

Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes

in a Changing Britain

Changes in attitudes to welfare, inequality and immigration over 20 years: Not such a divided Britain?

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Disclaimer

This work uses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (NatCen) collected by and copyrighted to the National Centre for Social Research and deposited in the UK Data Service (UKDS).

We are grateful to NatCen for the use of these data and to UKDS for making them available. Neither NatCen nor UKDS bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation of these data.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the respondents of the survey.

Motivation I

Part of wider SPDO programme that relates to the context for policymaking:

- How has the attitudinal context for social policymaking changed over the last two decades?
- To what extent, if at all, is there reduced support overall for the welfare state, less concern about inequality and more concern about immigration?
- Even if these attitudes have remained stable overall, have views become more polarised?

Why analyse attitudes towards welfare, inequality and immigration?

- Recent political events (e.g. EU referendum) have revealed apparently deep attitudinal divides
- Recent economic and societal changes have been felt differently by different groups
- Could apparent polarisation of attitudes be due to some parts of the population being 'left behind'? (eg Goodwin and Heath, 2016)
- Expect these attitudes to be related e.g. racial prejudice and support for the Welfare State (Ford, 2006)

Motivation II

Why should be we concerned about polarisation in social attitudes?
Social attitudes are part of the context in which policymaking takes place

- If attitudes are increasingly divided then policy solutions are difficult to achieve and/or unstable (Ford and Lymperopoulou, 2016)
- Attitudes about equality and the welfare state relate to support for redistributive policies (Bucelli, forthcoming)
- Attitudes about immigration are believed to constrain viable options for the terms of the ongoing relationship between the EU and the UK (Blinder and Richards, 2018)

Existing research

- Latest BSA report chapter on inequality and poverty (Clery and Dangerfield, 2019)
- JRF/Natcen research on attitudes of people on low incomes (Dunatchik et al 2016; Taylor, Saunders and Toomse-Smith, 2017)

On the whole most research

- Narrower range of attitudes
- Mainly focuses on age, education (and/or income)

Aims of the paper

Aim to examine attitudinal differences between groups and the extent of polarisation or convergence in attitudes in Britain across 20 year period.

Attitudes about:

- The welfare state
- Inequality
- Immigration

Selected as most relevant to the economic and societal changes over the period

Attitudes of:

- Disabled people
- People with low educational qualifications
- Lone parents
- People in London, Rest of England, Scotland, Wales
- Young people, and older people

Selected based on SPCC analysis (and data constraints)

Data and methods

The data – British Social Attitudes Survey

British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) annual survey with sample size of around 3,000 people. Focus on 1995 to 2017

Repeated cross-sectional data so trends in attitudes of groups rather than individuals' trajectories

We focus on the following characteristics of interest:

- Limiting long-standing disability
- Highest educational qualification
- Parents/lone parents/no children
- Country (+ separating out London)
- Age

We conduct regression analyses including all characteristics in our model simultaneously in order to identify the independent association of each characteristic with each attitudinal index.

But *do not* presume these relationships are causal.

Attitudinal measures – Welfarism index

We use the BSA derived variable based on the following items:

- The welfare state encourages people to stop helping each other.
- The government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes.
- Around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one.
- Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help.
- Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another.
- If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet.
- Cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives.
- The creation of the welfare state is one of Britain's proudest achievements.

Higher scores indicate stronger anti-welfare attitudes. Scale 1 – 5 and interquartile range 2.6 – 3.4

Use years 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017

Attitudinal measures – Inequality index

Influenced by Park et al's 2003 analysis of 'liberals' and 'sceptics', we created our own index measuring concern about inequality, based on the following items:

- Government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off (agree/ neither agree nor disagree/ disagree)
- Level of benefits for unemployed people (too low and cause hardship / too high and discourage from finding jobs)
- Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth (agree/ neither agree nor disagree/ disagree)

Higher scores indicate less concern about inequality. Scale 0 – 2.3 and interquartile range 0.7 - 2

Use years 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017

Attitudinal measures – Immigration index

We created our own index to measure anti-immigration attitudes based on the following items:

- Immigrants increase crime rates
- Immigrants are good for the economy
- Immigrants take jobs from British born
- Immigrants bring new ideas and culture
- Britain should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants
- The number of immigrants in Britain should increase/stay the same/reduce

Higher scores indicate stronger anti-immigrant attitudes. Scale 0-6 and interquartile range 3 - 4.5

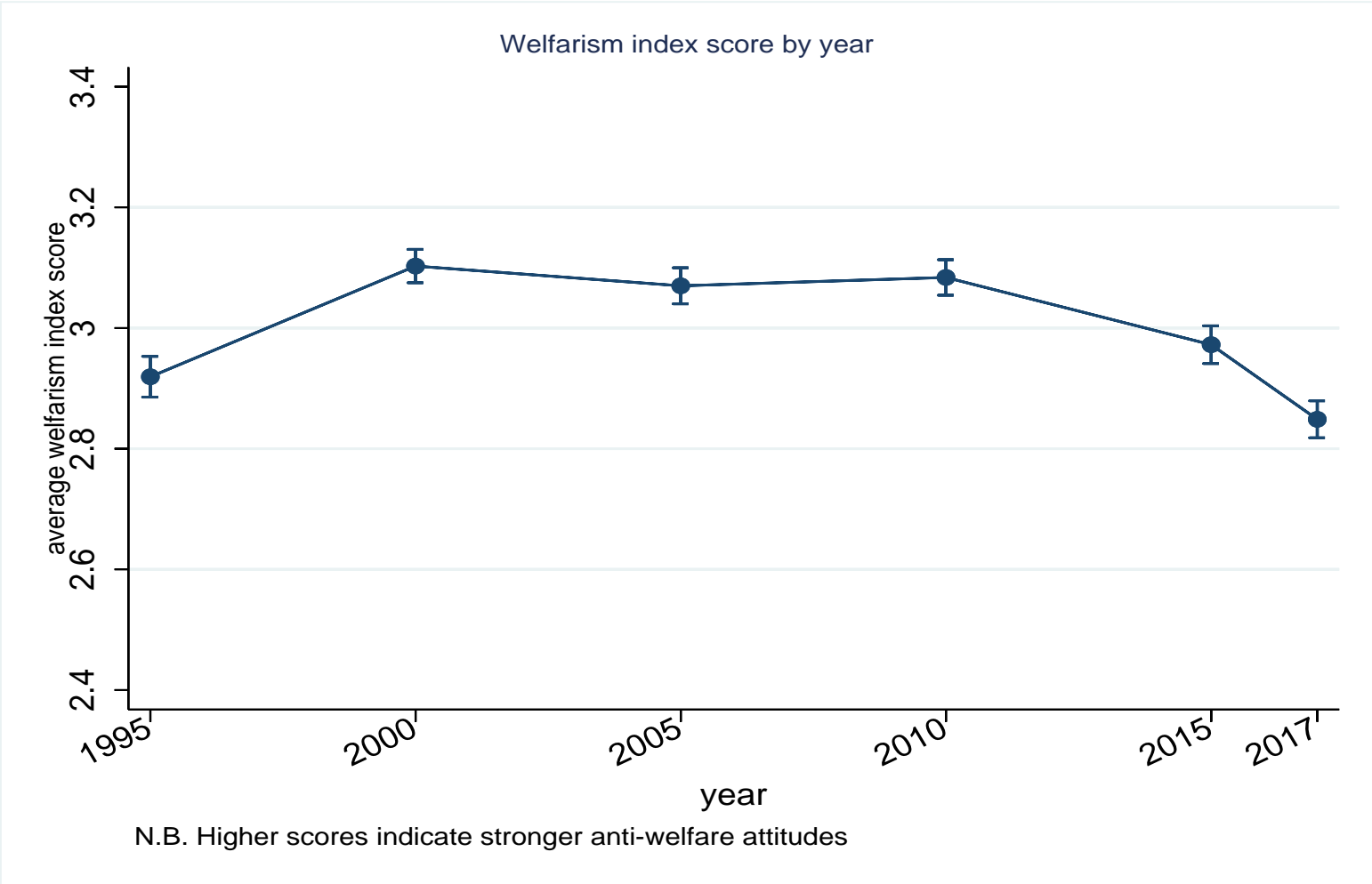
N.B. Only measured in 1995, 2003 and 2013. Cannot analyse in relation to disability or parenthood. Also difficult to discern trends based on just 3 time points.

We have two measures in 2017 - on a scale 0-10 from extremely bad to extremely good:

- Good or bad for economy that migrants come to Britain?
- Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here?

Results: Has the attitudinal context become more hostile for policymaking?

