

## Twitter Thread by Noah Smith



**Noah Smith**

[@Noahpinion](#)



**1/Lately I've been reading a ton of books about immigration and diversity. The most recent one is "Americanism in the Twenty-First Century", by <https://t.co/neqzyYVaYS>**

**What" target="\_blank">[@debbiejsr](#).**

**<https://t.co/neqzyYVaYS>**

### What did I learn?

2/This book is not very "pop". It's a dry political science book that's basically a concatenation of several research papers, all based on one big survey that was done in 2004. <https://t.co/efr9BUENHI>

3/The survey, the 21-CAS, asks people about how they define their own identity - race, national origin, and/or "American".

It also asks them about what they think being an "American" entails.

4/Basically, the survey asks people about 5 types of "Americanism":

1. Feeling like an American
2. Believing traditional American values like freedom
3. Civic participation (voting, etc.)
4. Multiculturalism vs. blending in
5. Being white and/or Christian

5/I edited out a few others (e.g. being born in America, being a citizen, speaking English). Anyway.

The upshot is that except for being white/Christian, most of these definitions of "American" get broad endorsement from all groups of people surveyed.

6/Only 17.4% of survey respondents said having European ancestors was important for being an American. 34.9% said being a Christian was important.

In comparison, 96.9% said respecting other people's cultural differences was important for being an American.

7/In addition, pluralities of all the big racial (or "pan-ethnic") groups - whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians - identified as "Americans" first and foremost.

whites - 89.4%

blacks - 52.3%

Latinos - 53.6%

Asians - 47.3%

8/For black people, racial identification was also common (41%).

For Latinos and Asians, national-origin identification (e.g. "Mexican", "Chinese", etc.) was common (28.2% for Latinos, 36% for Asians). Many of the people choosing national-origin identity were foreign-born.

9/Some more numbers for what people thought it means to be an American:

Letting other people do what they want - 87.8%

Carrying on the cultural traditions of one's ancestors - 72.7%

Blending into the larger society - 73.4%

Pursuing economic success through hard work - 90.7%

10/Some of these bear repeating.

The % of people who said "carrying on the cultural traditions of one's ancestors" is crucial for being an American was FOUR TIMES as large as the % who said "having European ancestors" was important!

11/Also, almost everyone surveyed (94.1%) agreed that being able to speak English was important for being an American. And 93.7% said having American citizenship was important.

That should quiet the fears of the Huntingtonian nativists...

12/What's more, the conception of what it means to be an American basically didn't vary across races.

This means that at least in 2004, most Americans thought of themselves as "Americans", and most agreed about what that meant.

13/After establishing these basic facts, the book correlated different conceptions of Americanism, and different self-identities, with various policy preferences and with perceptions of discrimination.

