INTRODUCTION

Political party plays an important link between the citizens and their government, such as structures the popular vote; integrates and mobilizes the mass of the citizenry; aggregates diverse interests; recruits leaders for public office; and formulates public policy (King, 1969: 111-41).   More importantly, within the liberal democracies, it is primarily parties that organize the modern government.   In such a way, as R. Wildenmann notes, "party government is the crucial agent of institutional legitimization" (1986: 6).   The same view was held by E. E. Schattachneider that "political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties" (1944: 10).   S. P. Huntington also indicates that parties organize participation, bring together different groups in society, and "serve as a linkage between social forces and the government" (1980: 91).

Evidently, parties are involved in every aspect of government.   Yet political parties were not part of the founders' plan for America.   Indeed, from the earliest days of the Republic, parties were viewed with distrust.   J. Madison warned against the mischievousness of faction.   In the same vein, B. Franklin also warned of the "infinite mutual abuse of parties, tearing the best of characters to pieces" (Hofstader, 1970: 2).   Despite the Founders' forecast that the establishment of political parties would have dire consequences for the new Republic, parties quickly became an institutionalized part of the political process.   Wherever free elections have been conducted on a regular basis at national and regional levels, political parties have been part of the process.

Even though parties are an integral part of American-style democracy, people tend to be suspicious of the proposition that "it would be better if we put no party labels on the ballot in all elections," and only 29% disagree with the statement that "parties do more to confuse the issues than to provide a clear choice on issues" (Dennis, 1986).   In other words, this reflects the public's distrust to parties.   Furthermore, some scholars find that the percentage of U.S. respondents who spontaneously identify with one or the other party has never been greater than 77% (Miller et al., 1980).   Much worse, a recent research shows the party identification has declined to around 60% (Johnson, 1992: 543).

The correlation and consequences of party identification have been an ongoing concern among political scientists.   There have been several arguments about the origins of partisanship, the stability between individuals and electorates, the extent to which party identification shapes, and the impact of the shift of party identification on electoral realignment or dealignment.   Despite extensive research on party identification, the linkages between partisanship and the transition of electorate have been ignored.   This leaves a gap in our understanding about the dynamic of the partisanship.   To remedy this, this paper intends to focus on the primary elements of electoral realignment and the related concept of dealignment, in particular when it is applied to the Reagan years.

The transition of electorate affecting party system is diverse, ranging from the emergence of new parties to the growth of anti-party sentiment.   In most cases, recent

examples of partisan have changed reflect one of the following two patterns - either realignment or dealignment.   These conceptions have been examined in recent years in an attempt to understand the phenomena of the U.S. in the 1980s.   Yet, questions have been raised, that is, do they occur suddenly or gradually? how should "profound readjustments of power" be defined? And which factors will cause the dealignments?

The paper is organized as follows.   In section two, we address the conception of electoral realignment.   To further understand the causes of realignment, we focus on the American party system in section three.   In the fourth section, this paper explores whether there is realignment in the 1980s.   In section five, we analyze the causes of dealignment.   In the last section, this paper provides answers to the probing questions.

THE CONCEPTION OF ELECTORAL REALIGNMENT

Electoral realignments have been discussed extensively in the literature since V. O. Key, Jr., published his classic article on critical elections in 1955.   According to Key's conception, new and durable voting behaviors can occur during periods of critical elections and will result in a significantly different partisan balance in the electorate.   In his analysis of presidential elections in New England, Key (1955) defined a critical election as:

An election type in which the depth and intensity of electoral involvement are high, in which more or less profound readjustments occur in the relations of power within the community, and in which new and durable electoral groupings are formed" (28).

On the basis of this definition and analyzing the percentages of the vote each party received, Key points out the two elections, those in 1896 and 1928, as an evidence of strong realignments.   Although Key's definition initiated the concept of realignment, it has left much discussion and revision when scholars attempt to lend more precision to the concept.   Realignments were subsequently defined by W. D. Burnham (1975).   According to his explanation, realignment consisted of "a major change rooted in the behavior of critically large minorities of American voters that durably alters electoral coalitions, the shape of election outcomes, and the flow of public policy" (356).