Trends over time: Attitudes about the Welfare State



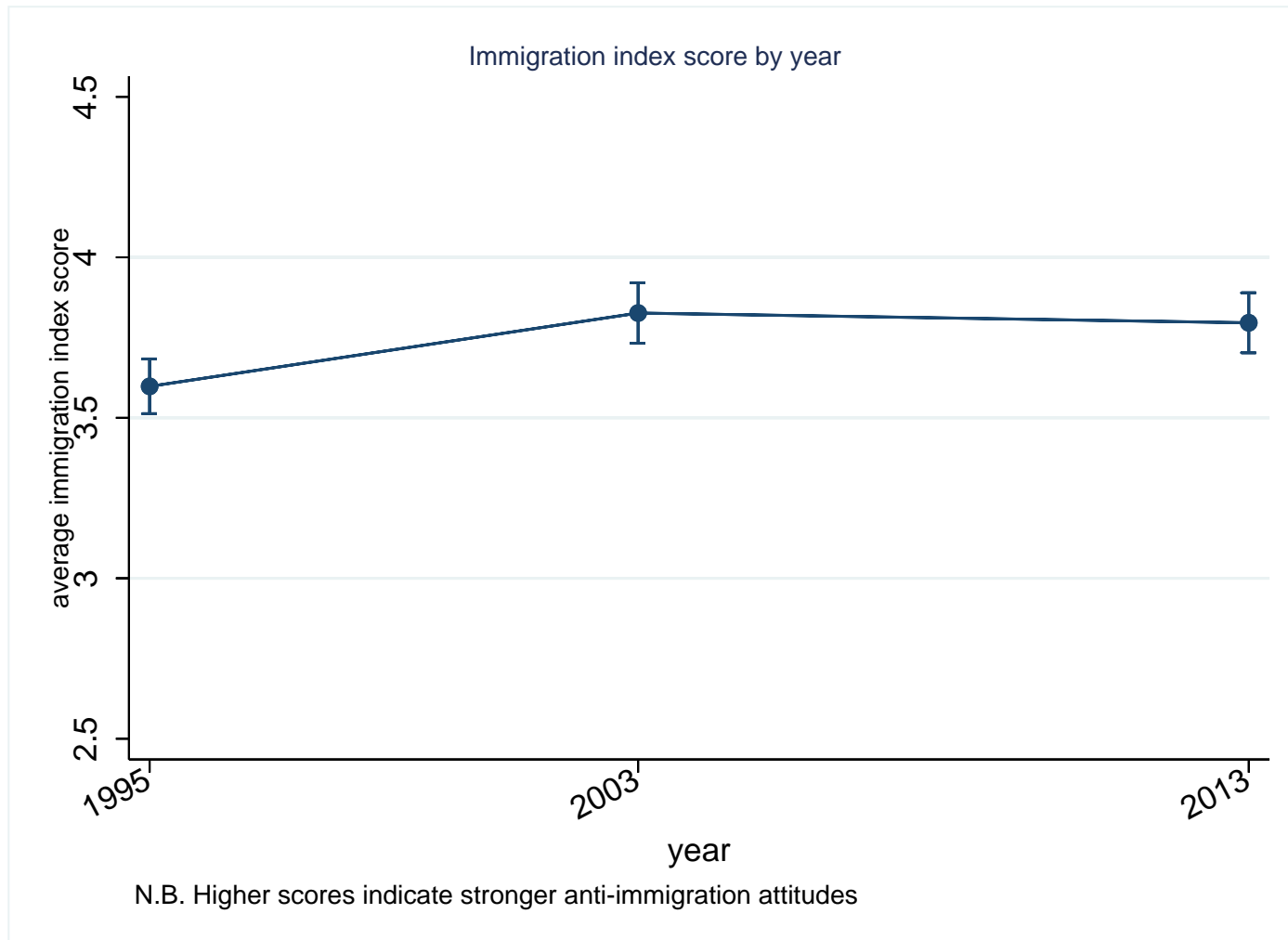
IQR for welfarism index: 2.6 -3.4

Trends over time: Attitudes about inequality



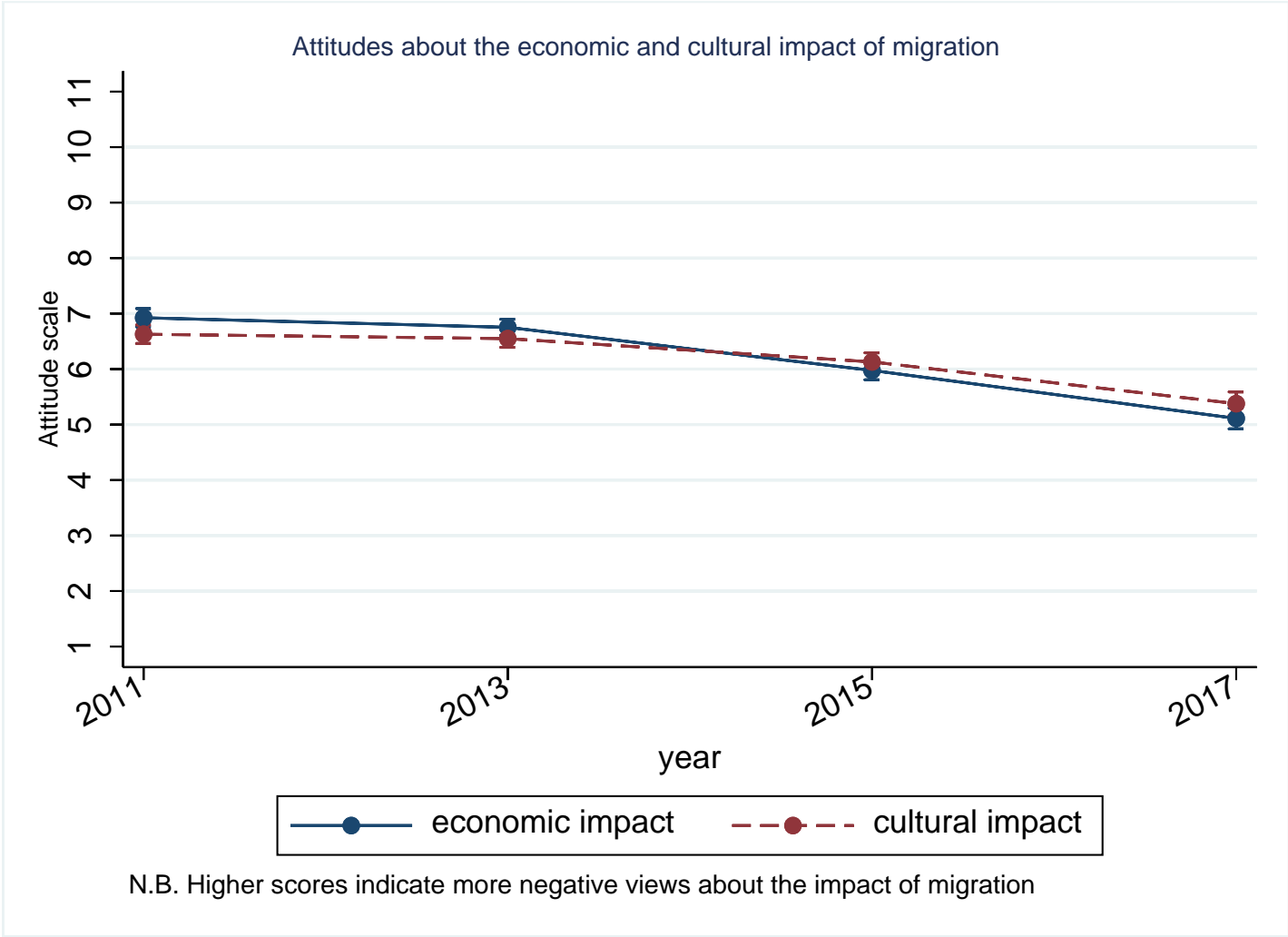
IQR for inequality index: 0.7 - 2

Trends over time: Attitudes about immigration



IQR for immigration index: 3 – 4.5

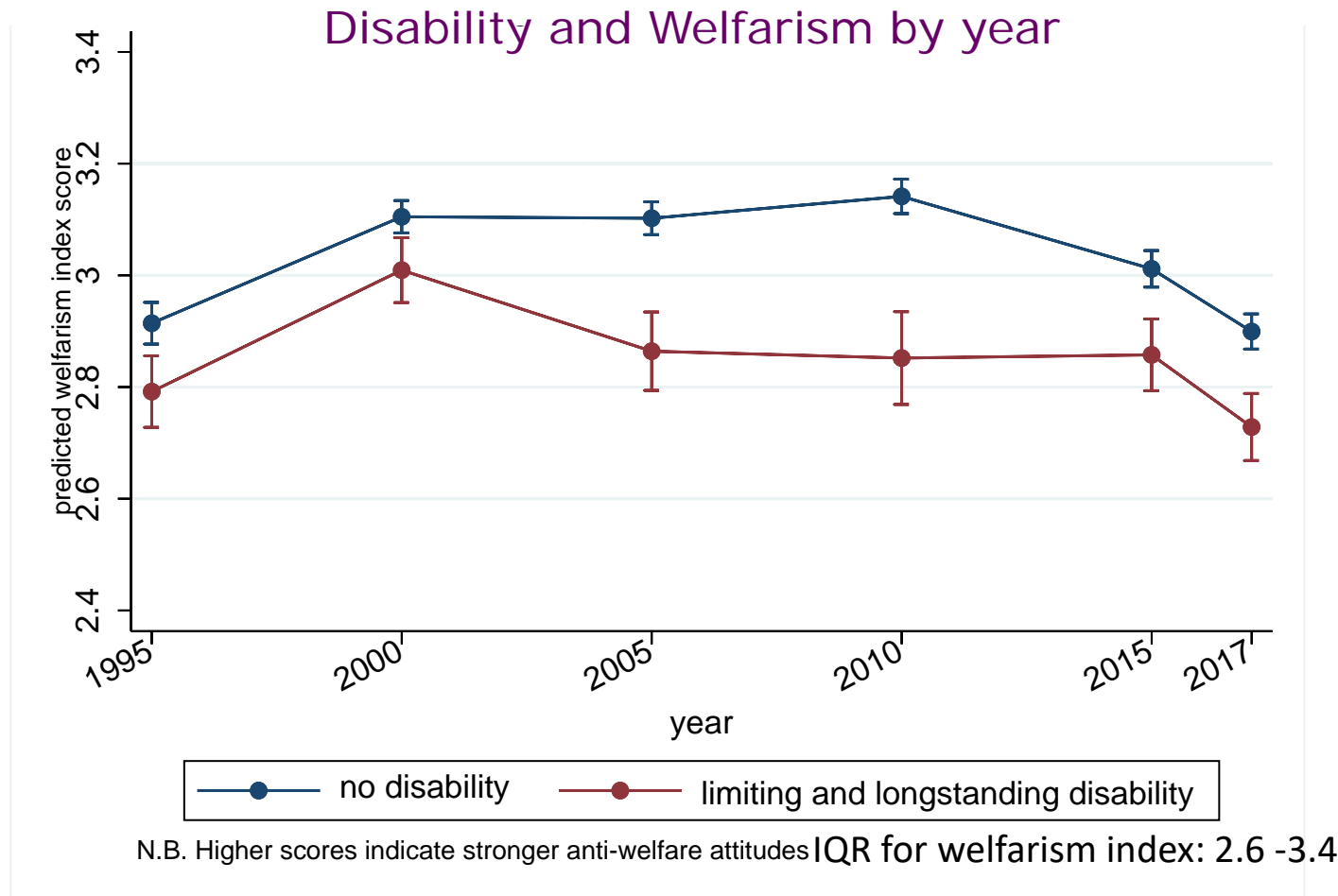
Trends over time: Attitudes about immigration



Results: do groups hard hit by recession and austerity have more positive attitudes to welfare than comparator groups, and have views diverged over time?

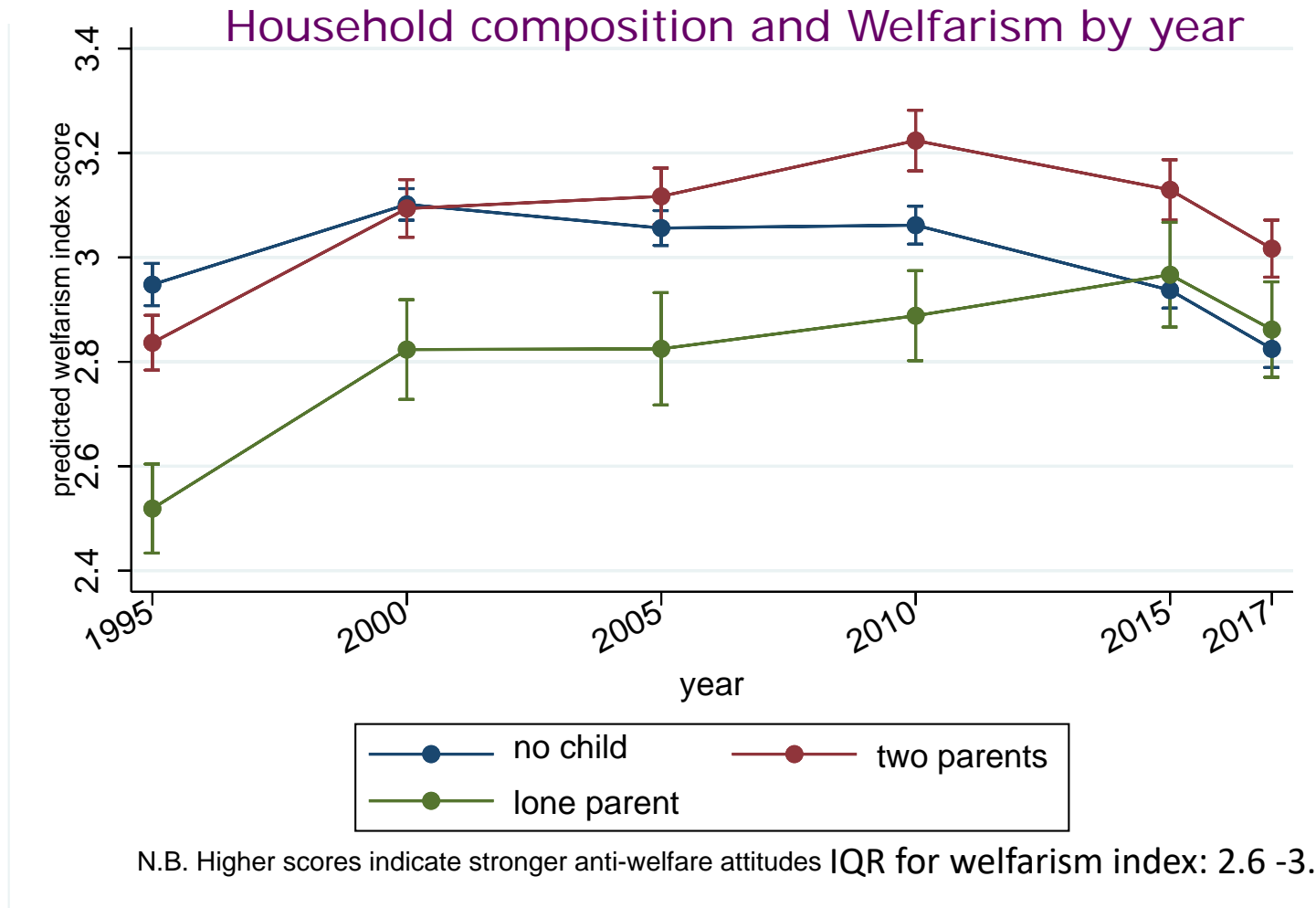
Findings: Disability and attitudes over time

Disabled people have more positive attitudes towards the **welfare state** and more concern about **inequality** than non-disabled people. No evidence of divergence despite cuts to benefits and services since 2010.



