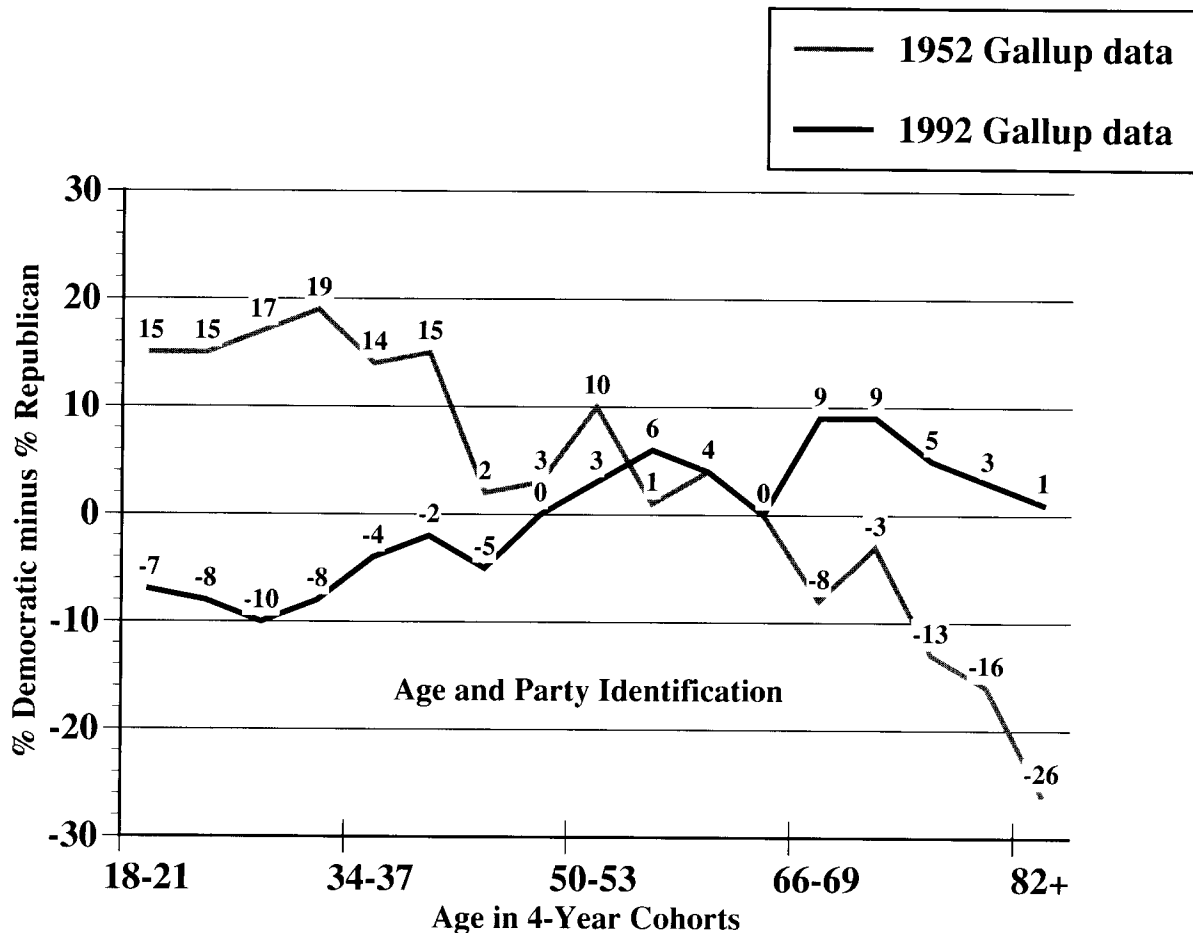


AGE, GENERATION, AND PARTY ID

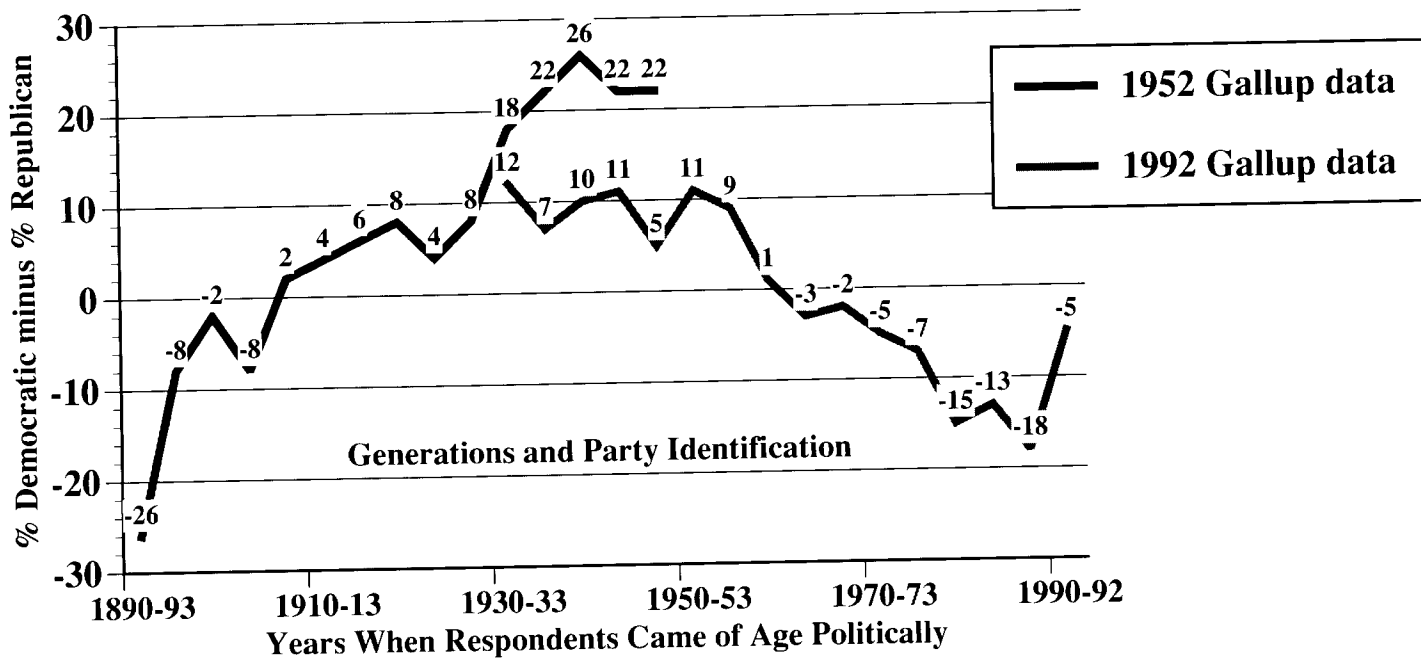


The data shown are the percentages identifying as Democrats, minus the percentage Republican, within each 4-year age group: 18-21, 22-25, 26-29, etc. Gallup surveys in 1952 (7 from between April and July) and 1991-92 (8 from October 1991 through May 1992) were combined—all asking age and party ID in exactly the same forms—to get much larger sample sizes.

The relative strength of the major parties in the various age groups has shifted tremendously over the last 4 decades, as we see from the above figure which looks at party ID by age in the 1952 and 1991-92 Gallup polls. In 1952 the Democrats' best group were the young and middle-aged, while the Republicans had large leads among the more elderly voters. In 1991-92, however, the Republicans were strongest among the young and the very old, while the Democrats had their greatest strength among people in their fifties and sixties.

Let's translate these data more directly into the frame of generational experience, showing groups by the time when they came of age politically rather than by current age. "Coming of age politically" will be expressed here as reaching 18 years, which seems adequate as a rough standard. Looking at the figure on the next page, we see a broad array of groups, from those who reached 18 years of age way back in the early 1890s—who were

AGE, GENERATION, AND PARTY ID/cont.



