

## **The Changing Strategy of the Democrat Party in the Era of Donald Trump**

By: Jason Higgins

**Summary:** City governments are themselves increasingly important hubs of power in a tiered system of global governance. Demographers now estimate that by 2050, cities will be home to two-thirds of the world's total population and every one of the world's inhabited continents will have more people living in cities than in rural areas<sup>1</sup>. Politicians of major cities are, therefore, becoming more integrated into the greater political landscape.

City officials who serve the needs and demands of diverse communities have emerged as global catalysts for innovative thinking on issues from immigration to climate change. National leaders have a range of tools, from diplomacy to warfare, for managing issues and settling disputes. The heads of cities rely on different toolkits to deal with things like economic development and immigration, and persistent stresses like crime and poverty<sup>2</sup>. In an emerging age of managerial politics, city leaders will start to emerge as the next cadre for national political leadership.

**Take Away:** As the predominant focus of human settlement, cities already wield considerable power and will continue to increase their influence in the decades to come. Cities generate most of the world's wealth. They are the places where citizenship and political participation are defined, redefined, and contested. They are the sites where global challenges, ranging from climate change and natural resource depletion to international security problems, are felt. In other words, we have seen the future, and it is urban<sup>3</sup>.

Many U.S. cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and smaller regional hubs like Austin, Houston, Boston, Miami, and San Francisco, cultivate and maintain global relationships. Such cities all have their distinctive economic, political, and social niches in the United States. They also have their own distinctive leverage in international affairs courtesy of links that imbue city leaders with unprecedented influence. Hence, this is a new role for government in a rapidly changing world. These developments have led municipal leaders to pursue ties with like-minded men and women across borders to carve out solutions that suit their urban communities<sup>4</sup>. Cities are shaping our collective fates in nearly every respect.

---

1 [http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/20151008\\_Urbanization\\_IB.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/20151008_Urbanization_IB.pdf)

2 <http://prospect.org/article/cities-fill-global-void-left-trump>

3 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/foreign-policy-for-an-urban-world-global-governance-and-the-rise-of-cities>

4 <http://prospect.org/article/cities-fill-global-void-left-trump>

Building on the concept that city politicians are going to better fit the image Americans will have of executive leadership, Democrats are already attempting to groom future presidential hopefuls from the ranks of major city mayors. In particular, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Only days following Trump's issuance of executive orders, news outlets were focusing on New York Mayor Bill de Blasio. On January 25, 2017, de Blasio hosted a press conference in which he said the city would sue the President over his newly inked executive orders to strip funding from sanctuary cities<sup>5</sup>. De Blasio has, in recent weeks, been touted heavily as a potential face of resistance to the Trump administration.

De Blasio has taken several overt steps in order to position himself accordingly. He has met face-to-face with the President to argue his viewpoints, delivered public speeches in highly visible settings, such as the famed Cooper Union, as well as e-mailing supporters to gain momentum. These actions were taken with the intended purpose of affirming his promise to challenge national executive orders issued by the new President. Through these actions, he has now positioned himself as the person political leftists can organize around as the new face of the movement.

De Blasio's appeal to the political left and, by extension the national Democrat party, goes far beyond his high-profile challenges to Trump. Already left-wing political journals have begun advertising the New York mayor's long established progressive political stances.

In his time as mayor, he has engineered municipal ID cards that give undocumented workers official government identification, new wage and sick leave protections for workers, and income targeted housing that is now required whenever a developer takes advantage of rezoning.

Left-wing political journals further tout de Blasio by building on the achievements of his administration. Thus, they argue an extensive drop in the crime rates and a rise of private sector jobs growth<sup>6</sup>. What makes De Blasio even more appealing to the left-wing movement is that his record of progressive politics has not recently been on the public stage.

De Blasio studied Latin American politics at Columbia and is conversational in Spanish. He grew to be an admirer of Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista party, thrusting himself into one of the most polarizing issues in American politics at the time. The Reagan administration denounced the Sandinistas as tyrannical and Communist, while their liberal backers argued that after years of dictatorship, they were building a free society with broad access to education, land, and health care.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/01/de-blasio-gears-up-for-fight-over-sanctuary-cities.html>

<sup>6</sup> Murphy, 2017

He became an ardent supporter of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. He helped raise funds for the Sandinistas in New York and subscribed to the party's newspaper, Barricada or Barricade. When he was asked at a meeting in 1990 about his goals for society, he said he was an advocate of "democratic socialism."

Mr. de Blasio had arrived in Nicaragua in 1988 as part of a 10-day tour; the capstone of the year he spent as an employee of the Quixote Center, a social justice group in Maryland.

The center, founded by Catholic leaders, officially did not take sides in the Nicaraguan dispute though much of its aid went to help families sympathetic to the Sandinistas — its work was intensely political. One of the center's leaders once likened American efforts in Nicaragua to a policy of terrorism<sup>7</sup>. Its harshest critics accused the center of yielding to a Marxist agenda. In the mid-1980s, the Treasury Department investigated whether the center had helped smuggle guns, but the claim was never substantiated.

In a recent interview, Mr. de Blasio said his views then — and now — represented a mix of admiration for European social democratic movements, Mr. Roosevelt's New Deal, and liberation theology<sup>8</sup>. He has also taken his movement beyond New York City. During his first year in office, he tried to convene a national progressive base. During the election, he attempted again to build a national persona by organizing an Iowa forum to center around economic-security issues<sup>9</sup>. At a time when the Democrat party (as reported in previous papers) is trying to find its place with a legacy of progressivism, de Blasio is a serious consideration.