Findings: Household composition and attitudes over time

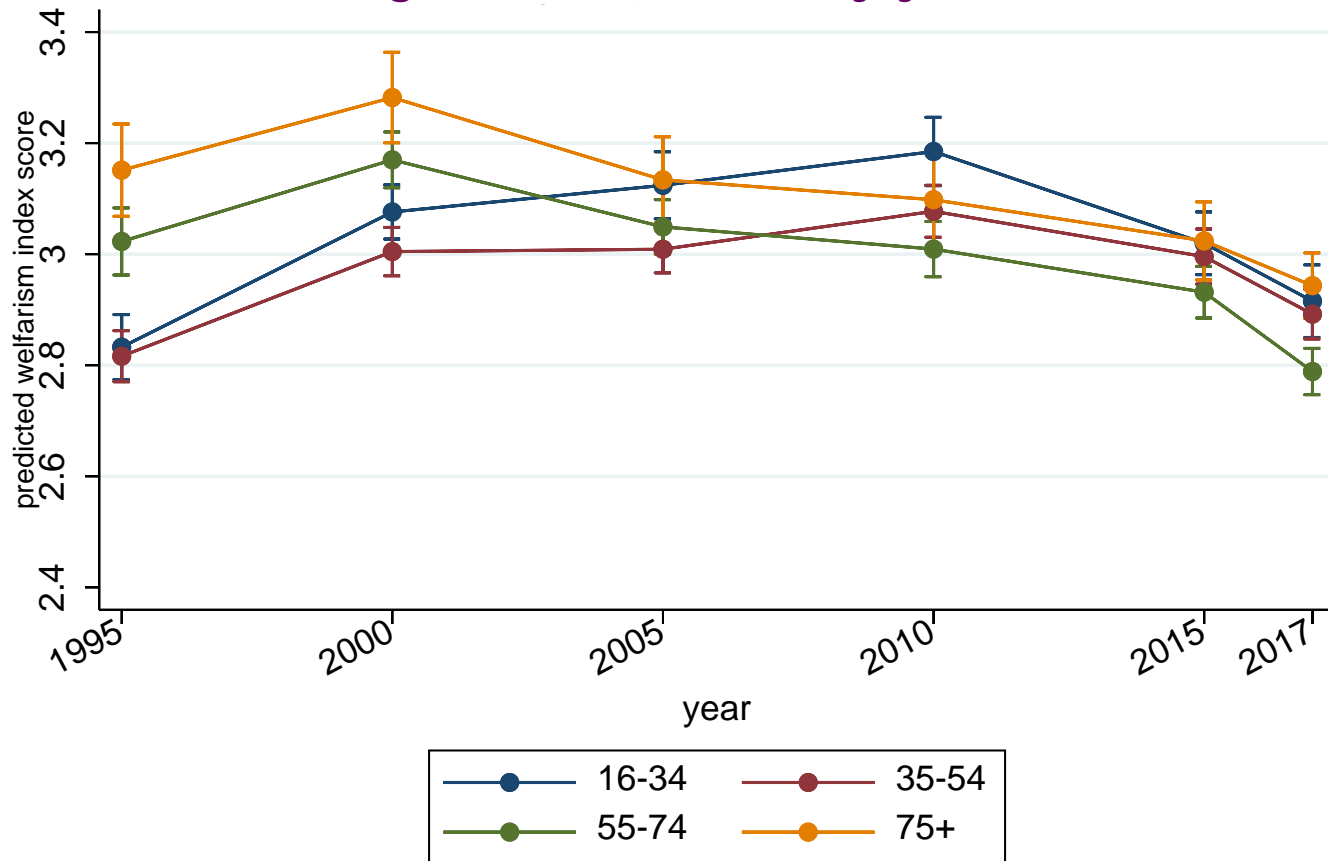
Lone parents are more **pro-welfare** in 1995 but despite benefiting from expansion of social security (1997-2010) followed by harsher conditionality and restrictions post 2010, their attitudes converge with couple parents over the period. No change in attitudinal gap regarding **inequality**.



Findings: Age and attitudes over time

A story of convergence in attitudes by age (controlling for other characteristics). Older age groups were more anti-welfare but not different by 2017. Significant narrowing of attitudinal gap for **welfarism** and **immigration** but not **inequality**.

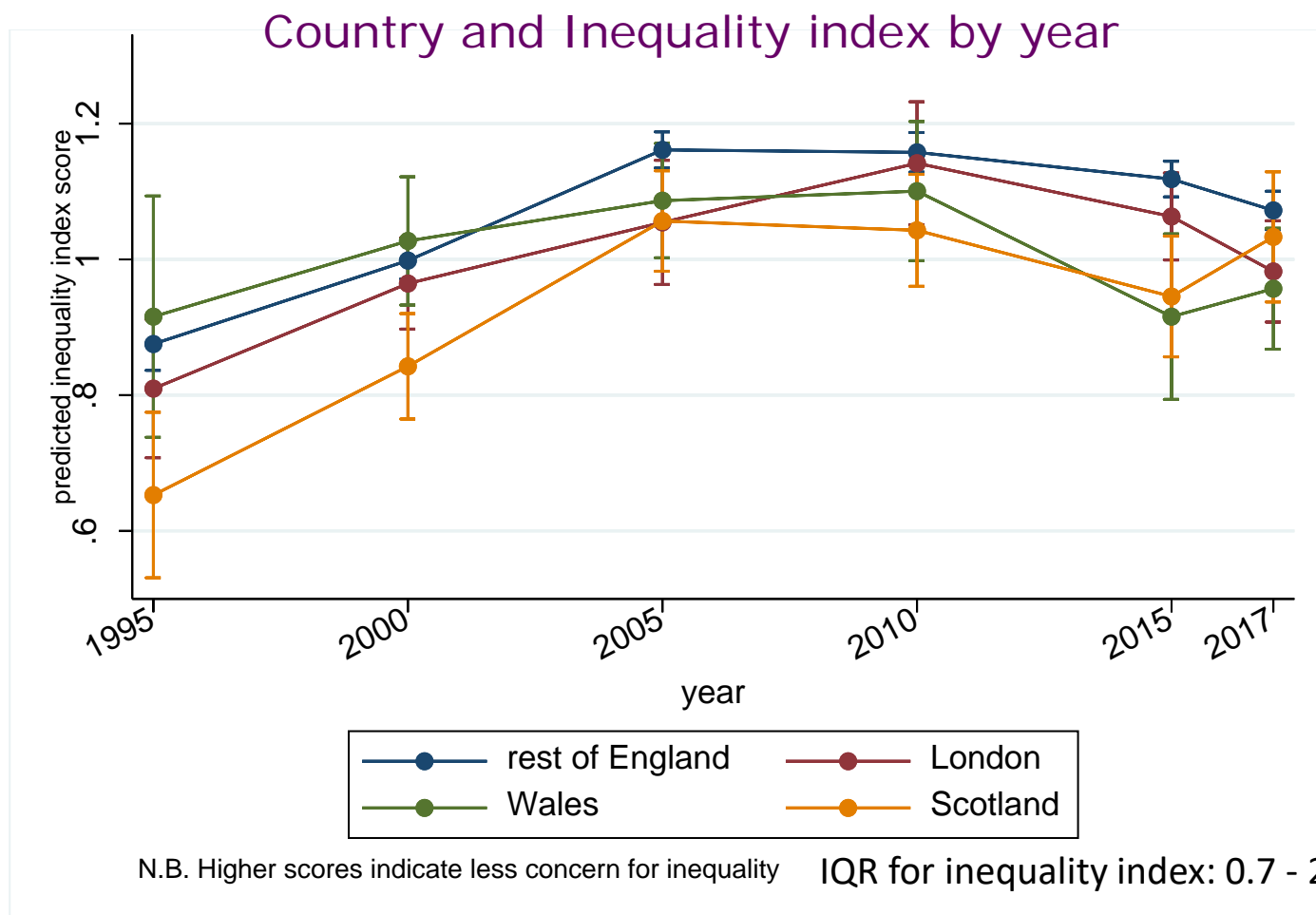
Age and Welfarism by year



N.B. Higher scores indicate stronger anti-welfare attitudes IQR for welfarism index: 2.6 -3.4

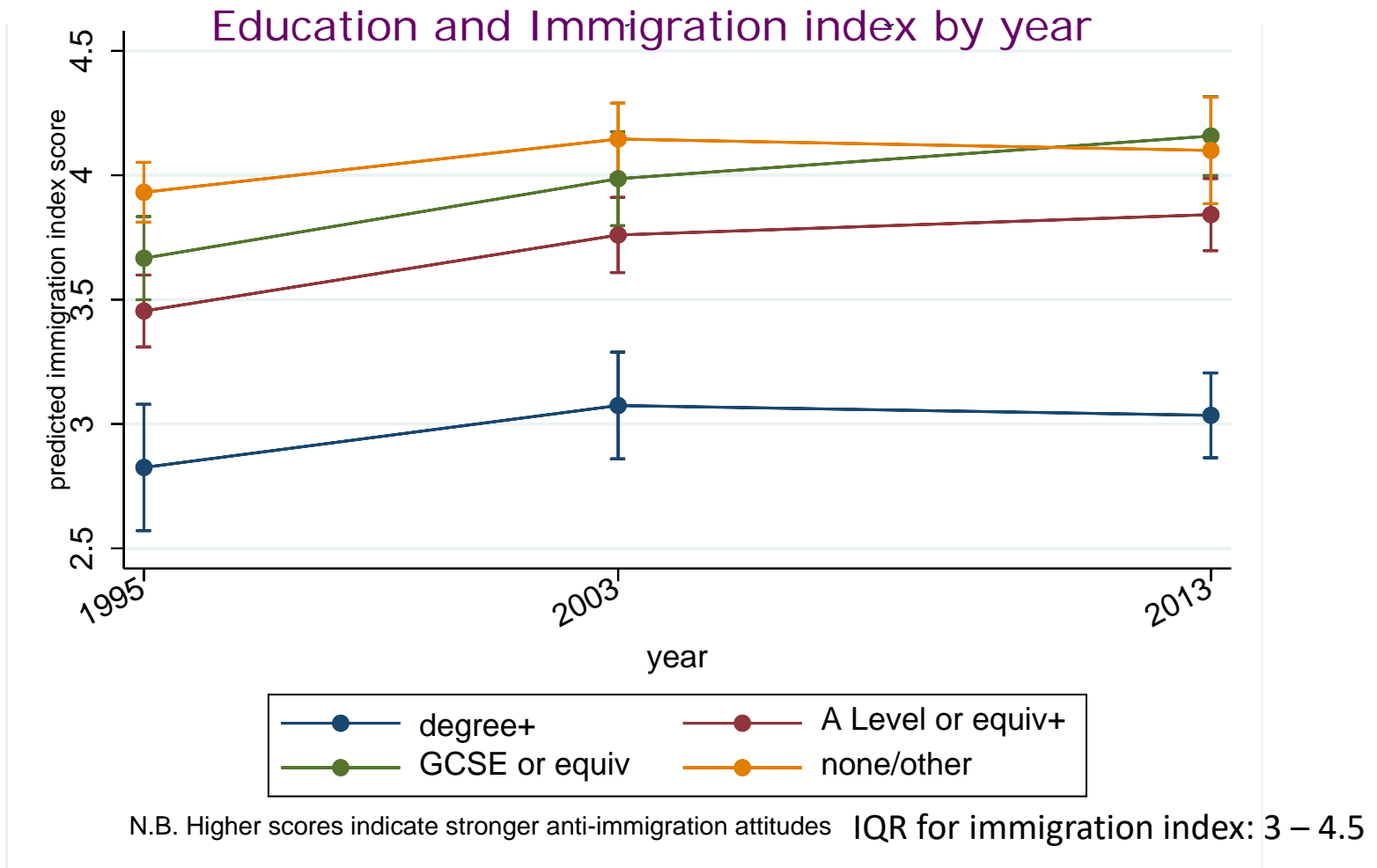
Findings: Country and attitudes over time

Scotland becomes more similar to England by end of period in terms of attitudes about **immigration** (after divergence) and **inequality** as Scotland becomes more hostile about immigration and less concerned about inequality. No sig change in terms of **welfarism**.



