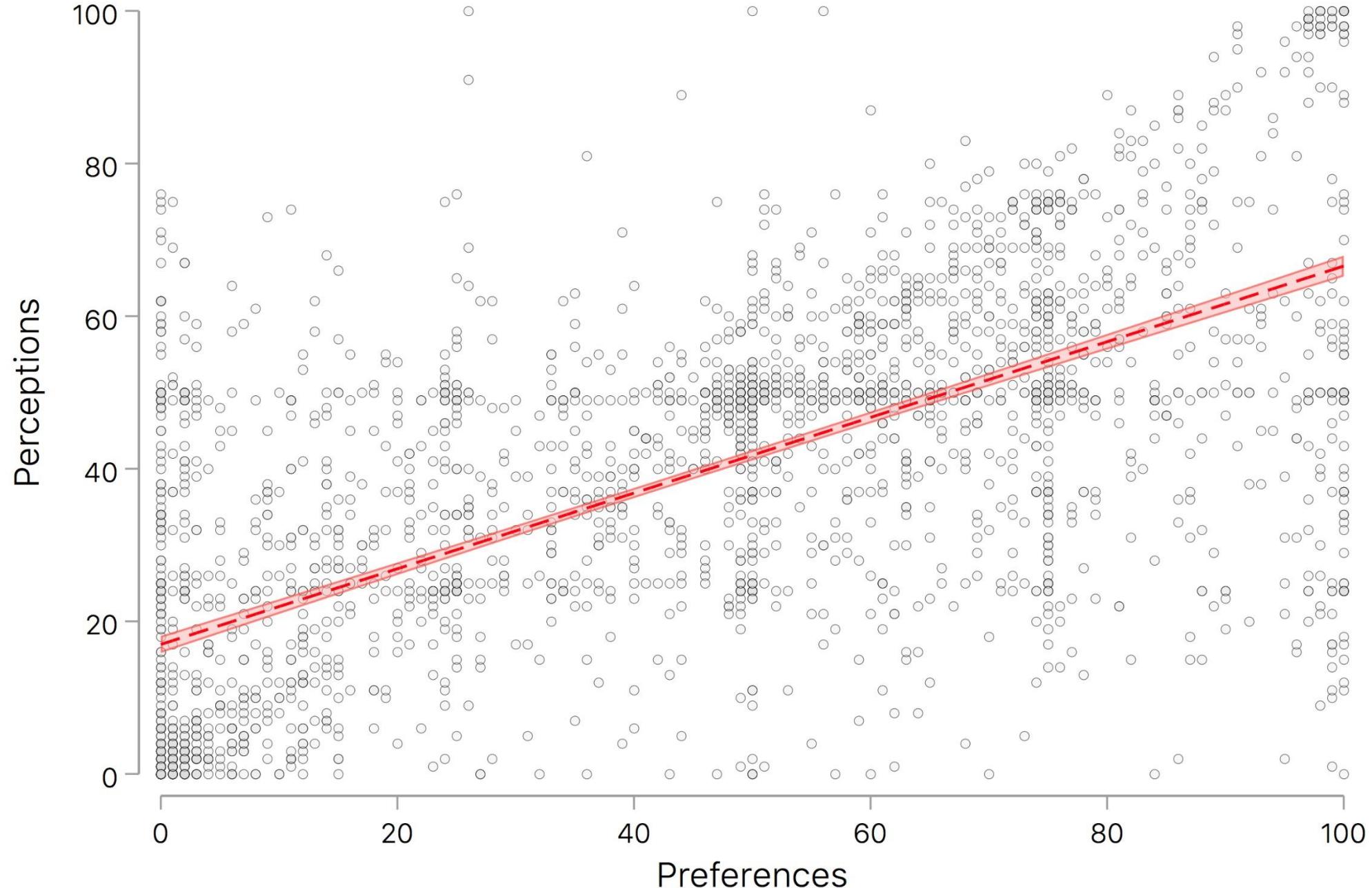
## Preferences and Perceptions, 2

**Expectations for relationship between preferences and perceptions on regional autonomy?**

**No systematic relationship:** what you prefer in terms of degree of autonomy is unrelated to how far you perceive it as having gone