Put together, a critical realignment is "an aggregate-level concept that refers to an abrupt, large, and enduring form of change in prevailing electoral patterns" (Nardulli, 1995: 10).   In accordance with this conception, scholars have examined in detail in recent years and hold a general consensus that at least five major realignments of the political parties have taken place in American electoral politics, they are:(1) 1800, the emergence of Jefferson's Democratic Republicans；(2) 1828, the emergence of Jacksonian populist Democrats；(3) 1860, the emergence of Lincoln's Republicans；(4) 1896, the emergence of business Republicanism；and (5) 1932, the emergence of Roosevelt's New Deal Democrats.

Coincidentally, we see that the realignments happened roughly every thirty-two to thirty-six years (Johnson et al., 1994: 267; Bibby, 1992: 181). Between these critical elections, party identifications are stable and most people vote according to them. It is called the "normal vote" or "maintaining elections" (Campbell et al, 1960: Chap. 2). However, during a period of party realignment, rapid and fundamental changes take place in the coalitions that make up the two parties and in the issues that divide them and dominate politics (Key, 1955; Burnham, 1970).

On the basis of the historical pattern, the America latest realignment was in the 1930s. However, there has been a great deal of speculations about whether realignment took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Virtually, significant but gradual changes do occur at other times, such as the rise in black support for the Democratic party since the New Deal and the more recent erosion of the democratic party's control of the South (Ladd and Hadley, 1978). Still, many of the most important political and electoral changes occur during realignments.

According to J. L. Sundquist, the outcome of a realignment may be one of the following five general forms, based on the resolution of the crisis created by the cross-cutting issues: (1) no major realignment; (2) realignment of two existing parties; (3) realignment of two existing parties through the absorption of a third party; (4) replacement of one major party; and (5) both parties replaced. In the first case, the crosscutting issue polarizes the members of the parties, but it gradually fades into the background and the two parties retain their normal ideological cleavage. The second and third categories represent realignments of the electoral bases of the two existing parties, with the party formerly having the minority of electoral support emerging as the new dominant party. In the forth scenario, a party is formed in reaction to the crosscutting issue, and actually replaces an existing party. In the fifth hypothetical situation, both parties are seen as inadequate by the voters, and are subsequently replaced by new parties.

Sundquist argues that the major realignments in American history fit into three of these categories. The realignment of the 1850s, centered on the issue of slavery, falls into category IV, where a third party, the Republicans, replaced a major party, the Whigs. The realignment of the 1890s belongs in category III, where another third party, in this case the Populists, was absorbed by the Democratic Party. The Great Depression in the 1930s falls into category II, when both parties were realigned. Thus, the outcomes of realignment may vary extensively, but in all cases there is a major shift in the power bases of the electorate.

In this sense, when the Republicans repeatedly won the presidency in the 1980s, some scholars, such as H. Norpoth (1987) and T. B. Edsall (1992), debate that America is experiencing another realignment. However, this description would be too easy to accept their statements and leave it at that but, how can we really be sure that the U.S. was due for a realignment between the Democratic and Republican parties that did not materialize? Before we look at this question, we should step back and examine the American party system.

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN THE U.S.

Each nation has its own characteristic political system. The American political system has generally been characterized by the stable two-party system, which means the parties are institutionalized to the extent that most voters identify with one or the other, and other third parties are disadvantaged by the system. Broadly, this stability can be attributed to the following three factors.

First, all elections in America are decided in single-member districts. The winner-take-all nature of presidential elections and the need for a majority to win, which "provides a strong incentive for candidates and their supporters to combine forces in large and broad combinations capable of mobilizing such a majority" (Epstein, 1986:242). The need for the majority induces the two major parties to absorb a wide range of divergent interests, therefore not taking strong stands on issues which may alienate the majority of voters, in their efforts to propel their candidate to victory (Rae, 1971).