Findings: Education and attitudes over time

People with degree+ are most positive about the **welfare state** (convergence) and least hostile towards **immigration**. High concern about **inequality** similar to those with no/other qualifications.



Discussion and conclusions

Overall findings

Disadvantage does not neatly map onto attitudes

- Overall we find some groups who are disadvantaged (disabled people, lone parents) have more pro-welfare attitudes and are more concerned about inequality but other (the young, less well educated) are not.

Not a story of increased division (indeed some convergence)

- We do not find that disadvantaged groups have diverged from others in their attitudes about the welfare state, inequality and immigration.

Discussion: How do we make sense of these results?

No single underlying driver of these phenomena.

- Different explanations for trends in attitudes over time, differences between groups at a point in time and whether differences increase/decrease over time

Mistaken to assume attitudes across these three areas follow same patterns

- Three independent outcomes and neither trends over time nor differences between groups follow consistent patterns
- This goes against a simple characterisation of a 'divided Britain'

Limitations and areas for further research

Measures:

- Attitudinal indices do not capture full nuances that can be achieved with qualitative or deliberative approaches (but only indicators of change over long period)

Data constraints:

- Years and indicators available. Trend may differ for intervening years.
- Other socio-demographic characteristics (ethnicity, region) might reveal different patterns).

Further research:

- Understanding more about what shapes people's attitudes to inequality (see work by Kate Summers, Fabien Accominetti et al)

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Thank you for listening! Questions and
comments welcome

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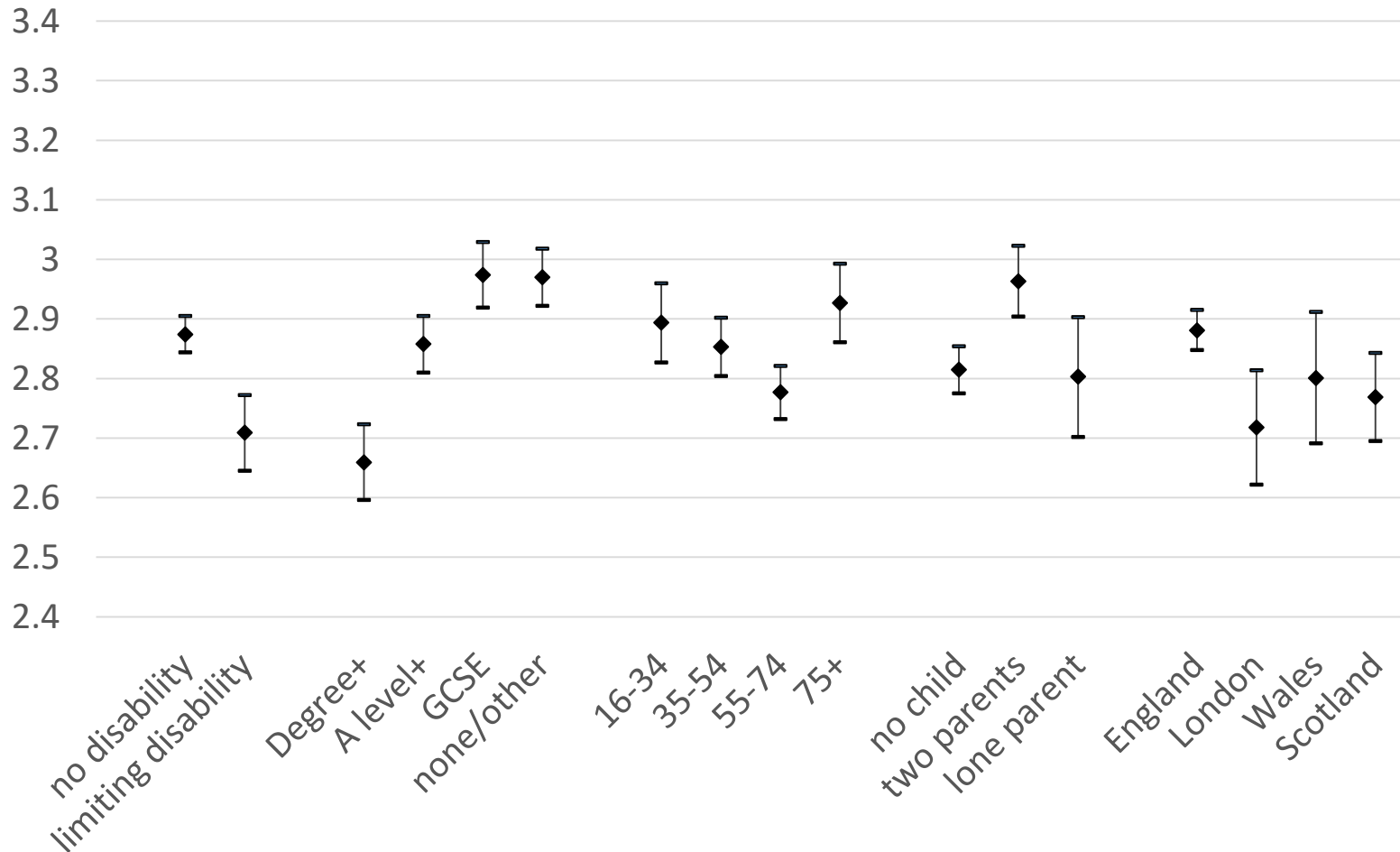
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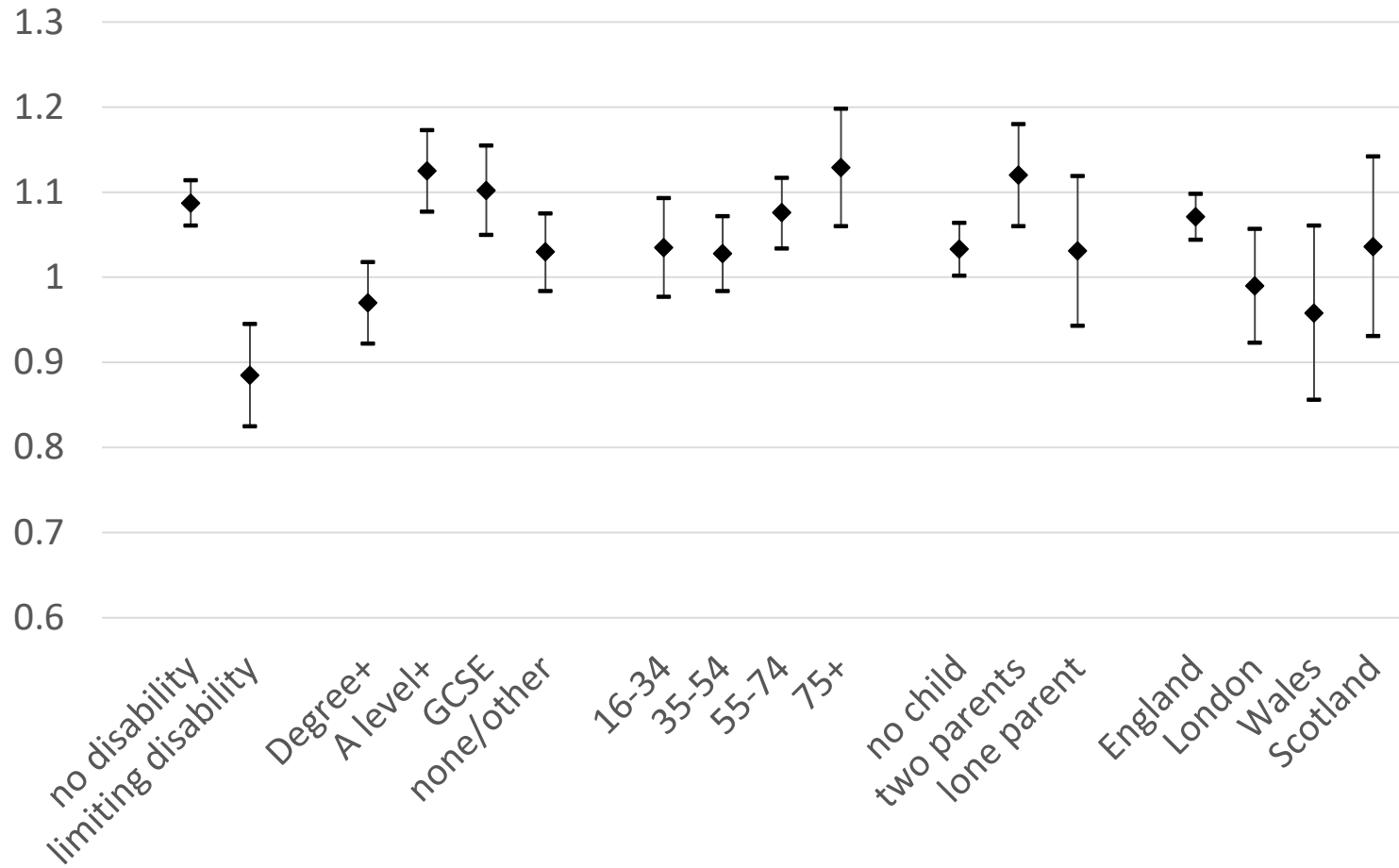
Results for 2017 by characteristics

Attitudes about the Welfare State in 2017



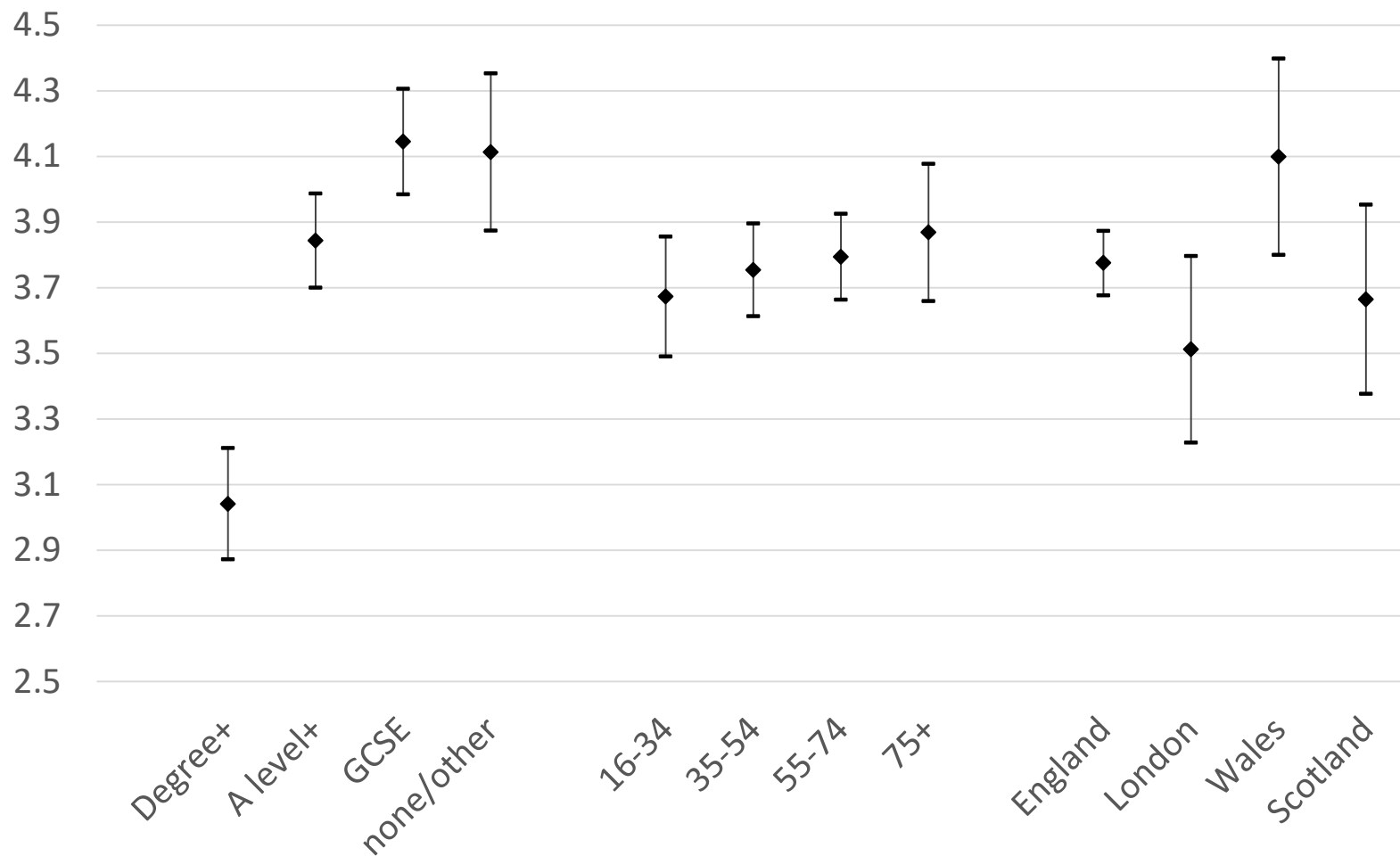
Source: authors' calculations using BSA 2017. Note: Higher scores indicate stronger anti-welfare attitudes. Predicted scores on the index are indicated by the diamond and 95% confidence intervals by the whiskers.