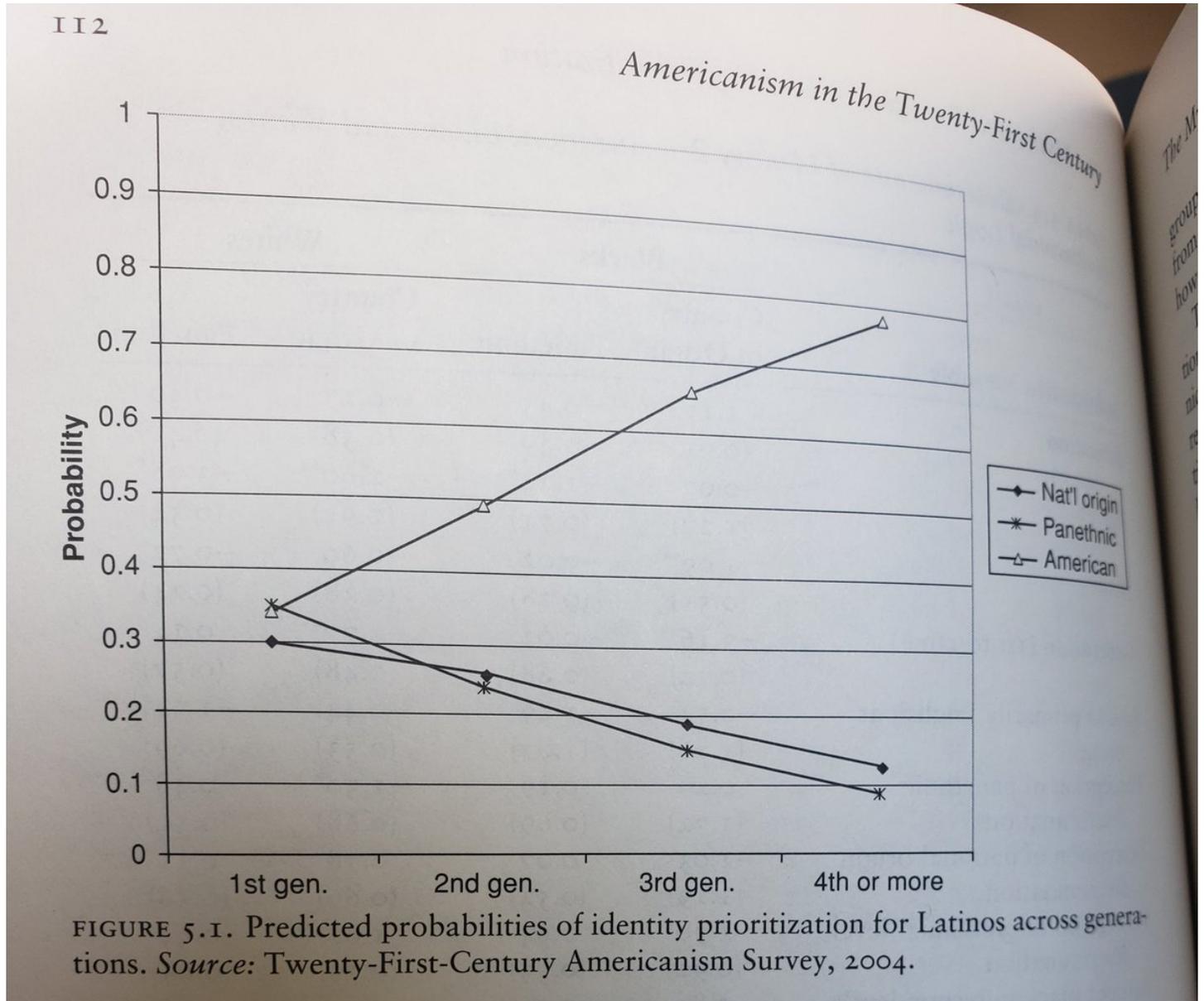
This approach has at least two big methodological problems...

14/The first problem is that since such large majorities of people agree on what it means to be an American, there isn't much variation in the data.

The second problem, of course, is telling correlation from causation. This is just a survey.

15/But a few interesting facts really jump out.

For both Latinos and Asians, national-origin identity disappears across the generations, and American identity increases.



16/Note, though, that for Latinos, racial ("pan-ethnic") identity also declines, while for Asians it does not.