Second, the dominant parties create legal obstacles in the path of the third parties. A candidate's ability to get his or her name on the ballot in presidential elections is controlled by the state government. The states allow parties on the ballot only if they (1) receive a large share of the votes in the preceding election or (2) can collect a large number of signatures from a geographically diverse set of districts. As a result, no minor party was able to put its presidential candidate on the ballot (Johnson et al., 1994: 276).

The third factor is the financial laws. The laws provide financing for the presidential campaigns of the two major parties but make it very difficult for the third parties to receive much money from government. According to the laws, if a third-party candidate receives more than 5% of the popular vote, the federal government will match some of that candidate's expenditures after the election. However, there is a premise, that is, the candidate must follow all of the federal limitations on fundraising and spending.

These three major points can be traced back to the electoral institutions that preserve the two-party system. Although the institutionalization of the two-party system helps maintain stability, it can also lead to tensions among those individuals who do not agree with the party's broad, middle-of-the-road stance on issues. In their efforts to accommodate a majority of voters by not taking strong stands, the parties inevitably alienate people who feel strongly about one issue or another. The tensions because of this homogenization of issues can lead an individual to change parties and, if this occurs on a large scale, to realignment, as we shall see later. Apparently, the Democrats and Republicans have been central to the electoral system since the 1850s, although the third parties threaten periodically the two dominant contenders.

In addition to the stability of the two-party system, distinct regularities can be shown in the voting patterns of citizens in presidential elections. In his study of party strength during presidential elections from 1789 to 1960, Charles Sellers (1965) examines the

strengths of the parties as measured by differentials between the parties' votes in the presidential elections and by the parties' percentages of seats in the House of Representatives.   He demonstrates regularity existing in the movements of party strength from one party to the other over time, and suggests that realignments occur as aberrations of this regular cycle.   Realignments, he maintains, develops over time and is better represented as long-term phases in a cycle, rather than as single, critical elections. Key (1964) referred to this concept of long-term realignment as "secular realignment" and thus distinguished it from the "critical" type associated with single elections.

Many theorists suggest that realignments, like voting patterns in general, are cyclical. D. G. Lawrence and R. Fleisher (1987) adopt W. D. Burnham's (1970) belief that tension between a citizen's current opinions and those of his or her party can cause a sudden change in partisanship.   This change may result from the party's inability to accurately represent and individual's interest due to its attempt to homogenize the issues in order to retain the stance as a majority, as mentioned earlier.

In addition, younger people reaching voting age may experience similar tensions between the party choice of their parents and that of their own beliefs (more on this later). Younger voters may feel that the party of their parents no longer reflects the social and economic realities as the younger voters interpret them.   The strongest evidence for the realignment based on youth is the fact that the young moved into the Republican camp much more dramatically than the population at large.   The shift of young voters, if it persists, will give the Republicans a lasting source of votes (Norpoth, 1980: 376-80). Like many scholars, Lawrence and Fleisher see a connection between the increasing tensions felt by voters and the seeming periodicity of realignments, and believe they can be divided into regular intervals.   As a result, "the time period necessary for a sufficient gap between party loyalties and socio-economic reality defines the life expectancy of party systems and seems to be approximately forty years" (1987: 84).   According to this theory, the U.S. was due for a new realignment since the 1960's, hence the substantial amount of literature concerning the state of partisan alignment in the 1970s and 1980s. Whether realignments occur around single, critical elections, or in phases, the outcome has the same "sharp and durable" change in the power structure that Key identified.