Attitudes about inequality in 2017



Source: authors' calculations using BSA 2017. Note: Higher scores indicate less concern about inequality. Predicted scores on the index are indicated by the diamond and 95% confidence intervals by the whiskers.

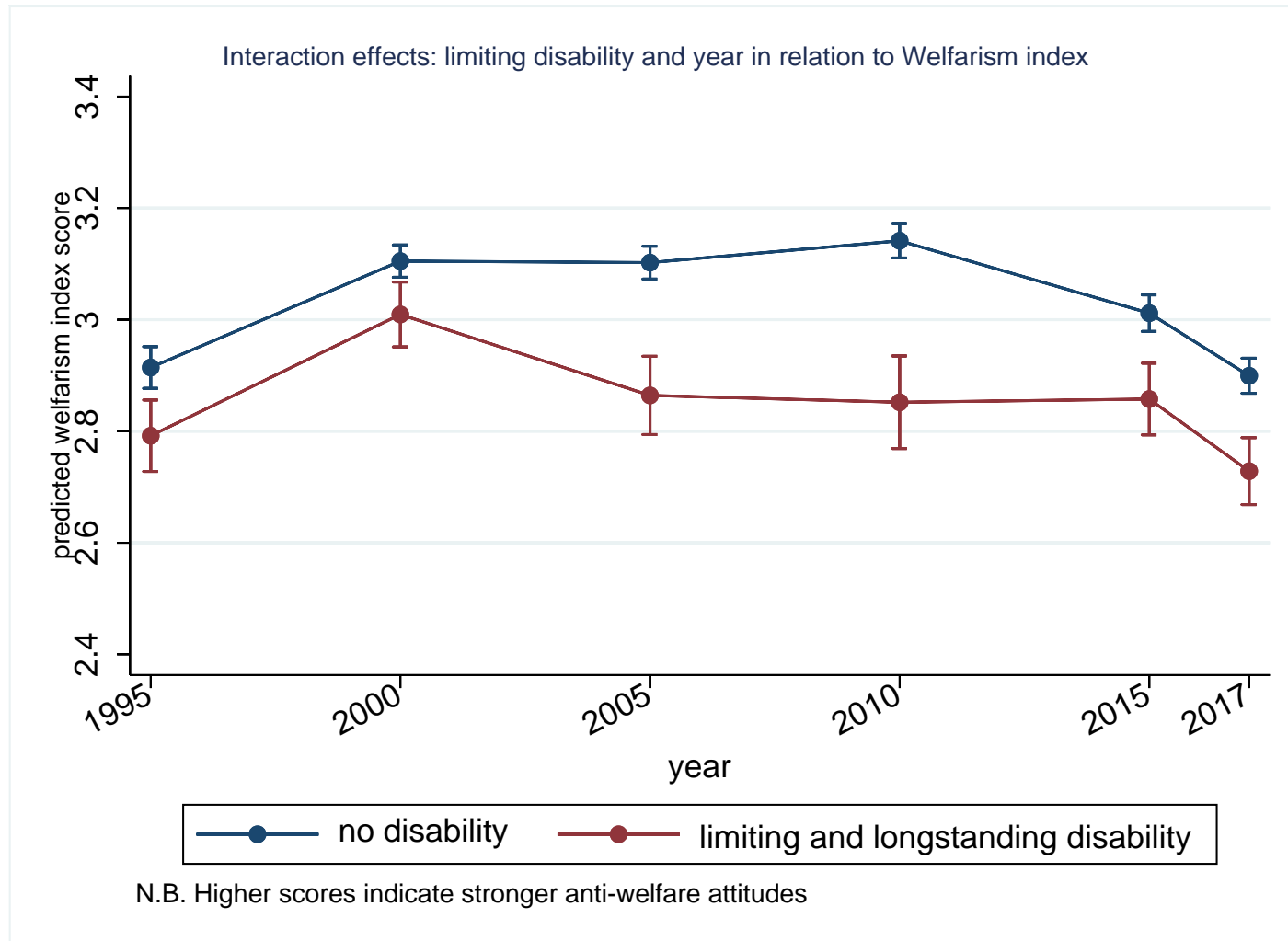
Attitudes about immigration in 2017



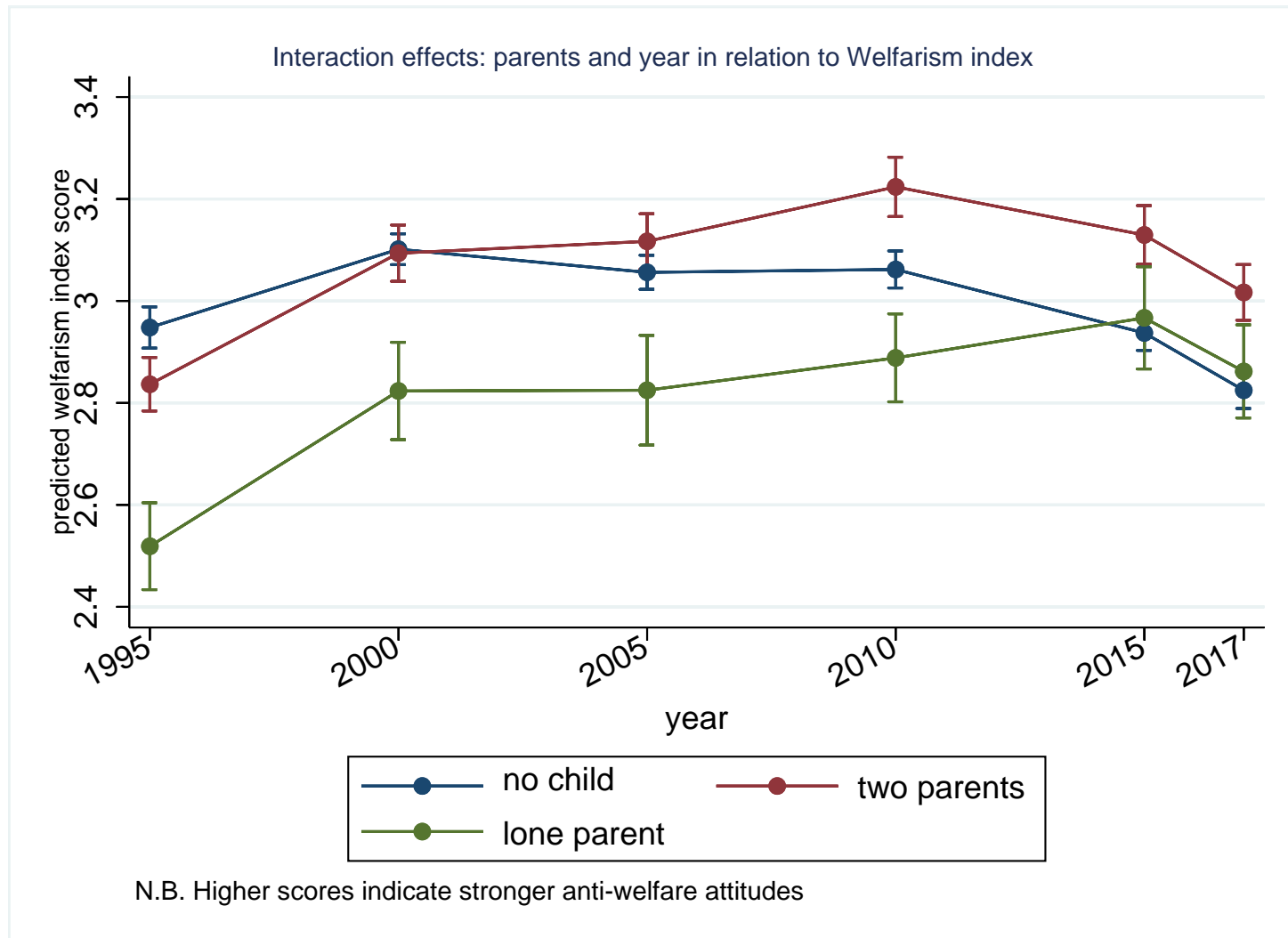
Source: authors' calculations using BSA 2013. Note: Higher scores indicate stronger anti-immigration attitudes. Predicted scores on the index are indicated by the diamond and 95% confidence intervals by the whiskers.

