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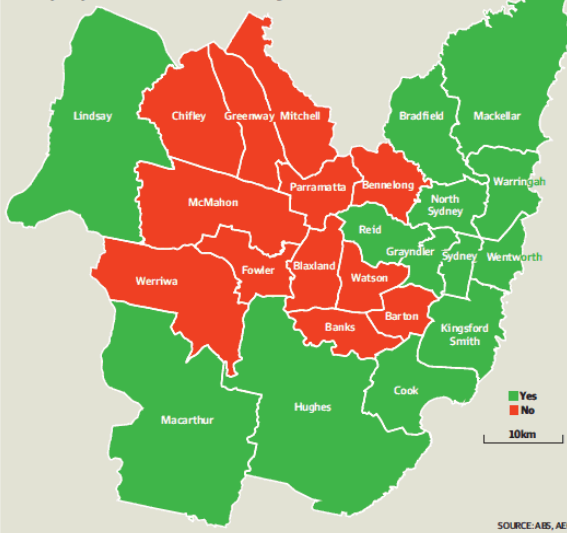
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Mapping our differences

Same-sex marriage vote by state (%)

NSW	57.8	42.2
Vic	64.9	35.1
Qld	60.7	39.3
SA	62.5	37.5
WA	63.7	36.3
Tas	63.6	36.4
NT	60.6	39.4
ACT	74.0	26.0

How Sydney voted in the same-sex marriage ballot



Sydney, with a flourishing student population and some impressive faculties. Parramatta has its own theatre, and an inner-city vibe pervades some of its cafes.

More generally, outer suburbs citizens are the inheritors of a population explosion that began with the stepped-up post-war migration in the '50s and '60s. First it was the "Balts" and the Dutch; then came the big waves of Italians and Greeks, followed by the Lebanese, Turks, Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans and Indians.

Now Sydney's western suburbs account for almost half the city's population, and 12 federal electorates, nine ALP and three Liberal. All 12 voted against same-sex marriage.

This compares with just two electorates – Calwell and Bruce – that voted No in Melbourne, Australia's second-biggest city and fast catching up in population terms. The remaining three of the 17 Australian electorates that voted No were the Queensland rural and regional seats of Maranoa, Kennedy and Groom.

Back in western Sydney, where the biggest No vote took place, there are many factors to explain the difference. These include: the more powerful position of established religions; conservative ethnic communities; a more targeted and effective No campaign than elsewhere; and the influence of some conservative radio shock jocks.

But the most distinctive difference is that the area has by far the biggest concentration of Muslims

Professor Vromen says some commentators have focused too much on the Muslim factor and not enough on other religious groups. She says "there is definitely more religiosity and ethnicity" in western Sydney, "and you shouldn't underestimate the conservative Christians, conservative Pacific Islanders and Korean groups."

She cautions against underestimating the impact of the No campaign in western Sydney. "The mobilisation of the No campaign must have really mattered, particularly in the Chinese-language media."

"We shouldn't generalise about all

Many prefer the term 'partner' to prevent gender 'labelling' of their relationships.

immigrants from those nationalities and I'm assuming the third generation will change on those moral issues," Professor Vromen says.

However, immediately after the result was announced on Wednesday, the "Muslim factor" once again entrenched itself into the national debate.

Conscious of his electorate's twin records – highest Muslim population, highest No vote – Blaxland's Labor MP Jason Clare remains a steadfast Yes supporter, saying "I have been very up front with my com-



Crowds came out to celebrate the Yes verdict in Sydney on Wednesday. PHOTO: AAP

Labor should take heed

Comment

Gabriele Gratton and Richard Holden

Wednesday's same-sex marriage survey result was a victory for many Australians, and seemingly also for the Australian Labor Party, who strongly supported the Yes case.

Maybe not. If there are two dimensions to politics: social and economic, then Australian politics seems to revolve more around the economic dimension. This is certainly the case compared to the United States, for instance.

Just look at the big issues in the last election campaign: negative gearing and housing affordability, education, health care, superannuation, the company tax rate. According to the ABC's vote compass, "the economy" was the top or second top issue in every state and territory.

But what is now being debated in federal parliament? How exactly anti-discrimination laws should be amended in the face of gay marriage, and how religious freedom should be further protected.

The big risk for Labor in the wake of Wednesday's result is a radical realignment of Australian politics from the economic dimension to the social. And if you think it can't happen, then a little US history is instructive.

It may sound improbable today, but throughout the 1950s, white supremacists across the US largely voted Democrat. In 1957, they reacted with outrage when Republican President Dwight D Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to protect the integration of nine black girls in the previously all-white Little Rock Central High. When the 1957 Civil Rights Act was passed three months later it was opposed by 18 Democrat Senators. No Republican Senators voted against it.

Little had changed when Congress passed the 1960 Civil Rights Act. The Democratic Party was dominant in the racially segregated South. Its major historical strongholds were in poor southern states such as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Republicans had no hope to win the votes of the southern whites – they could not outdo Democrats on "white first" politics.

But when Presidents Kennedy and Johnson pushed for the adoption of the 1964

noted, Nixon "emphasised that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognised this while not appearing to".

Republican campaigns turned to an ever more sophisticated language of states' rights, law and order, lower taxes, and individual freedoms: dog-whistle messages southerners heard clearly. As Republican strategist Lee Atwater famously put it, "you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a by-product of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites".

The immediate result of the Southern Strategy was that Democrats lost their stronghold in the South. As early as 1968, Nixon won 70 per cent of the popular vote in the deep south, and 65 per cent in the rest of the former Confederate states. But its long-term implications were even deeper. The Southern Strategy changed the American political language for decades to come. Everything in American politics – from economics to education to gun control – is viewed through a social prism.

Consider, then, Australia today. Twelve of the 17 electorates in Australia that voted "no" in the same sex marriage plebiscite are in Sydney's west and south-west. These electorates are comprised of many voters who are struggling with economic pressures, and who routinely vote Labor, including for some of the party's leading lights. For instance, Chris Bowen's seat of McMahon recorded a 64.9 per cent No vote; Tony Burke's seat of Watson was 69.6 per cent No; and Ed Husic's seat of Chifley 58.7 per cent.

If the Australian political prism is economics, then Labor wins these seats handsily. But if the prism flips to a social one, and issues like education, health care, and retirement savings are viewed through a social lens, then Labor is clearly in trouble.

Of course, perhaps no such realignment will happen, and there will be no "Western Strategy" in Australia. The Southern Strategy took a combination of historical geography and fiendish political strategy.

Unlike the US, Australia doesn't have a history of slavery being ended by a Republican president and thus "the party of Lincoln" being out of favour in the South for

in Australia. Paul Keating's old seat of Blaxland, now held by Labor frontbencher Jason Clare, recorded the biggest No vote in the survey – 73.9 per cent – and it also has the highest percentage of Muslims in Australia – 29.2 per cent.

The second-highest No vote of 69.6 per cent was recorded in the nearby seat of Watson – currently held by another Labor frontbencher, Tony Bourke. Watson has the second-highest concentration of Muslims – 23.4 per cent.

community and said to them 'I respect your view, I hope you respect the fact I have got a different view'."

On the same day, libertarian crossbencher Senator David Leyonhjelm may not have singled out the "Muslim factor", but he did say rather pointedly that Australia must continue to be "picky" about who becomes a citizen if it is to maintain the type of tolerant society that supports same-sex marriage. "If we had a very high level of

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Civil Rights Act, southern Republicans seized their chance. In the years that followed, Republican candidates systematically targeted white supremacist, southern audiences. At first, they tried to appeal to the southern white vote with an explicit campaign against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But that strategy backfired when it alienated progressive northern voters.

Beginning with Richard Nixon, the so-called "Southern Strategy" emerged. As White House Chief of Staff H R Haldeman

a century.

But like the US, Australian politics has become an increasingly combative, sophisticated, and focus-group driven game. A game where, to paraphrase American football coach Vince Lombardi, "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing". ■

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