**Conservative Identifiers:** Mayor de Blasio has a strong background that resonates with left-wing progressives. However, beyond that immediate political base, he has many shortcomings that could prove detrimental on a wider stage.

There have been numerous investigations conducted by the U.S. Attorney General's Office into which fund-raising directed by the mayor and his associates may have violated the law. The allegations also argued that favors have been granted to well-connected parties.

Despite claims of improvements to the city's impoverished areas, critics from even within de Blasio's own party have raised concerns about the rising numbers of homeless flooding the shelters<sup>10</sup>. The party's consideration of municipal leadership is not solely limited to New York. Though he may be the most visible, he is not the only viable candidate for democrats to consider.

---

7 [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1985-12-21/features/8502280035\\_1\\_humanitarian-aid-religious-leaders-nicaragua](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1985-12-21/features/8502280035_1_humanitarian-aid-religious-leaders-nicaragua)

8 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/23/nyregion/a-mayoral-hopeful-now-de-blasio-was-once-a-young-leftist.html>

9 Murphy, 2017

10 Murphy, 2017

Since the election of Donald Trump, Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, has been active in building his foreign policy credentials. He is promoting a municipal level foreign policy of his own. Recently, he met the mayors of Mexico City, Ciudad Juarez, and Guadalajara to discuss what the four cities could do to assist families, individuals, and businesses confronting the swift policy shift<sup>11</sup>.

The mayor of Mexico City sought the meeting to discuss business, trade and immigration. The mayors promised that no matter what happens on the national level certain U.S. and Mexican cities will continue working together<sup>12</sup>.

In December 2016, Mayor Emanuel went to Mexico City to take part in a climate change summit organized by the C40 group of global cities. Emanuel was planning to meet with other mayors at the summit to discuss the significant role cities will play in addressing climate change.

The mayor also discussed the closure of two Southwest Side coal plants during his administration and his efforts to give incentives to make buildings more energy efficient. Emanuel was among three dozen U.S. mayors who signed an open letter to then President-elect Donald Trump calling on him to work with them to address climate change<sup>13</sup>. Regardless of whether he intends to run for president, Rahm Emanuel is definitely building a national profile and a foreign policy persona.

**Conclusion:** The wake of Donald Trump's presidential victory has signaled a change in American political consciousness. Breaking from the traditional concept of political leadership, the country has seemingly embraced a manager-leader concept with the election of a business mogul over the more traditional national political figures of congressmen and senators.

At a time when the Democrat Party is attempting to embrace an image as the party designated to serve the interests of the working class (see: The Unseen Strategy of the Bernie Sander's Presidential Campaign on The Higgins Report), the Democrats have likewise begun embracing a new concept in recruiting future party leadership or candidates.

Two things are likely to happen in the coming years: 1) it is likely that during the Donald Trump administration, the faces of the Democratic Party national movement will gravitate toward municipal leaders (i.e., big city mayors). The Democrat-embraced strategy will force them to shy away from any perception of an association with big business. This leaves the choice of big city mayors as their best choice to offer to the public.

---

11 <http://prospect.org/article/cities-fill-global-void-left-trump>

12 <http://wgntv.com/2017/02/10/emanuel-meets-with-mayors-from-mexico/>

13 <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-rahm-emanuel-mexico-city-global-warming-20161130-story.html>

2) The other will be that as cities are already acting out against many of the presidential orders and, like in the case of New York, threatening law suits to challenge the legal right of the executive in these matters. The political battles of the Trump administration are going to be largely centered around the courtroom. This will inevitably make the Supreme Court the key branch to the most controversial issues that will face the United States during the Trump administration.

The next few years will be a complete change in dynamics of American political culture. Already, the landscape has started to change as leaders of large municipalities have arisen to be the prime challengers to the executive branch of government. It is likely that these municipalities will continue to exert their independence, pushing the envelope of the law. In so doing they will also instigate legal battles in challenge to presidential authority at every step. This suggests that the branch of government that will prove most significant in the coming years will be the Supreme Court and their rulings over each battle. This will inevitably set impacting precedents in the struggle between federal and local power for decades to come.

The most likely scenario is that de Blasio will attempt to position himself as the voice of the Progressive Movement and a likely Presidential candidate. However, it is unlikely that he will gain any popular support beyond the fringe political elements. Instead, he will continue to challenge the Trump administration both through the media and a series of court cases aimed at the legality of the President's policies.

It is likely Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, will emerge as a likely presidential candidate. Expect, sometime following the first two years of the Trump presidency, for Emanuel to start building a national media presence. The years he will have spent managing the large city of Chicago coupled with the foreign relations movement he is undertaking now will position him as a legitimate candidate in the eyes of the general public. Also, that he is not perceived as radical with a political agenda like di Blasio which makes him more appealing to a wider audience of potential backers and voters.

**Sources:**

Murphy, Jarret, *NYC vs. Trump: Will Bill De Blasio and the people of NYC land the first blows against Trumpism?*, *The Nation Magazine*, January 30, 2017, 13-17.

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/01/de-blasio-gears-up-for-fight-over-sanctuary-cities.html>

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/26/politics/sanctuary-cities-bill-de-blasio-trump-court/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/23/nyregion/a-mayoral-hopeful-now-de-blasio-was-once-a-young-leftist.html>

<http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/bio.page>

<http://prospect.org/article/cities-fill-global-void-left-trump>

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/foreign-policy-for-an-urban-world-global-governance-and-the-rise-of-cities>

<http://wqntv.com/2017/02/10/emanuel-meets-with-mayors-from-mexico/>

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-rahm-emanuel-mexico-city-global-warming-20161130-story.html>