Furthermore, realignments are nearly always precipitated by the introduction of a crosscutting issue.   Classical theories of the vote regard issue as a prominent role in voter decisions.   Nevertheless, they normally follow party identification and candidate image in importance of influence on the voter.   Early systematic research in the 1940s and 1950s found that issues had scant influence on how voters arrived at a decision (Berlson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960).   However, these findings have been questioned by more recent research, which used improved methodologies and took into account the relatively calm politics of the 1950s compared to the more turbulent and divisive decades of the sixties, seventies, and eighties.   According to this research, issues are now a more important basis for determining voters' choices than in the 1950s (Nie et al., 1976).   Essentially, this type of issue cuts across traditional party which cleavages and causes divisions within each party, rather than just widening the cleavage

between the two parties.   Sundquist (1973) described the crosscutting issues have significant effects on voters in a community.   He says:

Within the community at large, opinion polarizes.   And within each of the major parties, three distinct blocs form- a bloc at each pole trying to commit the party to a flat stand for or against (the issue), and a bloc of centrists trying to compromise or evade the issue as the means of holding the party together (16).

The new cross-cutting issue gains precedence over old party's platforms and voters turn toward whichever party's stand on the new issue which most closely corresponds with their own.   As the parties are pulled apart internally over the issue, one of the polar extremes may win out, and then the party will either gain new converts or lose old partisan supporters (or both), depending on the voters' opinions toward the party's new stance regarding the issue.   Thus, realignment is precipitated by the crosscutting issues, which divide the members within the parties, and in turn, the parties in the election.

It should also be noted that a realignment may also be influenced by widespread personal attachments to a particular candidate (Huerley, 1987).   A candidate's images - personality, physical appearance, style, and background - figure heavily in the media coverage accompanying presidential campaigns.   As usual, candidates with a favorable public image can contribute significantly to their party's vote on the Election Day.   This phenomenon certainly played a factor in the realignment in the 1930s when Franklin Roosevelt's popularity successfully crossed party lines as well as in the 1980s when Reagan's did the same.   A candidate's personality can affect a voter's decision in the current election, but may not alter their partisanship in a lasting manner.   Personality factors can induce citizens to temporarily switch parties, but for a durable realignment, other factors, which cause genuine ideological cleavages, must be involved.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REALIGNMENTS AND PARTIES

Political parties and the voters are the basic units in which realignment takes place; thus it is necessary at this point to look briefly at the concept of voter's party identification.   As known, voters' choices on Election Day reflect their long-held attitudes and beliefs as well as such short-term transitory influences as current issues and candidate images.   The impacts of these long- and short-term influences on the voter vary from election to election.   One of the most important and enduring influences on voters' choices is their party identification - a feeling of attachment and sympathy toward a political party (Campbell et al., 1960: 121-8).

Essentially, party identification is considered as a long-term, stable influence on the voter choice because it is not normally subject to sudden shifts from one election to the next (Asher, 1988: 70-5).   As a consequence, party identification is a key factor in how

people vote.   The stronger people's party feeling, the more likely they will look at issues and candidates through their "party lens", that is, fit those factors into the overriding party factor.

It is true that voting behavior was influenced by several factors, such as major issues, evaluations of the candidates, and so on, but some trends existed in the 1980s:

(1) Voting as members of family groups.   Analysis of massive amounts of voting data has showed that most Americans vote the same way their families or friends vote. Voting is largely a group experience, and the most homogeneous of all groups in terms of molding party identification and ultimately the voting behavior of its members is the family.   The main reason is members of the family are exposed to similar influences (such as economic, class, and geographical), and they shape each other's attitudes (Dawson and Prewitt, 1969).

(2) Voting as members of parties.   Many people support their party almost automatically, no matter who the candidate or what the issues (Converse, 1976).   It seems that party loyalty is declining, since Democratic and Republican Party self-identifiers have dropped.   Consequently, people usually do not openly give up their memberships, rather, they talk more about voting" for the persons and not the party".

(3) Voting in terms of class, occupation, and income.   A strong relationship has been found between these three influences and voting behavior - the higher the class, the stronger the tendency toward Republicanism (Burns et all, 1987: 233).

(4) Voting by region and race.   In the 1960s, region remained a potent source of political cleavage in the U.S. and was comparable to, if not more important than, the combined effects of education, occupation and income (Knoke, 1974: 344).   In the 1980s, religious issues experienced a political resurgence; emphasis on issues such as abortion, led Catholics and Protestants to vote Republican, by substantial margins. These results heavily favor Reagan.   Similarly, racial voting has been a polarizing force. During the late 19th century northern blacks voted heavily Republican, and Southern whites almost exclusively Democratic.   During Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal, blacks began shifting over to the Democratic Party and the to the civil rights policies that party was supporting.   For the same reason, Southern whites began to move toward the Republican Party.

(5) Voting by age.   From 1936, there is a tendency that young voter who came to maturity after the Depression and the New Deal identified with Democrats.   But youth, unlike race or religion, is fleeting, and as such is a less reliable voting indicator.   Prior to 1980, new voters tended to be Democratic; in the 1984, however, they were Reagan's strongest age group (Burns, 1987: 234).

Among these voting patterns, increases in Republican strength among whites and young people are the primary evidence for the argument that realignment has occurred (Johnson et al, 1994: 294).   As stated above, the shift in party identification among whites is especially prominent in the South, where a massive Democratic advantage among whites has disappeared.   This change has led some scholars to speculate that parties have gradually realigned on the race issue (Carmines and Stimson, 1980: 80). As H. McPherson puts it, Republican success resulted from "the white man's view that

the Democrats had cast their lot with black Americans, to the ultimate disadvantage of whites.　Thus, the party of 'inclusion' [the Democratic Party]...has lost the original voters, the white males, and with them the potent leverage of the Presidency" (1988: 27).

On the other hand, the growth in young people's support for the Republicans as a second indicator of realignment.　In 1980, only 20 percent of the people between the ages of 18 and 29 called themselves Republicans; 42 percent said they were Democrats. By 1988 people in the same age bracket were evenly divided, with Democrats outnumbering Republicans by a narrow 35 to 33 percent margin (Ibid.).　With regard to this tendency, two well-known properties were outlined in The American Voter (Campbell et al., 1960).　The first is that young people tend to adopt the party identification of their parents, and the second is that, once adopted, party identification is relatively durable.　Campbell and his associates explain this allegiance as follows:

Once a person has acquired some embryonic party attachment, it is easy for him to discover that most events in the ambiguous world of political redound to the credit of his chosen party.　As his perception of his party's virtue gains momentum in his manner, so his loyalty to it strengthens, and this fact in turn increases the probability that future events will be interpreted in a fashion that supports his partisan inclination (165).

If we accept this statement that young people are socialized with their parent's party choice at an early age and this partisan choice becomes more steadfast as they grow older, then partisanship should be a rather immutable property.　However, when realignment occurs?　Although young people show a strong tendency to acquire the partisanship of their parents, the Michigan scholars also found that they are "not overly interested in politics, they are indifferent voters, and they do not typically regard themselves as strongly attached to the political parties" (Campbell et al., 1960: 164).　This suggests that, although young people typically follow their parents' lead in party selection, they can be extremely susceptible to crosscutting issues and external political stimuli.　Many scholars believe that it is these volatile young people entering the political arena that accounts for long-term secular realignments.　Norpoth (1987) holds this view. According to his description, "the partisan balance shifts when young voters enter the electorate with an imprint that distinguishes them from the rest of society.　So long as this new generation maintains that imprint as it ages and manages to impress it on its own offspring, the whole society gradually takes on the outlook of that generation" (380).

This concept offers one explanation for the existence of realignments, and their seemingly periodic nature.　The argument fits in well with Charles Sellers' cyclical theory of electoral behavior (1965) as discussed previously.　In that regard, he states:

Realignment seems not to be caused mainly by permanent changes on the part of people with established identifications...but rather by a strong shift to the advantaged party by younger people and other new voters still in the process of forming their identification (159).

This argument has also been offered as an explanation for the events of the 1960s through the 1980s, suggesting that the power base of Democrats has gradually faded as more young people find the issues which framed the party during the New Deal period no longer interest them (Carmines et al., 1987). Volatile people from Democratic families, especially the younger voters, may therefore, often identify more with the Republic party. Norpoth argues that the youthful surge toward the GOP definitely marks a major disruption of the normal pattern of personal socialization (1987: 385).

REALIGNMENT IN THE 1980S?

Although most scholars agree that a classical realignment, in the form outlined by Key and Burnham, has not taken place in the 1980s, there have been many debates over what actually has happened. The Democratic party has remained dominant since the realignment of the 1930s created a coalition of support for the party including three major demographic groups: union members, Catholics, and Southerners. These groups, collectively known as the New Deal coalition, have remained at the core of the Democratic majority since the Depression, but there is much evidence to suggest this is changing. National Election Studies data indicate that Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a ratio of 1.7 to 1.0 in 1952, but that the difference had decreased to less than 10% in 1984. This gap was even less when only those partisans who actually voted are considered with the Democrats gaining 47.4% and the Republicans 44.6% (Wattenberg, 1987). In summary then, we have seen a dramatic decrease in the differential between the support for the two parties; the Republicans are gaining support while the Democrats are losing it.

Regarding this phenomenon, scholars have different explanations. The argument usually bases on two premises, centering on the definition of Key's phrase "profound readjustments of power". The first interpretation simply suggests an aggregate shift in support from one party to another. While we have seen that the Republicans have gained support and the Democrats have lost it, the Democrats still remain in the majority, and we do not know whether the gain to the Republicans can be directly linked to the decline of support for the Democrats. P. Hureley (1989) argues that the Republican gains can be explained more through the incorporation of Independents, rather than by the conversion of Democrats. She says:

It is highly unlikely that many of the defecting Democrats moved directly into the Republican Party. Rather, dissatisfied Democrats (presumably the more conservative element of the party) moved to the position of independents. At the same time, the more conservative portion of those calling themselves independents probably moved into the Republican Party (256).

For this reason, although a shift of partisanship is apparent, most scholars would argue that it hardly constitutes a "profound readjustment of power", and that, therefore, no realignment has occurred.

In her article, Hureley focuses on "partisan representation" as an indicator of realignment, noting that in past realignments the policy behavior of the emerging dominant party elites has shown a strong congruence with the opinions of its rank-and-file members. For a readjustment of power to occur, she theorizes the elites of the emerging party must receive signals from the party in the electorate and act accordingly in their policy-making. By comparing opinion surveys from the National Election Studies with roll call votes in the House of Representatives, she was able to examine the Republican Party's representation in 1980, 1982, and 1984. Her data suggests that the representation of the Republican electorate by the party elites actually decreased over the period, and the party representatives were more conservative than the party in the electorate, which should not have occurred if indeed the Republicans were experiencing a realignment in their favor. Hurley therefore concludes that the 1980s were characterized more by dealignment, rather than by realignment.

The second type of power readjustment which may signal a realignment is a change in the social base of partisan support (Wattenberg, 1987). To further demonstrate that realignment has taken place by using this approach, there has been a major shift in the underlying party coalitions. In this sense, there is a stronger argument that some form of realignment has occurred since the 1960s. While it remains in dispute whether younger voters have shifted towards the Republican party, the evidence points more strongly towards movement among other demographic groups, as J. Petrocik (1987) points out, "by the end of the 1970s, the Democratic and Republican coalitions had developed social bases that were unlike those of the 1950s. Changes continued into the eighties. By 1984 northern, white Protestants had declined to about 40% of all Republican identifiers; white Southerners, Catholics, and labor households-the mainstays of the New Deal Democracy-represented almost half of all Republicans" (254).

Most notable among these groups are the white Southerners, who have gradually been moving to the Republican Party for some time (McPherson, 1988; Petrocik, 1987). In addition, the number of African Americans claiming identification with the Democratic Party has doubled since the 1970s. These shifts in coalition support among the two parties are most likely attributable to a growing distinction between the parties' ideological bases. In the last twenty years, the Democratic Party has increasingly become associated with Liberalism, while the Republicans have assumed a more conservative stance (Carmines et al., 1987). In this regard, it seems as if a realignment of sorts has occurred; however the actual electoral results, with the exception of the presidency, do not indicate that a major shift toward the Republican Party has occurred. For this reason, many scholars speculate, as noted earlier, that the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by dealignment, rather than by realignment.

THE CAUSES OF DEALIGNMENT

Dealignment from partisan affiliations has demonstrated a marked increase over the past thirty years. Broadly, there are three contributing factors that generally explain the dealignment. One is the increase in the proportion to voters labeling themselves as independents. This trend was especially strong from the 1960s through the mid-1970s and was most noticeable among young voters who did not align themselves with a party as quickly as older generations did, as indicated earlier. Thus, the increased proportion of independents in the electorate has stemmed mainly from a large influx of new voters, so-called baby boomers, who came of voting age in the 1960s and 1970s but not from partisans adopting the independent label.

Independents have shown a capacity to switch back and forth between the Republican and Democratic candidates in presidential elections after World War II. Even so, the current number of independents is high compared with that found in the 1950s. The tendency of voters to declare themselves independents leveled off after the mid-1970s, and in the 1980s partisanship showed a modest resurgence among voters. The percentage of the electorate that considers themselves to be Independents has increased from 23% in 1964 to over 35% in 1972, and remains high today (Carmines et al., 1987: 389). With independents constituting approximately one-third of the electorate and capable of great swings in party preference from one election to the next, they constitute a critical voting bloc for both parties.

Independents are not unsophisticated voters as previously thought, but are rather experiencing a conflict with the ideological views of their parents' party. They became dealigned originally because they found acquiring their parents' partisanship more an empty ritual than a confirmation of vivid political experiences and shared political beliefs. As Carmines et al. argues, "the new independent's lack of partisanship can be seen as a rational strategy for reducing the psychological dissonance caused by having political views and an inherited partisanship that pull in opposite directions" (1987:396). Thus, there are an increasing percentage of voters in the electorate that no longer receives voting cues from the parties, thereby leaving them open to issue and candidate influences. Reagan's personality undoubtedly affected many of the independent voters in the 1980s. Under such circumstances, it would not be difficult to explain increasing proportions of the electorate to engage in ticket splitting-voting for candidates of different parties instead of voting a straight party line ballot.

The second explanation for the dealignment is the increase of third parties. Many minor parties have always existed in the U.S., all of which are called third parties no matter how many there are. Although most third parties do not become major parties, they have at times had critical impacts on election outcomes and electoral alignments (Rosenstone et al., 1984). In recent years, there have also been candidates for president who ran for office mainly on the basis of their personal appeal and without the support of an established third party. Perhaps it would be better to call them independent candidates because the campaign organizations that they create typically do not have the permanence and organizational strength that we usually associate with the term of party.

Major signs of weakness in one or both of the two parties can lead to the efforts of the third party efforts.　In detail, when the major parties fail to represent an emerging group and politicians see it as an opportunity to form an entirely new coalition, new parties spring up.　In many cases, some minor parties are characterized by strong policies or ideological orientations.　Their goals are not to win elections; rather, they use the electoral process to publicize their cause in the hope that eventually some of their policies will be adopted by the major parties.　Faced with such social unrest, at least one of the highly adaptive major parties normally has sought to accommodate the protest group within its rank (Rosenthal, 1988).

Normally, strong third-party movements are a signal of substantial discontent within the country.　The widespread discontent prevalent in the U.S. arises, in part, out of dissatisfaction with the policy alternatives that has been offered as solutions to contemporary problems.　The findings of many researches strongly suggest that policy alternatives more acceptable to the total population will be exceedingly difficult to discover in the future because of the existing degree of issue polarization (Page and Jones, 1979).　This situation, which, in turn, may lead to people lacking of confidence in the ability of the existing parties to bring about responsive government (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982).