**Assimilation:** Positive correlation between preferences and perceptions: those preferring strong autonomy thinking things have gone relatively far; those more cautious/hostile to regional autonomy thinking things have not gone so far

**Contrast:** Negative correlation between preferences and perceptions: those preferring strong autonomy think that what has been received thus far is wholly inadequate; those more cautious/hostile to regional autonomy thinking things have not gone too far already in direction they oppose





## *It's Not Just 2016...*

- Same pattern in data from 2011 (2011 Welsh Referendum Study)
- Same pattern replicated in further survey in 2017



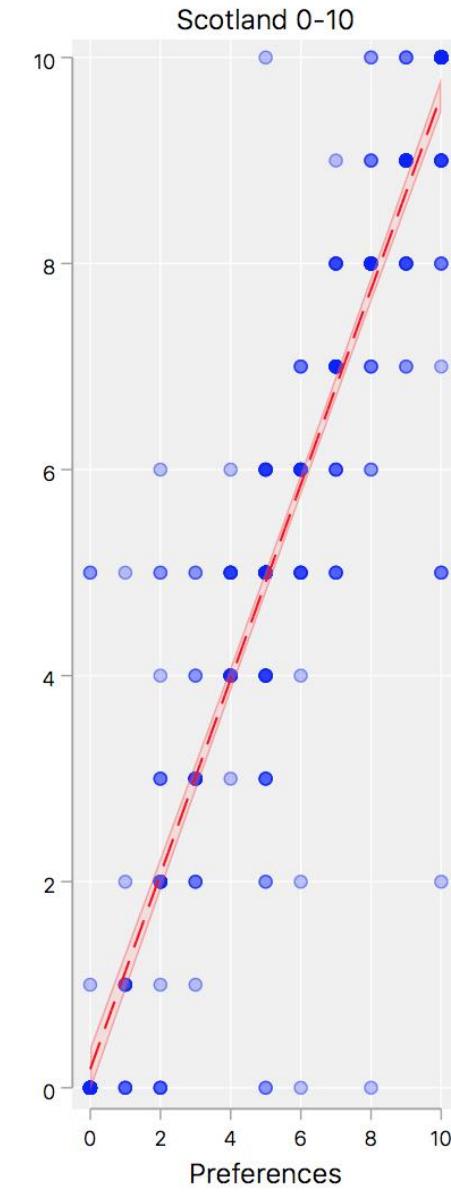
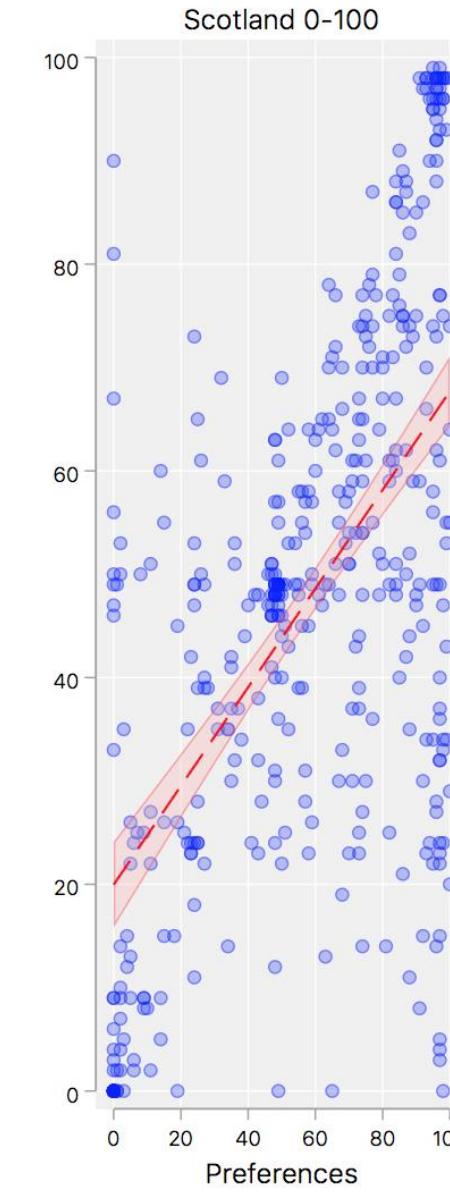
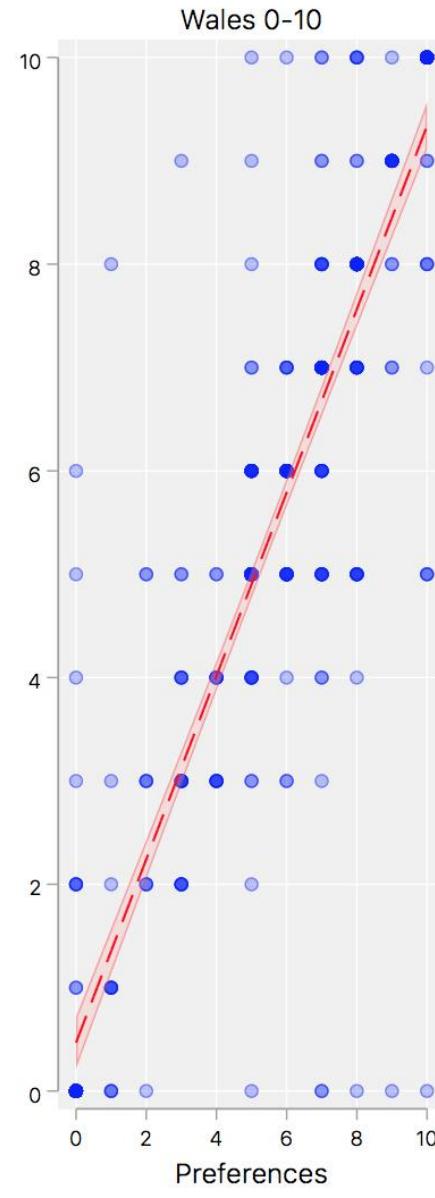
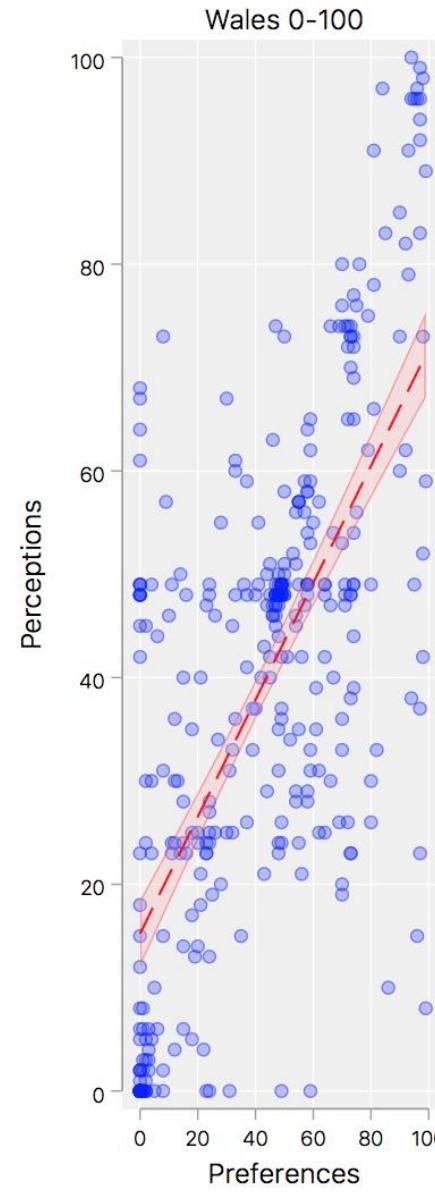
## *It's Not Just This Question Format...*