Interactions 1: Welfarism index results

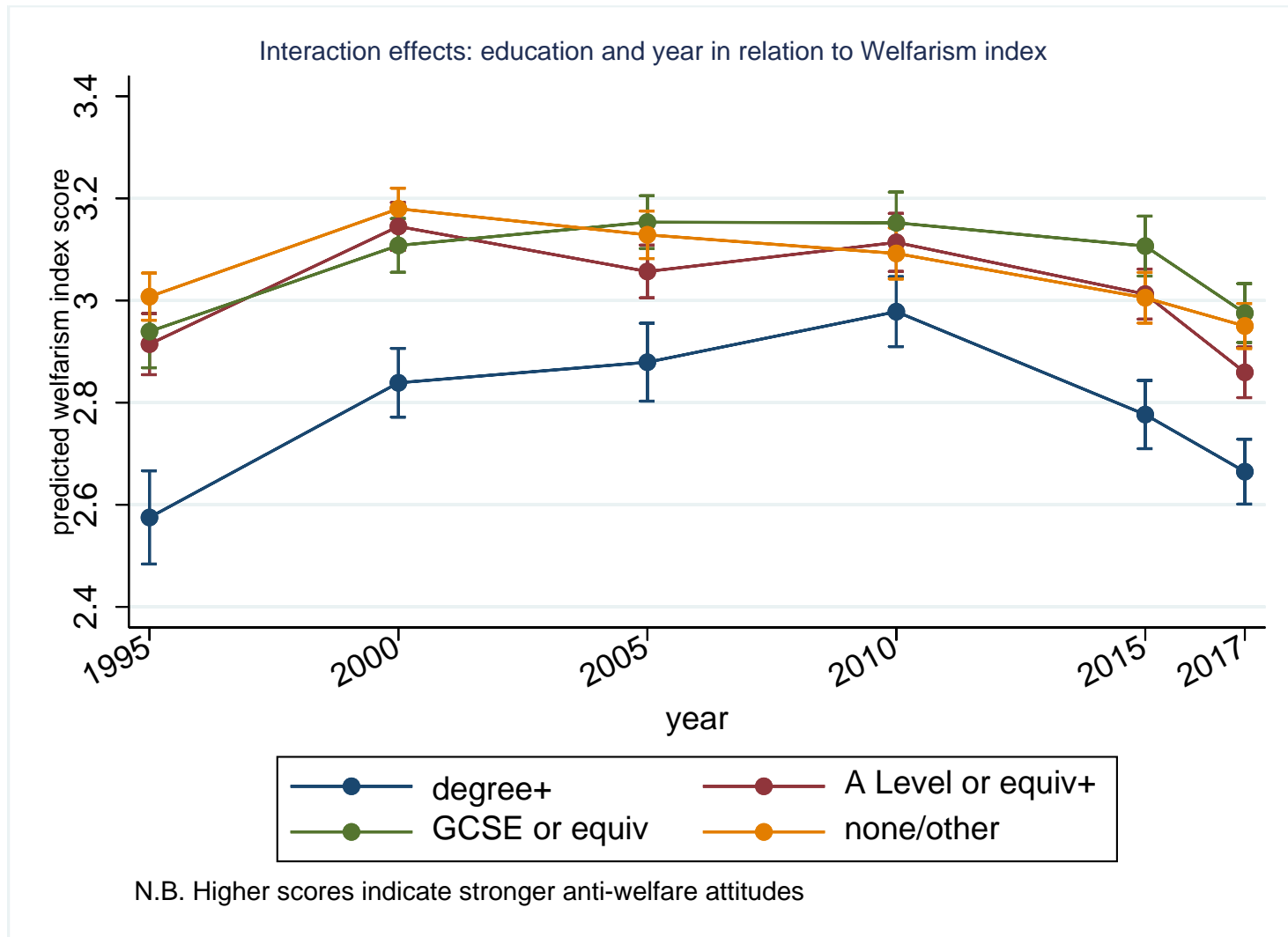
Disability and Welfarism by year



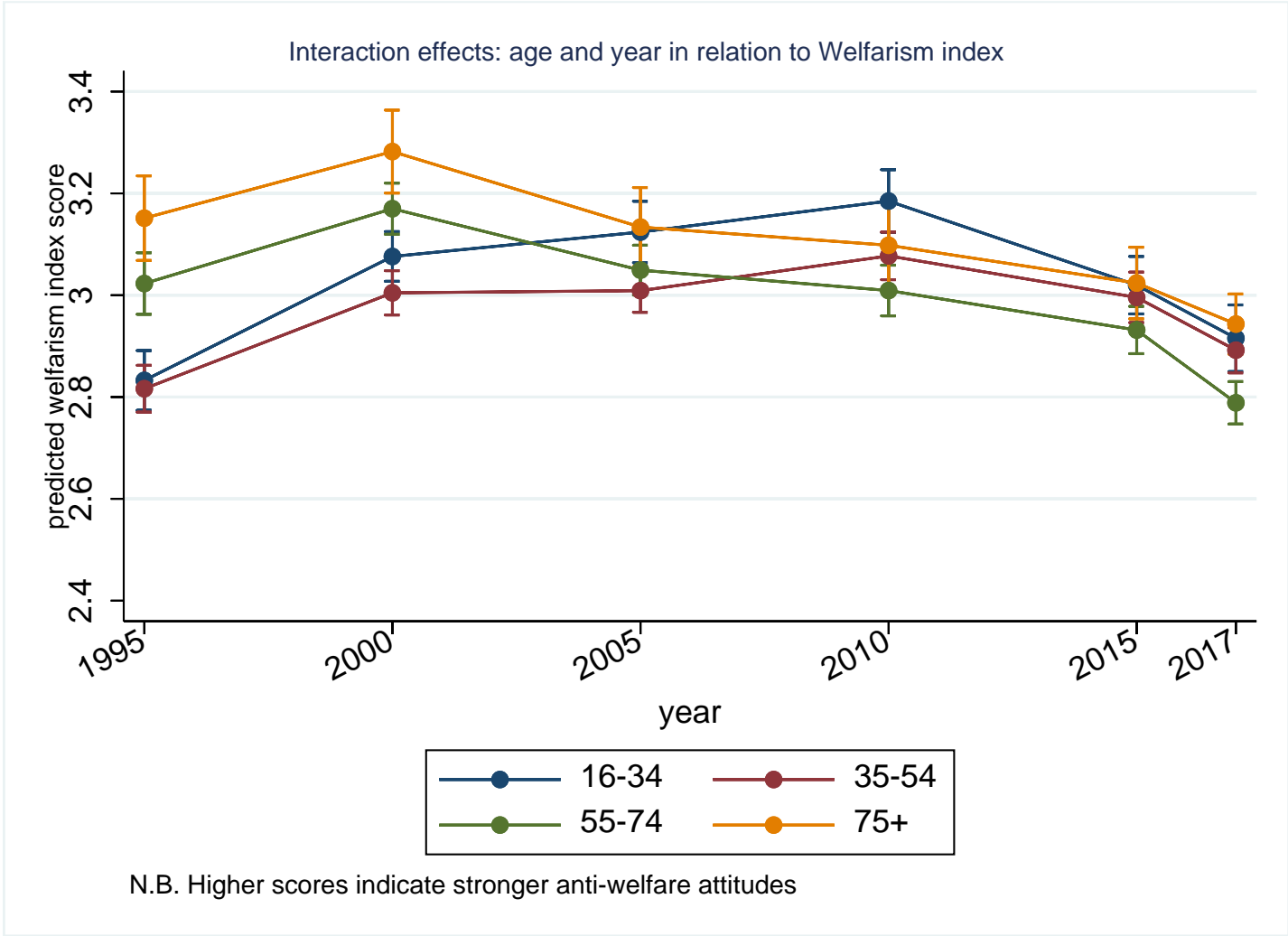
Household composition and Welfarsim by year



