



Viewer's Guide: Second Democratic Primary Debate

On July 30 and 31, Democratic candidates for president will gather in Detroit for the second primary election debate. The first round of debates in June featured some important exchanges on U.S. asylum policy, but little to no discussion on other key issues of concern to people affected by persecution and violence. Recent developments since the last debate have also changed the landscape for refugees, asylum seekers, and others in need of protection. Here's what you need to know:

Asylum seekers and the border

Mentioned in the first debate?

Candidates on both nights criticized the administration's policies towards asylum seekers.

Developments since the first debate

In the weeks since the first Democratic debates, the Trump administration has introduced further obstacles for people in search of safety, and doubled down on existing policies which harm asylum seekers.

On July 16, the administration announced a new policy that would bar Central Americans and others from seeking asylum if they crossed through what is known as a third country – which is any country other than their own– on their way to the U.S. southern border. Since most asylum seekers are currently transiting via Mexico to claim asylum, this provision would prevent people fleeing persecution from receiving the protection they need with almost no exception.

While a judge temporarily blocked this policy from being enforced last week, the administration has continued to expand its so-called 'Remain in Mexico' policy, or the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), as it is also known. MPP has forced thousands of asylum seekers to return to Mexico, often in unsafe conditions, while their claims are being processed.

The media is also reporting that the administration threatened to impose economic sanctions and a travel ban on Guatemala as a means of forcing the country's government to sign what is known as a 'Safe Third Country' agreement to prevent asylum seekers who transited through Guatemala from applying for asylum in the U.S. The National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act, or NO BAN Act, would prevent President Trump or any further president from introducing arbitrary blanket bans in the future. This bill would ensure that travel restrictions were imposed only in the case of specific threats to national security, human rights, democratic processes or institutions, or international stability, none of which is the case for Guatemalans.

What to watch for at the second debate

- Will candidates condemn the new third country bar on asylum seekers and threats to ban Guatemalans from the U.S.?
- Will candidates support the NO BAN Act to ensure such a ban cannot be instituted?

Refugees

Mentioned in the first debate?

No.

Developments since the first debate

Despite the unprecedented global crisis which has forced 70 million to flee their homes, including nearly 26 million who have crossed borders in search of safety, refugees did not feature prominently in the first set of debates. Recent [reports](#) have emerged that the Trump administration is seriously considering admitting not a single refugee next year. If confirmed, this would dismantle America's decades-long legacy of welcoming people facing persecution.

While the U.S. has historically been a global leader in refugee protection, the Trump administration has turned its back on refugees. We've seen the administration make drastic cuts to the refugee resettlement program and pull away from the strategic humanitarian aid investments that help keep people safe in their homes. With millions of people newly displaced in 2018, the U.S. should be doing more, not less.

Senator Markey (D-MA), introduced the GRACE Act, a bill that would set the minimum annual refugee admissions goal at 95,000 refugees (the average refugee admissions goal of the past four decades). So far, Senators Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, and Bernie Sanders have co-sponsored this bill. Although she has not yet co-sponsored the GRACE Act, Senator Warren announced earlier this month that if elected she would seek to admit 125,000 refugees in her first year in office and increase that level over the course of her presidency, a commitment to which other candidates have not yet responded.

What to watch for in the second debate

- Will candidates condemn reports that the administration is seriously considering admitting zero refugees next year and propose what admissions ceiling they would set if elected president??
- Will candidates mention the GRACE Act and its important role in preserving America's legacy of welcome?

Temporary Protected Status

Mentioned in the first debate?

Despite taking place in Miami, which is home to a large population of Haitians and Venezuelans, TPS was not raised by candidates or moderators.

Developments since the first debate

Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, is a critical protection tool used to safeguard foreign nationals living in the U.S. from deportation when conditions in their home countries – including conflict and natural disasters – make it unsafe for them to return. Although nearly half a million people have benefitted from TPS since it was established by Congress in 1990, the Trump administration has been [systematically dismantling](#) this crucial pathway for protection. The administration terminated TPS for Haiti, refused to designate Venezuela for TPS despite growing violence and instability, and is currently considering potential termination of TPS for Syria, where ongoing conflict has displaced tens of thousands of people in recent weeks alone. Last week, a bipartisan bill to designate Venezuela for TPS passed in the House of Representatives. A similar bipartisan bill was introduced in the Senate, but has yet to be cosponsored by any presidential candidate in Congress.

What to watch for in the second debate

- Will candidates uplift the stories of tens of thousands of people who rely on this protection to ensure they are not separated from their U.S. citizen children and other family members and forced back to unsafe situations in their countries of origin?
- Will candidates speak out about the need to ensure Syrians in the U.S. can continue to benefit from TPS?

Yemen

Mentioned in the first debate?

At the first debate, Senator Sanders described the situation in Yemen as the “most horrific humanitarian disaster on Earth,” and mentioned his support for the unprecedented bipartisan vote in the Senate to withdraw U.S. military support for the conflict. This increased pressure on the warring parties and pushed them towards a localized ceasefire agreement.

Developments since the first debate

With ongoing famine conditions, continued diplomatic pressure is required to sustain the fragile political process in Yemen.

But rather than double down on diplomacy, the administration has declared an “emergency” to bypass Congress and resume billions of dollars in arms sales. Just last week, President Trump vetoed three bipartisan resolutions that would have blocked arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, key parties to this brutal and often lawless conflict. Continued arms sales would add fuel to the fire of the war and consequent humanitarian crisis in Yemen and would entrench America further as a key backer of the war.

The U.S. clearly has the unique capacity to be a force for de-escalation of the conflict, and a halt to a failed war strategy which has left over 24 million people (80% of the population) in need of humanitarian assistance. According to UNICEF, a Yemeni child dies every ten minutes from entirely preventable causes. The IRC is a major provider of humanitarian assistance in the country, but as long as the fighting continues, the people of Yemen will continue to suffer and die.

What to watch for in the second debate

- Will candidates speak out against President Trump’s recent veto of three bipartisan resolutions on arms sales?
- Will candidates support a unilateral, unconditional ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates?