**Headline:** It’s Time for Candidates to Address the Bipartisan Root Causes of Our Immigration Crisis

By Brian Concannon

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**[Article Body:]**

The Democratic candidates missed the opportunity last week in Nevada—a state with a 30 percent Latino population—to address the root causes of our immigration crisis. They predictably criticized the worst Trump administration immigration policies, such as families separated at the border and chronic uncertainty for undocumented people in the U.S., many of whom arrived decades ago as children. How we treat people at or inside our border certainly deserves attention, but we cannot ignore that many people come to the United States in the first place because our foreign policies—by both Democrats and Republicans—force them to leave their homes in Latin America and elsewhere.

The U.S. displaces its neighbors by displacing their governments. The Obama administration [supported](https://www.cepr.net/calling-a-coup-a-coup-the-state-department-ignores-the-law-again/) the 2009 coup d’état against Honduras’ elected President Manuel Zelaya by U.S.-trained generals. The Obama and then the Trump administrations supported repressive and corrupt governments that followed Zelaya’s ouster, giving a green light to assassinations of [dissidents](https://www.madre.org/press-publications/article/open-letter-condemning-assassination-berta-c%C3%A1ceres) and journalists, government-linked drug trafficking, and spiraling crime. This repression continues to [drive](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/11/migrants-fleeing-central-america-guatemala-honduras-el-salvador-family-taken-killed-study) tens of thousands to seek asylum in the U.S. each year, regardless of the legal obstacles we erect. More recently, the Trump administration supported last November’s military [coup d’état](https://www.cepr.net/how-the-oas-and-the-media-s-lack-of-scrutiny-caused-a-violent-coup-in-bolivia/) in Bolivia—with little opposition from Democrats—deepening that country’s political crisis.

United States aid and trade policies—often touted as helping our neighbors—also drive people from their homes to our borders. NAFTA opened markets for highly efficient and highly subsidized U.S. farmers by lifting tariffs. Less subsidized Mexican farmers could not compete, and overnight lost their livelihood, [forcing many](https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/11/24/what-weve-learned-from-nafta/under-nafta-mexico-suffered-and-the-united-states-felt-its-pain) to seek replacement livelihoods in the United States. In Haiti, President Bill Clinton admitted—after he left office—to a “[devil’s bargain](https://www.cepr.net/three-years-later-round-up-clinton-edition/)” on rice tariffs that was “good for some of my farmers in Arkansas,” but destroyed rice farming and generated hunger and malnutrition in Haiti.

The failure of the United States to tackle climate change contributes to a global migration crisis. Catastrophic disasters—growing more frequent and severe —displace [more than 20 million people](https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/) each year. This includes [Nicaraguans](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/12/15/2017-27141/termination-of-the-designation-of-nicaragua-for-temporary-protected-status) and [Hondurans](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-honduras) benefitting from Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States since 1998’s Hurricane Mitch, and hundreds of thousands in Central America’s “[Dry Corridor](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/07/guatemala-hunger-famine-flee-north),” now facing their sixth year of drought.

The burden of harmful U.S. foreign policies falls disproportionately on women. In African countries struck by droughts, girls are [taken out of school](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2016/09/20/is-climate-change-the-weakest-link-in-girls-education-programming/) to make the longer walk for their family’s water. Repressive governments we support in Brazil, [Honduras](https://www.madre.org/press-publications/press-release/call-end-repressive-policies-state-honduras), and the [Philippines](https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/29/manilas-abortion-ban-is-killing-women/) keep women “in their place” with regressive laws, and by committing and permitting attacks against women advocates. Women displaced from their homes and headed to our border face a [high risk](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0220775) of sexual assault.

Congress recently demonstrated how bipartisan cooperation can achieve more principled and constructive policies. Last spring, both houses of Congress passed a [bill](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Yemen%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=1) by Senators Mike Lee (R-UT), Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Chris Murphy (D-CT) invoking the War Powers Resolution to stop U.S. support for Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen that has displaced 3 million people and killed more than 100,000. President Trump [vetoed](https://www.madre.org/press-publications/statement/trump-veto-means-continued-us-complicity-yemen%E2%80%99s-war) the bill, but Congress’ War Powers authority, neglected for decades, is now out of the toolbox: on February 13, Senate Republicans and Democrats [passed](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/68?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22war+powers%22%5D%7D&s=2&r=5) a similar measure to constrain the president’s ability to attack Iran.

The Democratic candidates have moved on to Super Tuesday states, two of which, Texas and California, have 26 million Latinos—more than the total population of any other state. Many Latino voters know from personal and family experience how U.S. policies drive people from their homes. They deserve to know, as do all of us, how candidates will address these root causes of our immigration crisis.

Candidates can start to address the root causes by pledging to respect the choices made by voters in other countries—even if we disagree with them—and ensure that our tax dollars will support economic and social development rather than war.  They can announce trade policies that help farmers farm on both sides of the border, and workers everywhere earn a living wage. They can vow to reduce hurricanes, floods, and drought by putting more solar panels on our roofs and less carbon into our atmosphere. In short, the candidates can show how the United States will help our neighbors live secure, dignified lives in their own communities. Because that is a foreign policy that will ultimately benefit all of us.