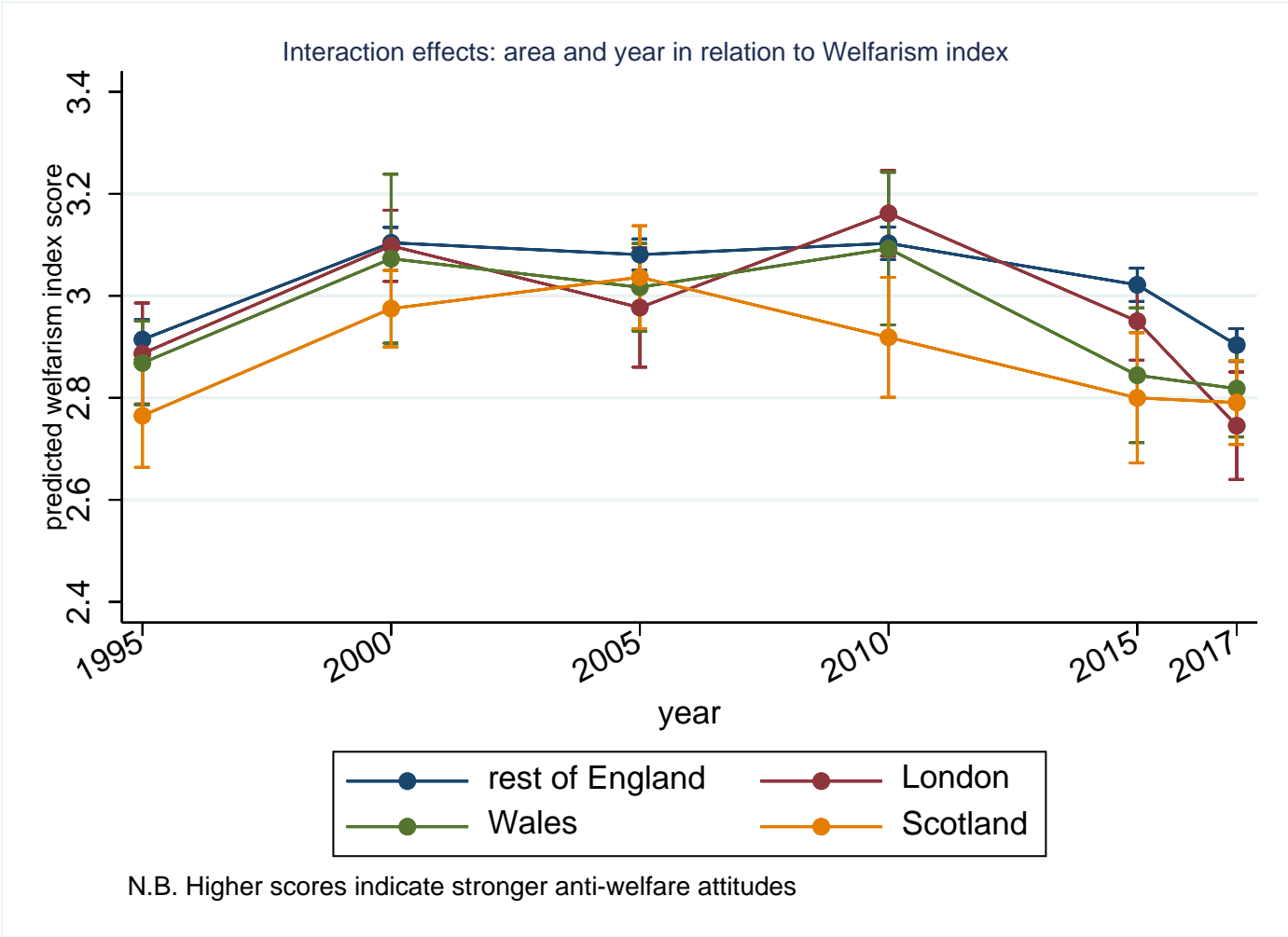
Education and Welfarism by year



Age and Welfarism by year

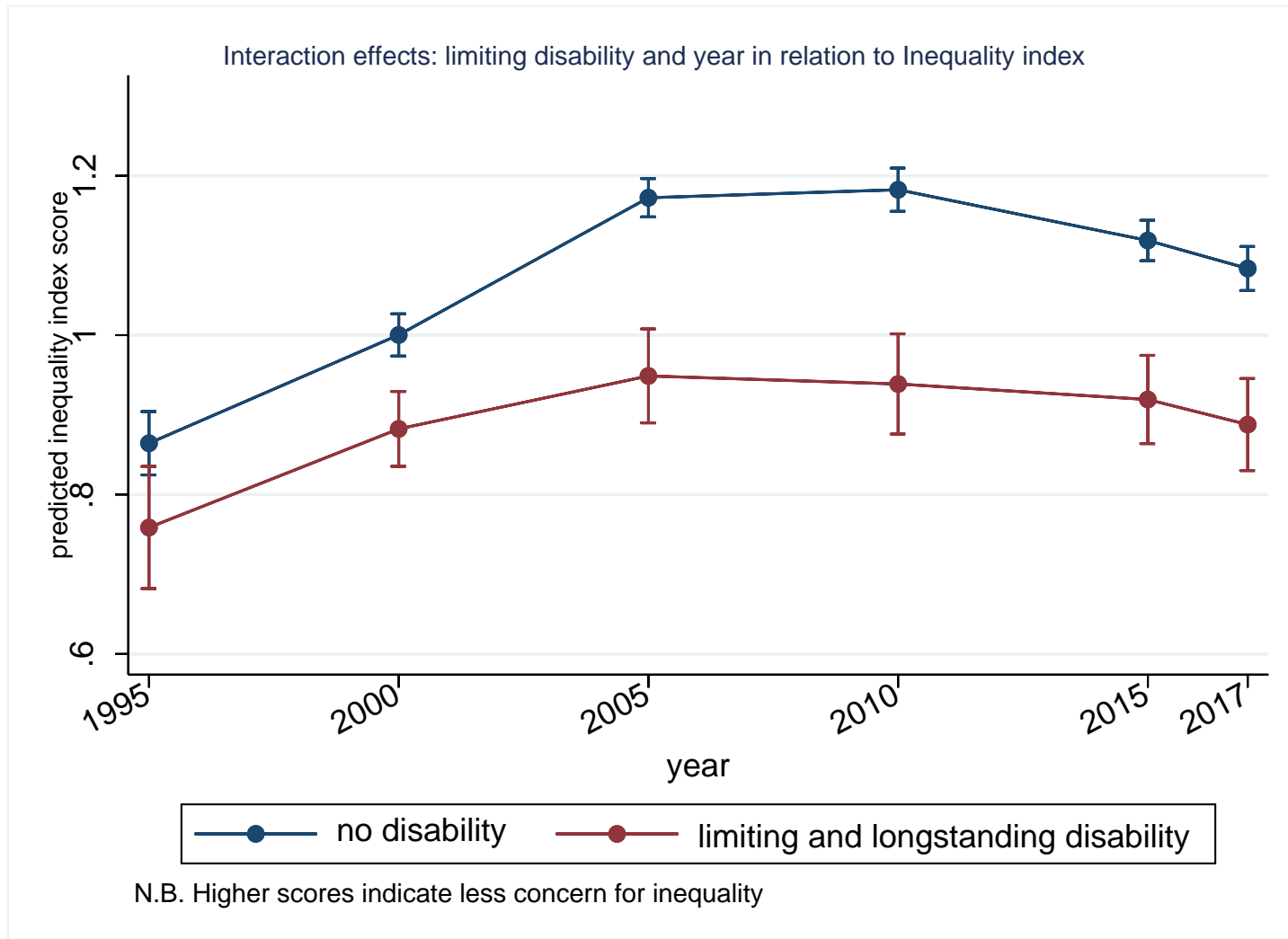


Country and Welfarism by year

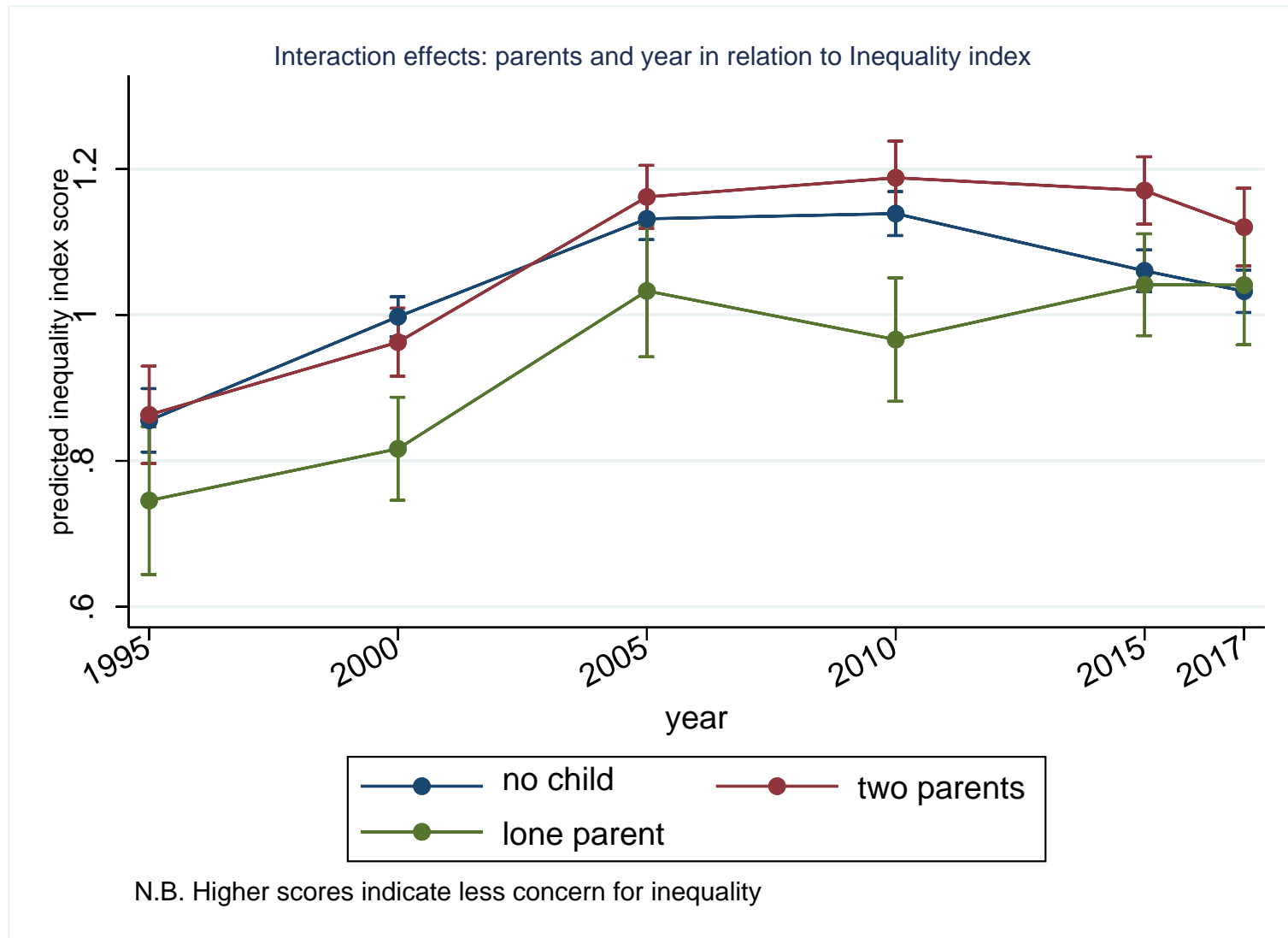


Interactions 2: Inequality index results

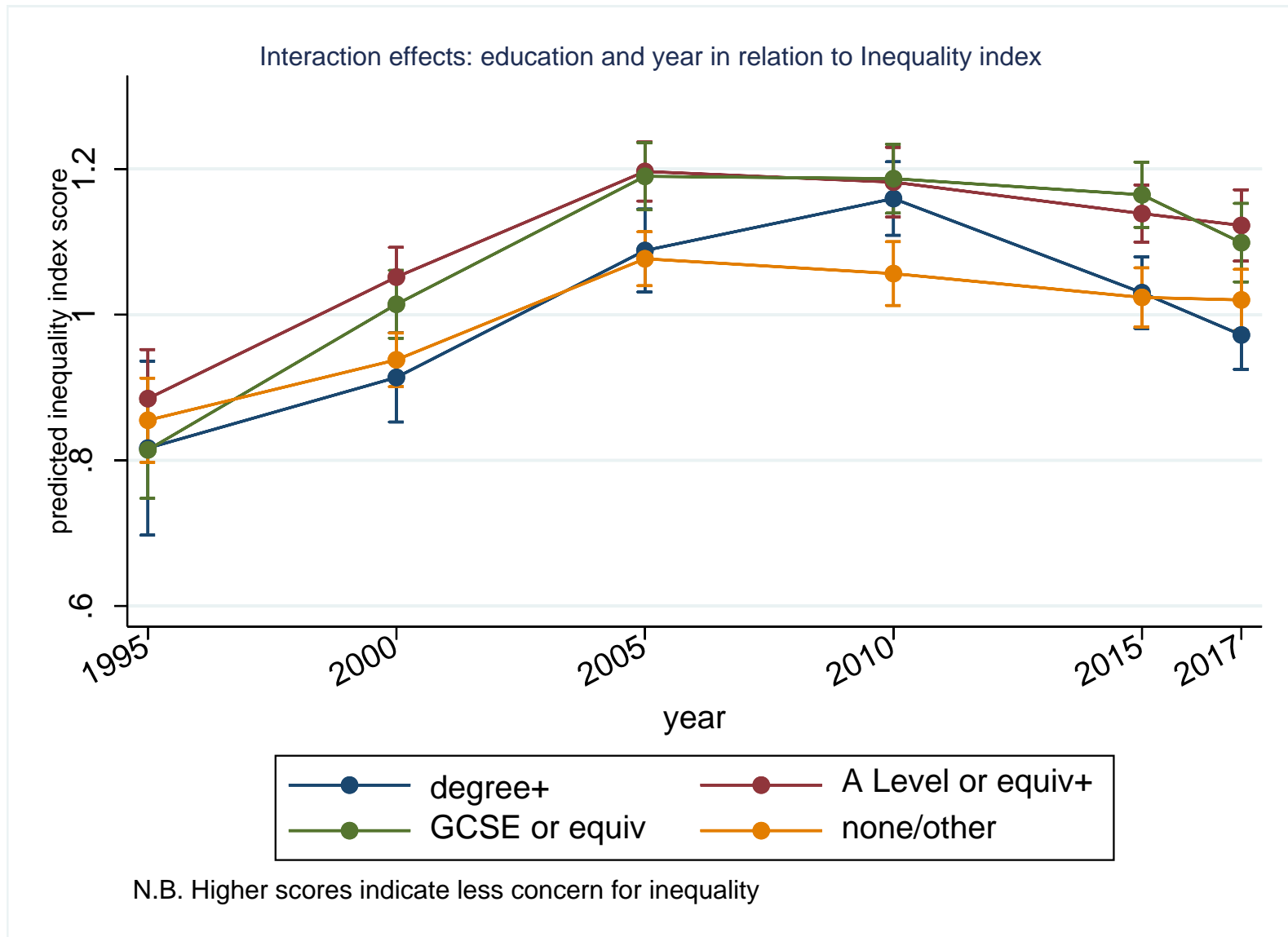
Disability and Inequality index by year



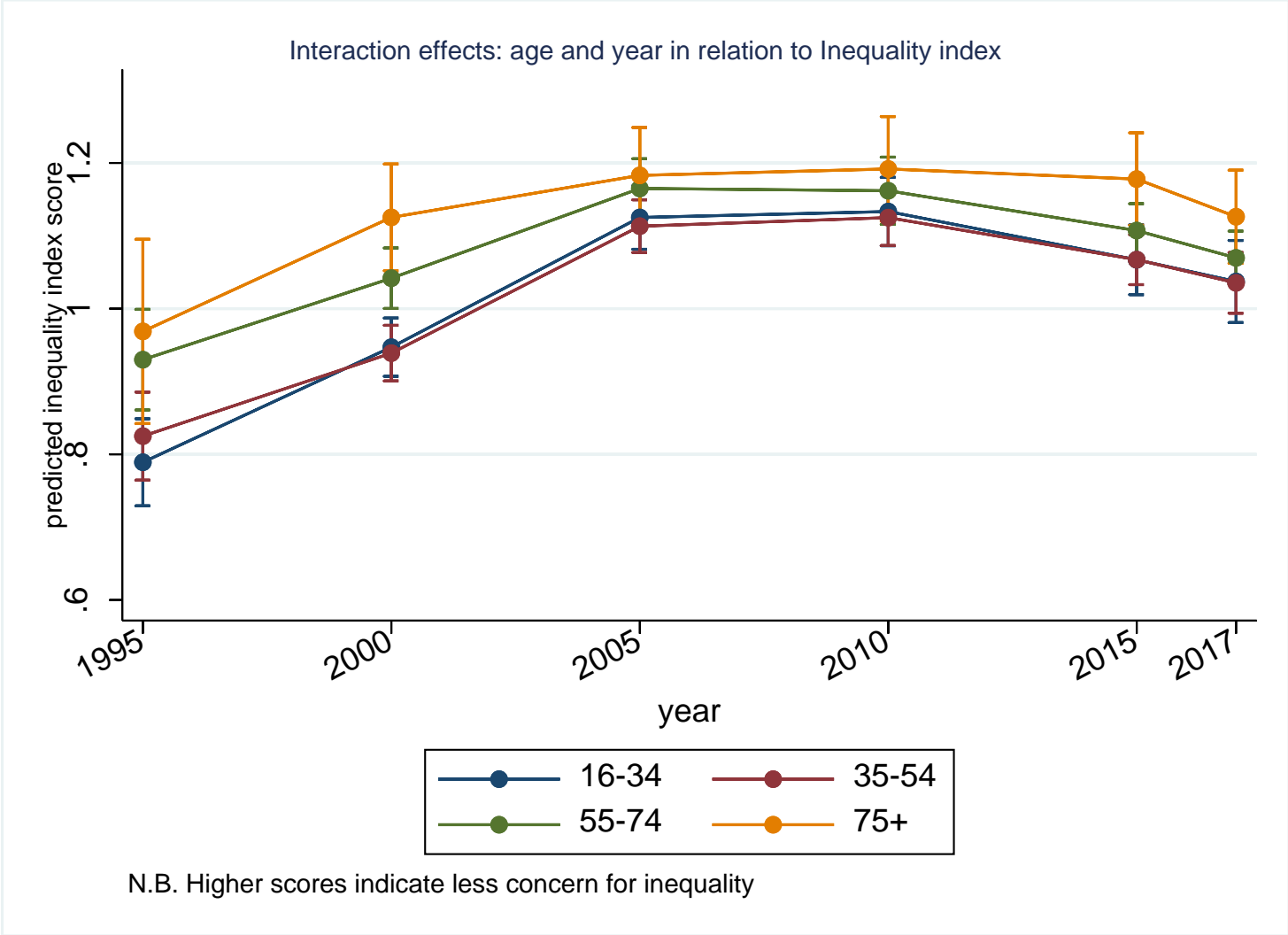
Household composition and Inequality index by year



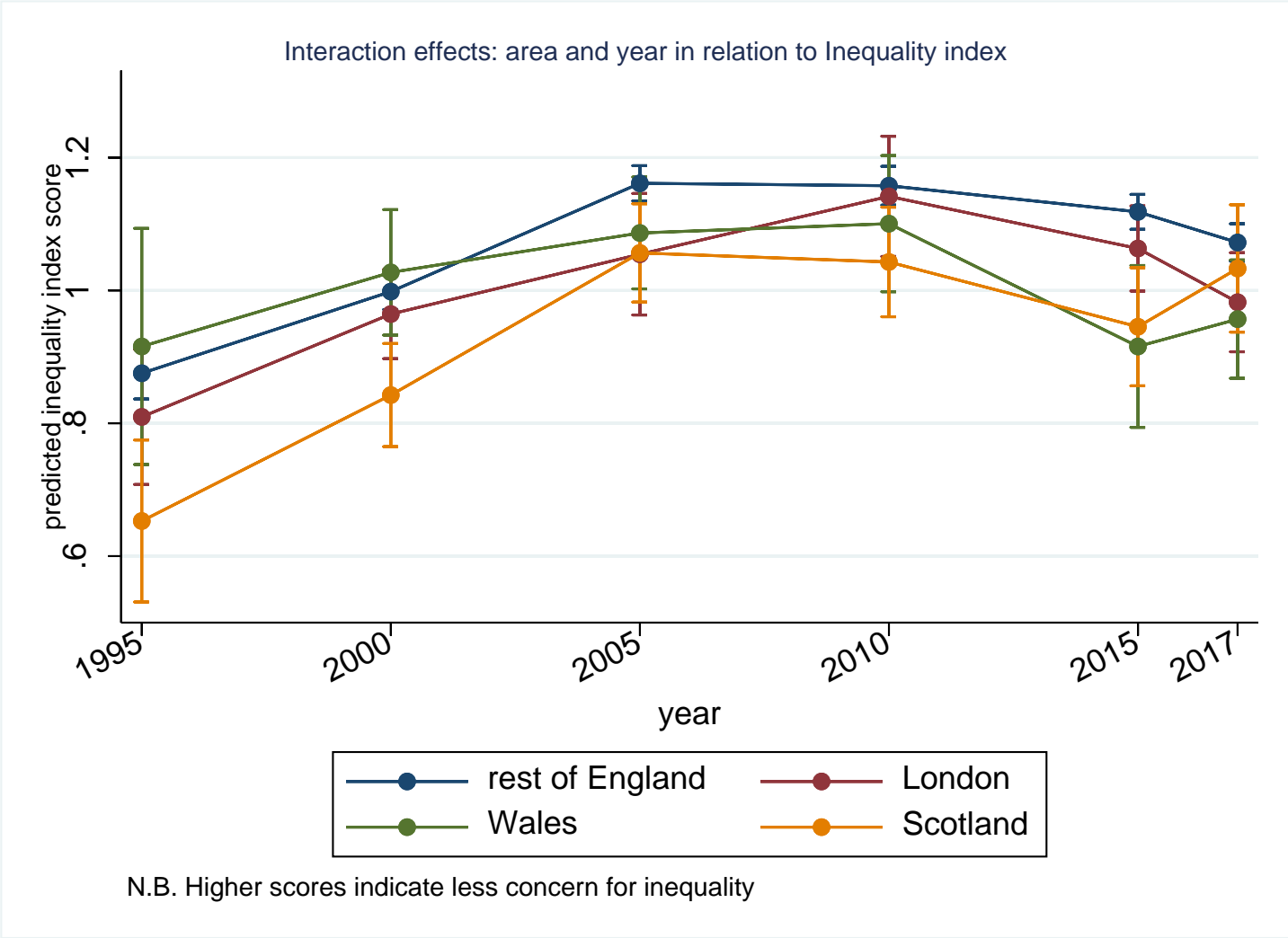
Education and Inequality index by year



Age and Inequality index by year

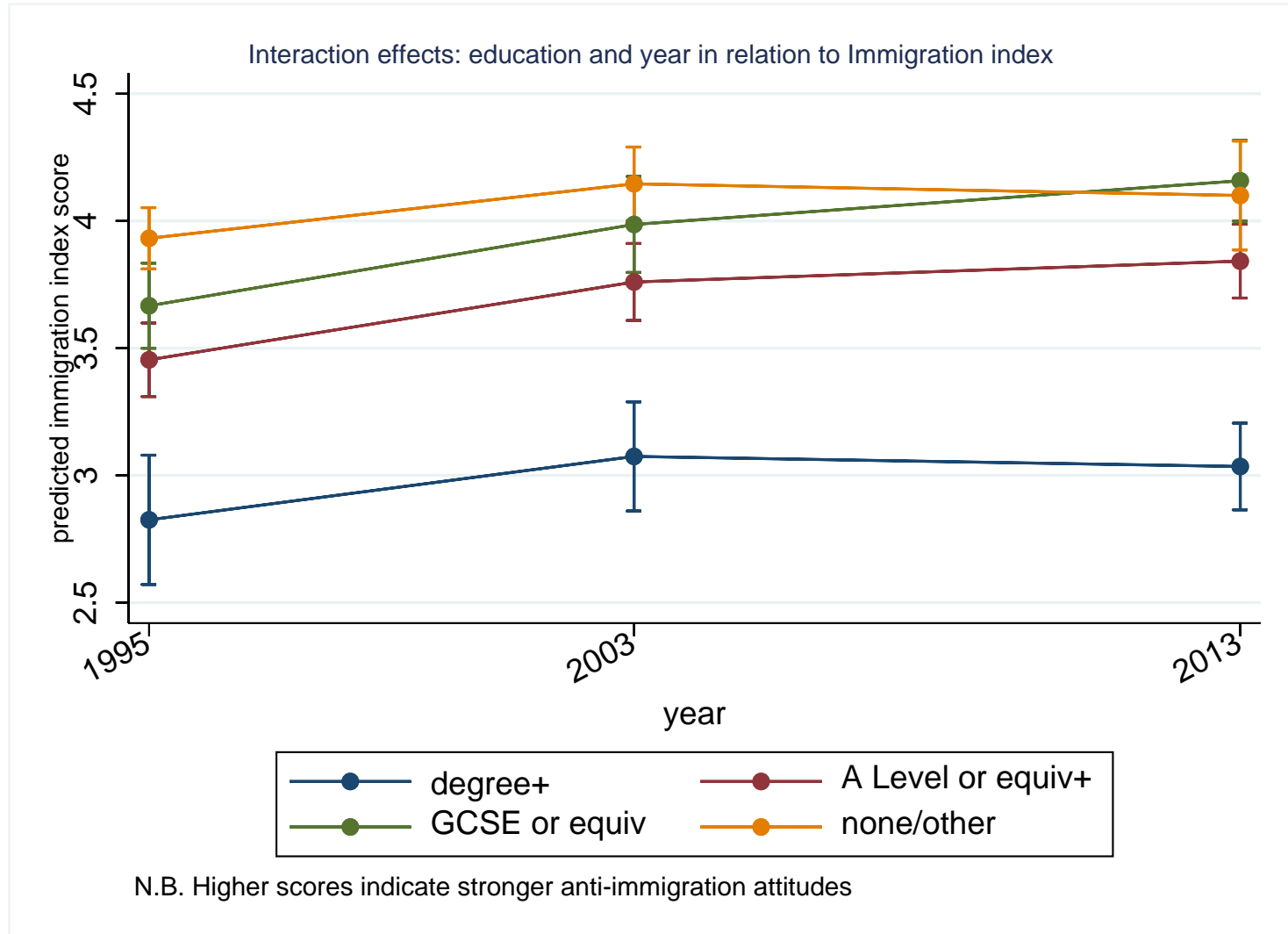


Country and Inequality index by year

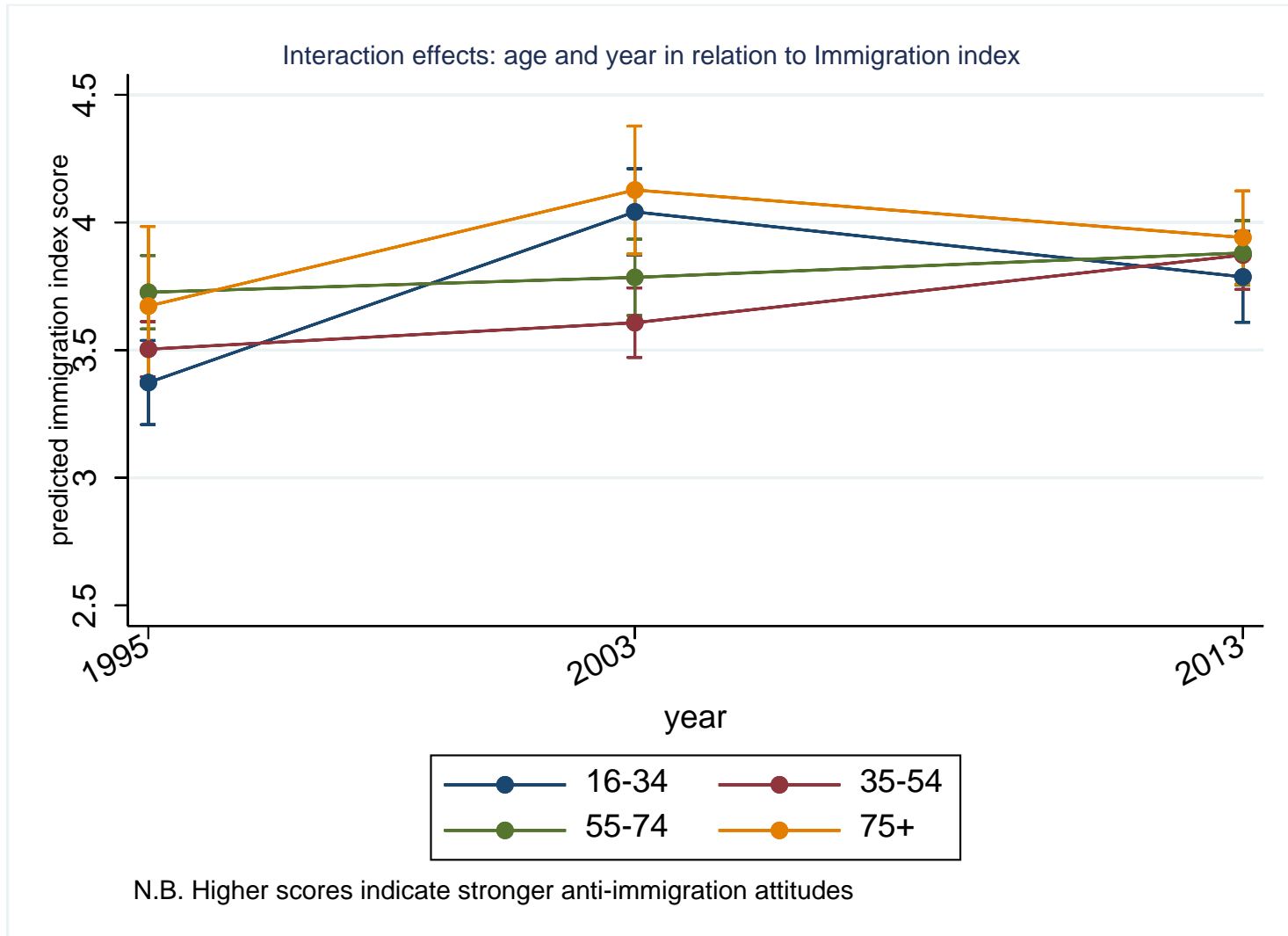


Interactions 3: Immigration index results

Education and Immigration index by year



Age and Immigration index by year



Country and Immigration index by year