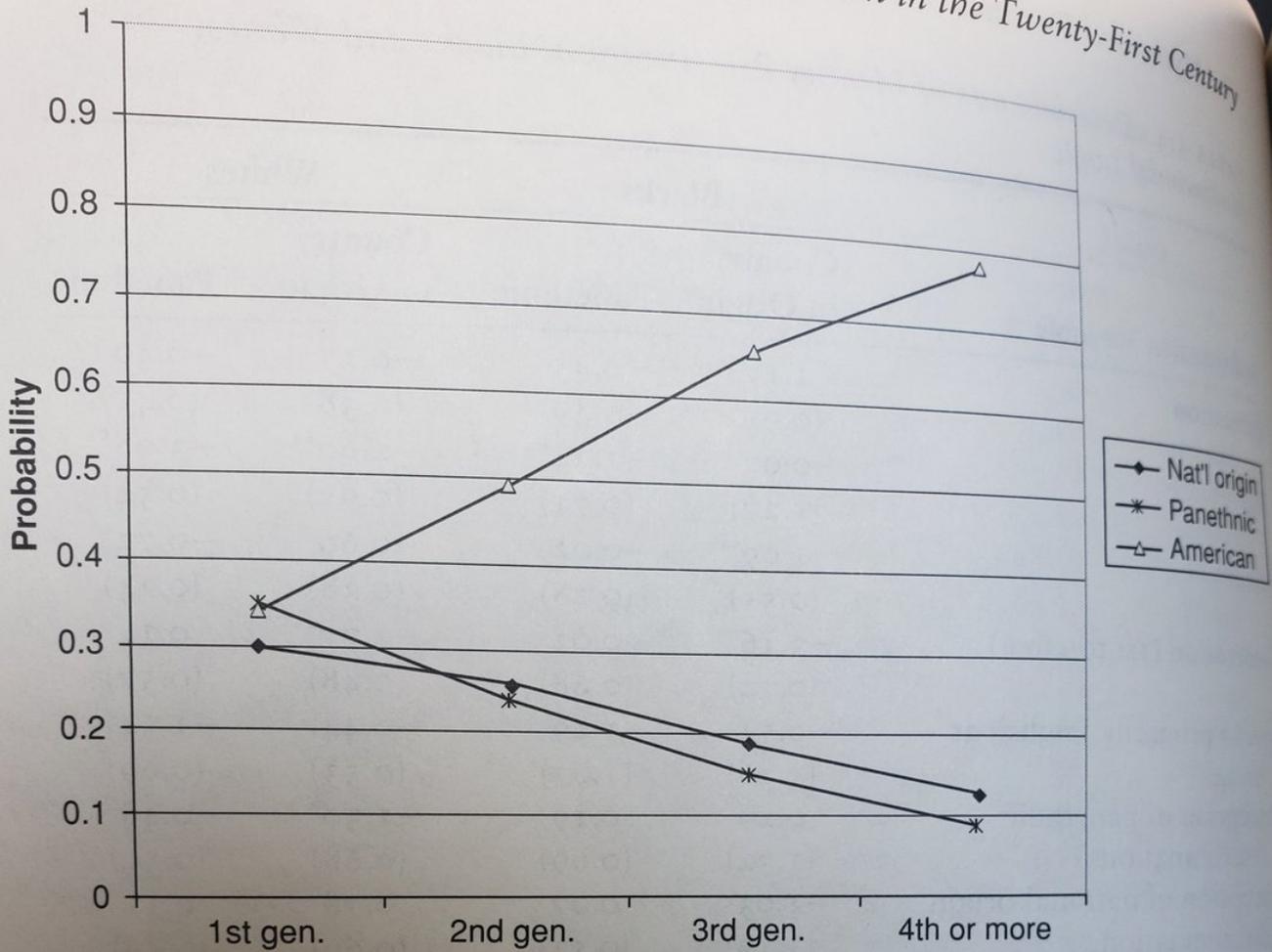


FIGURE 5.1. Predicted probabilities of identity prioritization for Latinos across generations. *Source:* Twenty-First-Century Americanism Survey, 2004.

17/Next, for both Latinos and Asians, the more people experience individual-level racial discrimination, the more they tend to identify with their racial and/or national-origin group rather than with America.

tions. Source.

