

Texans have a few things to teach policy advocates about the way to incite and bolster political will for climate action at the local level. This is not a claim based on a lack of climate action, but rather because of a new surge of it. The majority of Texans have begun to recognize the importance of mitigating and adapting to climate change, without regard to national political party politics. Followers of our increasingly partisan national-level politics need not be reminded of how incredible this is. But as a Texas native serving on the Steering Committee for a climate action and adaptation plan in San Antonio, Texas, I have personally experienced how city stakeholders, businesspersons, and political leadership have held discussions surrounding climate change. More often than not, Texans are taking this issue seriously.

First, it's worth briefly reviewing the many climate achievements and the surge of climate action planning that is occurring in the most populated Texas cities. San Antonio, Houston, Austin, Dallas, San Marcos, Smithville, and Georgetown have made significant strides toward climate action and adaptation. Austin was the first, [setting a climate action resolution in 2005](#), followed by [multiple related plans surrounding issues regarding climate resiliency](#). Since then, multiple other Texas cities have started developing their own climate action and adaptation plans, including [San Antonio](#), [Dallas](#), [San Marcos](#), and [Houston](#). All are currently developing climate action and adaptation plans to be completed by 2020, and [have joined the coalition of Climate Mayors](#), publicly showing its intentions for a future without climate change.

These cities in Texas have gained the political will towards climate action for reasons that directly reflect the city's context and culture. Houston, [with its increasing frequency of intense hurricanes](#), seeks to find ways to do its part to mitigate climate change while preparing its citizens to be more resilient. San Antonio, boasting its [nine-year AAA bond rating streak](#), and a growing hub for the tech industry, wants to become a smart city, as well as improve its presence as a global leader by contributing solutions to the global problem of climate change. Austin, being a hub of politically active college students, remained true to the city motto of "keep Austin weird" by showing its dedication to the progressive cause before any other Texas city. Georgetown, a Republican-run town full of primarily white suburban families, became the [largest city to run on 100% renewable energy](#) primarily because of its economic benefits. Texas cities' reasons for acting on climate are, essentially, a prime example of what it looks like to think globally and act locally. These cities are fashioning a solution to a global problem that aligns directly with their specific culture, needs, and goals.

Even though I focus on city government possibilities, it's worth remembering that many rural communities recognize the changes brought by climate change, and are willing to

discuss it outside a climate narrative. Much of rural Texas is Republican, which means that on the surface, these folks in these communities will generally tow the party line and claim that climate change is a hoax. (This is not to be reductive – the blame for harm to these rural working-class Americans lie squarely on the GOP and oil lobby for spreading their insidious climate disinformation campaign.) But if you ask rural Texans about average precipitation and heat levels over the most recent decades, many of them will readily tell you that there has been a noticeable change for the worse. They may never utter the phrases “climate change” or “global warming,” but they generally recognize significant changes in weather patterns over the years, and the ensuing difficulties to their livelihoods. Packaged with a different narrative from the one many climate policymakers usually use, these communities could be open to the equivalent of a climate resilience and adaptation plan.

These diverse narratives present a crucial lesson on how advocates everywhere can bolster political will for climate action. I notice so much debate between climate policy wonks on the language we should use to effectively advocate for climate action. We debate on whether the right “climate message” focuses on economic benefits, human benefits, equity and social justice, environmental benefits, morality, etc. I saw many criticize the recent [National Climate Assessment](#) for focusing too heavily on economic costs and benefits rather than its human costs. Perhaps it's worth noting that in Texas, no one-size-fits-all climate message worked for the cities taking action on climate. The climate message that cities need will always depend on the needs of the city itself.

I'll concede that a lot of this discussion stems from my personal Texas pride. But I also highlight this surge of Texas climate activism in cities because it poses unique lessons for climate advocates in cities outside of the state. So many articles I read about Texas' renewable energy sector describe the industry boom with surprise for its presence in Texas. But cities in Texas are showing that characterization to be false. To be sure, it is true that Texas is still a [fossil fuel industry giant](#), and climate-denying Republicans run the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the Texas state government. But the climate activism in Texas' largest cities is so strong, and potent, that political will for climate action has won out *despite* this intense political will and lobbying in favor of fossil fuels.

There are many potential reasons for this strong climate activism. Some of it likely stems from the [booming renewable energy industry in Texas](#), that provides business support of climate action plans. But if the oil and renewable energy lobby mirror the relative size of their sectors, this would not account for all of this new political will. Rather, this increased support for climate action is a reflection of city leaders that do not follow national-level party narratives, nor the needs of a special interest lobby, instead shaping their own that

reflects the priorities of its individual taxpayers. The Mayor of Georgetown, the aforementioned city that runs on 100% renewable energy, is a Republican who also recognizes [the moral imperative for moving away from fossil fuel energy](#). Houston, despite [housing the headquarters of multiple large oil companies](#), elected Mayor Sylvester Turner, who [co-chairs the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda, or "Climate Mayors" coalition](#).

San Antonio's politics illustrates the importance of using rhetoric that distances itself from political partisanship. The Mayor of San Antonio, Ron Nirenberg, [ran multiple successful campaigns while remaining staunchly nonpartisan](#). Nirenberg will never claim to be a Republican or Democrat, and he has a policy legacy that reflects it. When I personally worked for him while he was a City Council member, I could never predict what he would do based on a specific party line. Instead, for any policy decision he made, he would ask: "What's the most common-sense decision to make here?" This "common sense" narrative and legacy was ultimately the reason that voters promoted him to Mayor soon after he joined City Council. As mayor, climate action as a policy priority was a common-sense decision he and most city council leadership made [on their second day in office](#).

In summary, there are a few things we can learn from the uprising of climate action in Texas cities. There is no magic one-size-fits-all message that will work to convince every city to act on climate. The message does not need to reflect the common progressive narrative that we see today. There may be room for working pragmatically with rural communities to create plans improve their climate resilience. Finally, we can apply the lessons we learn in Texas cities to create a specialized narrative for every city that has not yet jumped onto the climate action train. These cities include El Paso, Tulsa, Las Vegas, and Montgomery, Alabama, which have yet to join the Climate Mayors coalition. They need a form-fitting narrative to get these climate-impactful cities to create climate action and adaptation plans of their own. Given the nature of national-level politics, climate action at the local level is becoming increasingly important. If we want everyone to join in this fight, we have to change the way we talk to them about it.