What was the "Solid South" and how was it affected by the Presidential elections of 1964 and 1980?

From the late 1800's until the late 1900's the southern regions of the United States overwhelmingly supported one political party, the Democrats. This constant support for the Democratic Party was referred to as the "Solid South". For nearly a century, the reign of the Solid South made it very difficult for any Republican Party members to get elected into the more powerful government positions. This Democratic trend perpetuated itself until the elections of 1964 and 1980. In those two election years the country's current social issues caused a major shift in support making it possible for a Republican to reclaim the Presidency.

The "Solid South" began in the late 1800's around the end of Reconstruction. During this time, and up until its end almost a century later, the southern region of the United States voted solidly with the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party won by large margins in the South in every Presidential election from 1876 to 1948 except for 1928, when candidate Al Smith ran on the Democratic ticket and was beaten by Republican Herbert Hoover, but even then the Solid South continued to support the Democrats. This cycle of voting was slightly cracked in the 1950's when Democratic support of civil rights caused the party to lose some of its support. Still, it was not until the 1964 election that the same issue would cause a significant break in the South's trend. However, the Solid South did have a short-lived resurge of power when the presidency was won by Democrat Jimmy Carter, who then lost his re-election campaign to Republican Ronald Reagan.

The event that caused the first significant tear in the "Solid South" was the Election of 1964. After Kennedy's assassination Lyndon B. Johnson became President. Johnson also ran as the Democratic candidate in 1964. However, Johnson strongly supported the passing of the Civil Rights Act; an act he knew would "…deliver the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come." Johnson's apprehensions were merited because his Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater, a usual supporter of civil rights, voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, believing it gave too much power to the federal government. Goldwater's actions proved to be enough to gain a sizeable amount of support from previously Democratic southerners and marked the beginning of the end of the "Solid South".

The final event that brought an end to the "Solid South" was the election of 1980. After Nixon's resignation due to the Watergate Scandal, many Americans viewed Republicans as untrustworthy. This new disdain for Republicans made way for the election of Jimmy Carter, giving Democrats a comeback. However, this comeback proved to be short-lived because during Carter's term as President the country experienced economic deterioration and other incidents such as the Iran Hostage Crisis, the 1979 Energy Crisis, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; so in the next election rather than re-electing Carter, Americans voted in Republican Ronald Reagan, bringing the end to nearly a century of Democratic support in the South.

For nearly a century voters in southern states continued to vote strictly for Democratic politicians. It was this trend that earned these states the epithet the "Solid South". The "Solid South" began its Democratic trend in the late 1800's but began to falter with the election of 1964. In that election politicians on the Democratic ticket supported civil rights and voted in favor of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 causing them to lose much of their support. The second and final event that brought the end of this era was the election of 1980. During this election campaign Americans felt that Jimmy Carter, who happened to be Democratic, had done a poor job and this led to a final shift of power towards the Republican party and brought a close to nearly a century of tradition known as the "Solid South".