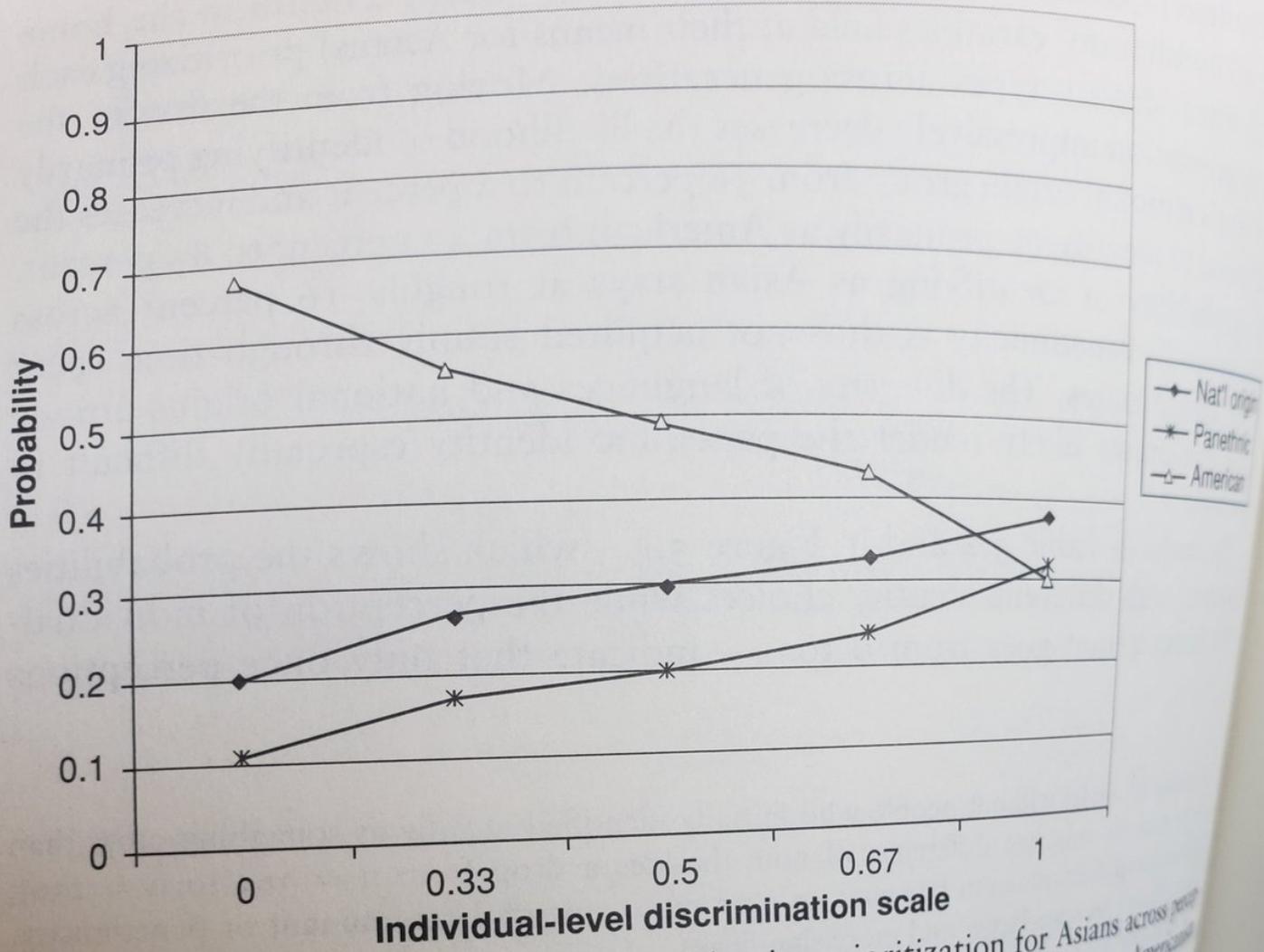


FIGURE 5.4. Predicted probabilities of identity prioritization for Asians across perceptions of individual-level discrimination. Source: Twenty-First-Century American Survey, 2004.

18/Now, there's an obvious correlation/causation problem here, namely that people who identify more strongly with their racial group might also be the type of people more likely to feel they're being discriminated against...

19/BUT, interestingly, there's not much correlation between Latinos' and Asians' identity and their perceptions that their racial GROUP is discriminated against in America.

It's only INDIVIDUAL-level discrimination that correlates with feeling less American.

20/This suggests that individual racial discrimination is the biggest danger for national unity in the face of large-scale immigration.

In other words, we need less of this crap: <https://t.co/jrB8vKexwR>

21/We need absolutely ZERO of this crap: <https://t.co/XiCJOLqgRA>

22/Not even a little bit of this crap!!!

<https://t.co/3QAucugyqF>

23/The data in "Americanism in the Twenty-First Century" strongly implies that if it weren't for asshole racists giving nonwhite Americans a hard time, we would have national unity.

24/Even WITH racists running around being assholes, most Americans of all races feel American, and we still all have broad agreement on what it means to be an American (at least, as of 2004).

But, we can do better.

25/If you see a racist giving someone a hard time or yelling "Get out of my country" or some such bullshit, shut them down immediately.

For the sake of common human decency, but also for the sake of the country.

(end)