

# All (climate) politics is local

Blog post by Adviser Matthew Duhan, 20 January 2017

As the Davos elite gather in the shadow of the Trump inauguration, much of the talk is of uncertainty over the future of globalisation. Davos sessions with titles such as ‘Climate change: COP out?’ highlight the very real fears that the new mood could see politicians privilege the national and local at the expense of the multilateral and global, with damaging impacts on future climate policy.

However, recent weeks have highlighted that a return of national and local politics cuts both ways on climate action. President Trump’s climate policy may well be driven by his political commitments to the deindustrialised parts of the US. But as Premier Xi can attest, local environmental concerns - in China’s case catastrophic urban air pollution levels - can be a powerful source of motivation for finding local solutions. Just as bad local hydrocarbon choices have negative climate externalities, these will have positive ones.

Air pollution in selected large cities



There are increasing signs that activists in the west see the potential here. The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has this week issued the second air pollution warning of his term, having made the issue a priority during his campaign. Early December saw Paris once again introduce traffic bans after suffering its worst air pollution for a decade. Perhaps more

surprising is the emergence of smog as a political issue in Poland. While it is home to 14 of the EU's top 20 most polluted cities, the majority of these are located among the southern coal mining communities, making it a more complex issue than in metropolitan Warsaw, which itself this week saw the highest pollution levels since records began a decade ago. This week a new polling memo circulated by the US Center for American Progress urged environmental groups and supportive congressional aides to focus on clean air and environmental preservation as issues that resonate more with voters than climate change and extreme weather.

The bottom-up approach has its limits. Urban policy responses will often focus on transport, which accounts for only 14% of global emissions. More broadly, global coordination remains a prerequisite for genuine climate progress; if only as a ratchet to avoid future backsliding. But in a world where environmentally-minded metropolitans are not the swing votes putting governments in office, some problem re-definition makes sense. Focusing on air pollution as a domestic political problem is far from guaranteed to change Rust Belt priorities or win over climate sceptics. But it is probably easier than convincing either to make policy concessions to foreigners in the name of saving the planet.