- Same relationship in data when we use a verbal 0-10 scale as when we use the visual scale



# It's Not Just Wales...

- Same relationship (though slightly weaker) in 2017 survey in Scotland as in Wales





## Modelling Preferences and Perceptions

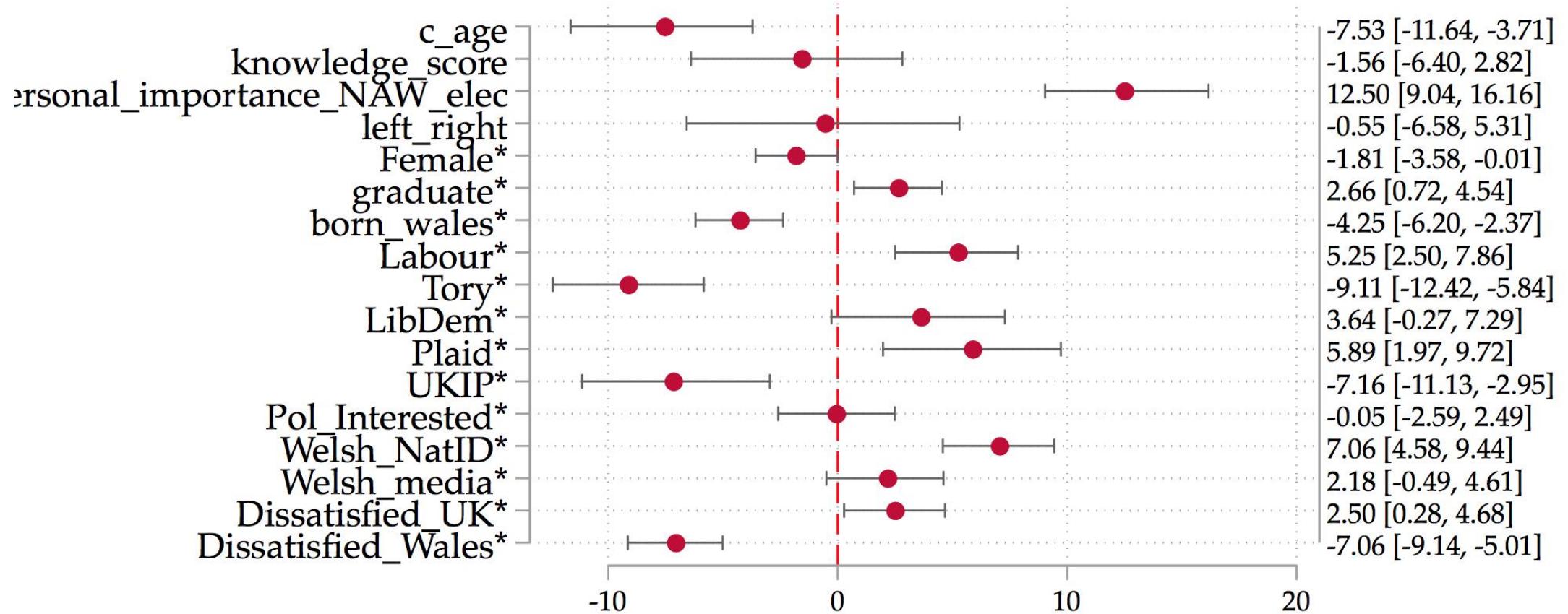
2 OLS regressions

*Dependent variable* = 0-100 perception and preference score

*Explanatory Variables:* Partisanship, National Identity, Importance of Regional Elections, Satisfaction with Welsh and UK Democracy