still part of the electorate in 1952—to people who reached voting age in the last few years. Using both the 1952 and the 1991-92 surveys extends the range of our generational examination. Some groups are represented in both the 1952 and the 1992 polls. Those who were just coming of political age in 1952 are now in their late-fifties.

The relative standing of the major parties varies substantially across generational groups in a fashion that corresponds in rough terms to what we know of decisive political experiences. For example, both the 1952 and 1991-92 Gallup polls show the Democrats' margin over the Republicans highest among those who came of age politically at the height of the Democrats' New Deal ascendancy. Since static enters into polling and poll responses, it is especially impressive that the picture provided by the two batches of surveys separated by thirty-nine years is so consistent.

People who reached political maturity in the late 1930s and early 1940s were in 1952 unusually pro-Democratic—and so they are today. Republicans had a big edge in the 1890s, but they began to lose this among new voters coming of age in the early twentieth century—reflecting in part the impact immigration had on the makeup of the population. In the 1930s the Democrats began to achieve an overwhelming generational advantage over the Republicans, which was not interrupted until the late 1950s when various developments, among them Dwight Eisenhower's personal popularity, cut into the Democrats' edge among new voters. Over the 1980s, the GOP pulled steadily ahead among new voters. The youngest—those who have come of age since 1990—are still plurality Republican but, this set of Gallup surveys suggest, less so than their immediate predecessors.

—ECL