The final indicator of the dealignment is that political campaigns have changed over the years, often de-emphasizing the role of the parties.　Current politics has been called the "permanent campaign", in which political parties have been increasingly displaced by television, campaign operatives, and individual candidates and their packagers (Hurley, 1989).　In addition, the campaign finance laws of the 1970s, providing for public funding of the general election and partial public funding of individual candidates in the nomination phase, reinforced the inclination.　As a result, candidates personal qualities and their records in office have become voting cues as significant as or more important than the party labels that traditionally determined most voters' decisions (Wattenberg, 1986).　However, it leads to a vicious consequence - people with limited education and political information no longer have cues such as party images and party identification on which to base their voting decisions.　These individuals have no choices but to leave the electoral arena.

To increase the chance of election, many candidates not only separate themselves from their national party organizations, but also practically divorce themselves from their fellow partisans running for other offices.　More significantly, presidents seeking reelection try to stay above the partisan fray during the actual campaign season but by paying more advertising to emphasize their accomplishments in office.　In such condition, both the presidential campaign and the presidential office have become the province of individual entrepreneurs, relying on their own skills and their own resources more than those of their political parties have.　The net result is a style of campaigning that focuses almost exclusively on the candidates themselves.　Therefore, party line voting is declining and candidate-centered campaigns are becoming more prevalent in the U.S.

On the whole, several indicators show that political parties no longer play a major role in the national electoral politics: the emergence of the highly educated and the independent voting public appears to have created a climate hostile to parties and partisanship; presidential campaign appears more candidate-than party-centered; candidate's personal campaign organizations run their campaigns, from soliciting funds to mobilizing voters; the influence of the mass communication industry becomes more significant; and the rises of the split-ticket voting. The overall influence of the parties seems to have declined and voters therefore are becoming increasingly dealigned from them.

CONCLUSION

By now, we can provide answers to the probing questions.   Some scholars suggest that the U.S. is in the process of undergoing a slow and secular realignment, as the social groups comprising the parties' primary support seem to be shifting.   Most notably, the Democrats' New Deal coalition is braking down, with more white Southerners, Catholics and union members moving to the Republican Party.   Despite these shift, however, no significant shifts in the power between the parties have occurred, and therefore, most scholars would argue no realignment has taken place in the 1980s.

In other words, the events of the Reagan era do not amount to realignment as conceptualized by V. O. Key, Jr.   There has been no major shift in the power base of the electorate, despite gains in the Republican Party and the repeated election of Republican presidents in the 1980s.   These events can be explained much more convincingly by using the theory of dealignment as outlined by Hurley as well as Carmines, McGiver, and Stimson.   These scholars argue that the Republican success at the presidential level, rather than signaling realignment, is just another result of party dealignment.   The rising role of candidates and the weakening pull of the party label suggest to some extent that the U.S. is in a process of dealignment and the electorate is losing interest in both parties.   The growth of the number of independents in the electorate and the rise of split ticket voting are principal clues that a dealignment could be under way.

Even so, this paper shows that people do not hate the parties, but that they feel increasingly neutral toward them.   As Larry Sabato puts it, "there is little proof that most of the electorate cares about parties" (1988: 170).   The new independents are not more distrustful of party labels or the idea of a party system itself.   Rather, they seem to be unhappy with the current parties and what they stand for.   We, therefore, can not say for sure whether the decline of party attachment signals permanent dealignment.   It could be that, if the parties changed their ways, they could be as strong as ever.   However, one thing is certain, that is, given the most ideal conditions for party revitalization, all that occurred in the U.S. is a stabilization of party decline.   To some extent, the candidate-centered age will last for a while, regardless of whether the next political era

will be a Democratic or Republican one.

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