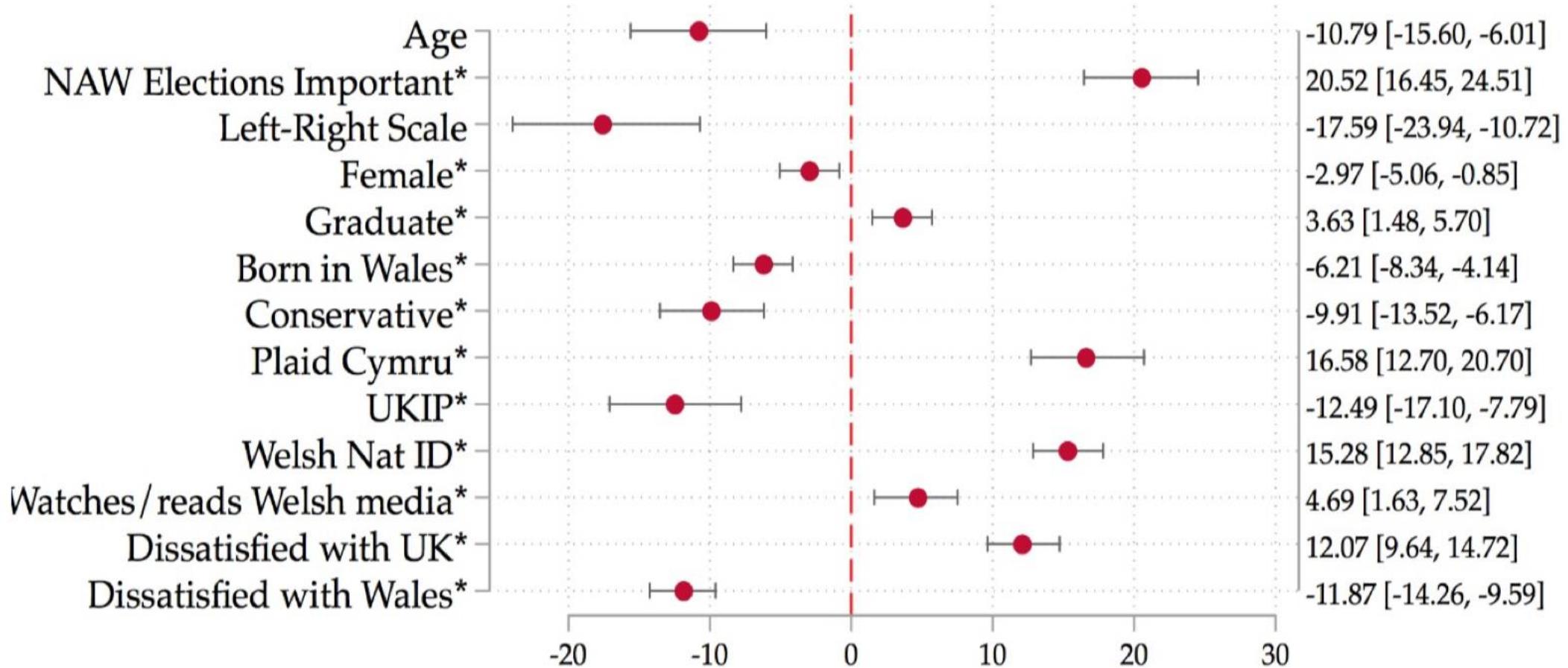
## PERCEPTIONS

First Differences for Change in  $E(Y | X)$   
with 90% Confidence Interval



User set first differences change as: min max.  
Variables with a \* are discrete - FD is a change from 0 to 1.

### First Differences for Change in $E(Y|X)$ with 95% Confidence Interval



User set first differences change as: min max.  
Variables with a \* are discrete - FD is a change from 0 to 1.



## Explaining the Relationship Between Preferences and Perceptions

- OLS regression
- Same explanatory variables used in previous slides (for now)
- Dependent variable = Perceptions – Preferences



Perceives no  
devolution, prefers  
independence

Perceives  
independence, prefers  
no devolution

Perception = Preference

-100

0

100

<b>Variables</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>S.E</b>
Age (Centred)	0.0149	-0.0517
Female	1.024	-1.372
Graduate	-2.299	-1.558
Born in Wales	1.801	-1.431
<b>Welsh National ID</b>	<b>-8.449***</b>	-1.594
Labour	3.448	-2.253
Conservatives	-0.44	-2.237
<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>4.045*</b>	-2.354
<b>Plaid Cymru</b>	<b>-10.48***</b>	-3.348
UKIP	2.918	-2.635
Knowledge Score	-0.56	-0.931
Interested in Politics	2.621	-1.963
Watches/Reads Welsh Media	-1.903	-2.114
<b>Dissatisfied with politics in UK</b>	<b>-8.784***</b>	-1.592
<b>Dissatisfied with politics in Wales</b>	<b>3.294**</b>	-1.608
<b>NAW Elections Personally Important</b>	<b>-0.933***</b>	-0.266
<b>Left-Right Scale</b>	<b>0.163***</b>	-0.0458
Constant	-0.141	-3.866
Observations	1,588	
R-squared	0.185	



## Conclusions

- **Methodological:** ‘Continuum’ Measure works well; should be used (in some form) as alternative/supplement to other question forms; should be used more widely as it facilitates exploration of questions not yet considered
- **Substantive:** Strong initial evidence of Assimilation, rather than Contrast, in public attitudes to regional autonomy in both Wales and Scotland
- Possible mechanism for explaining widespread success of regional autonomy: ambiguity of partial autonomy allows for ‘wishful thinking’?
- **Work to do:** Further clarifying which way does the causal arrow go?