

# The Latino community's challenge

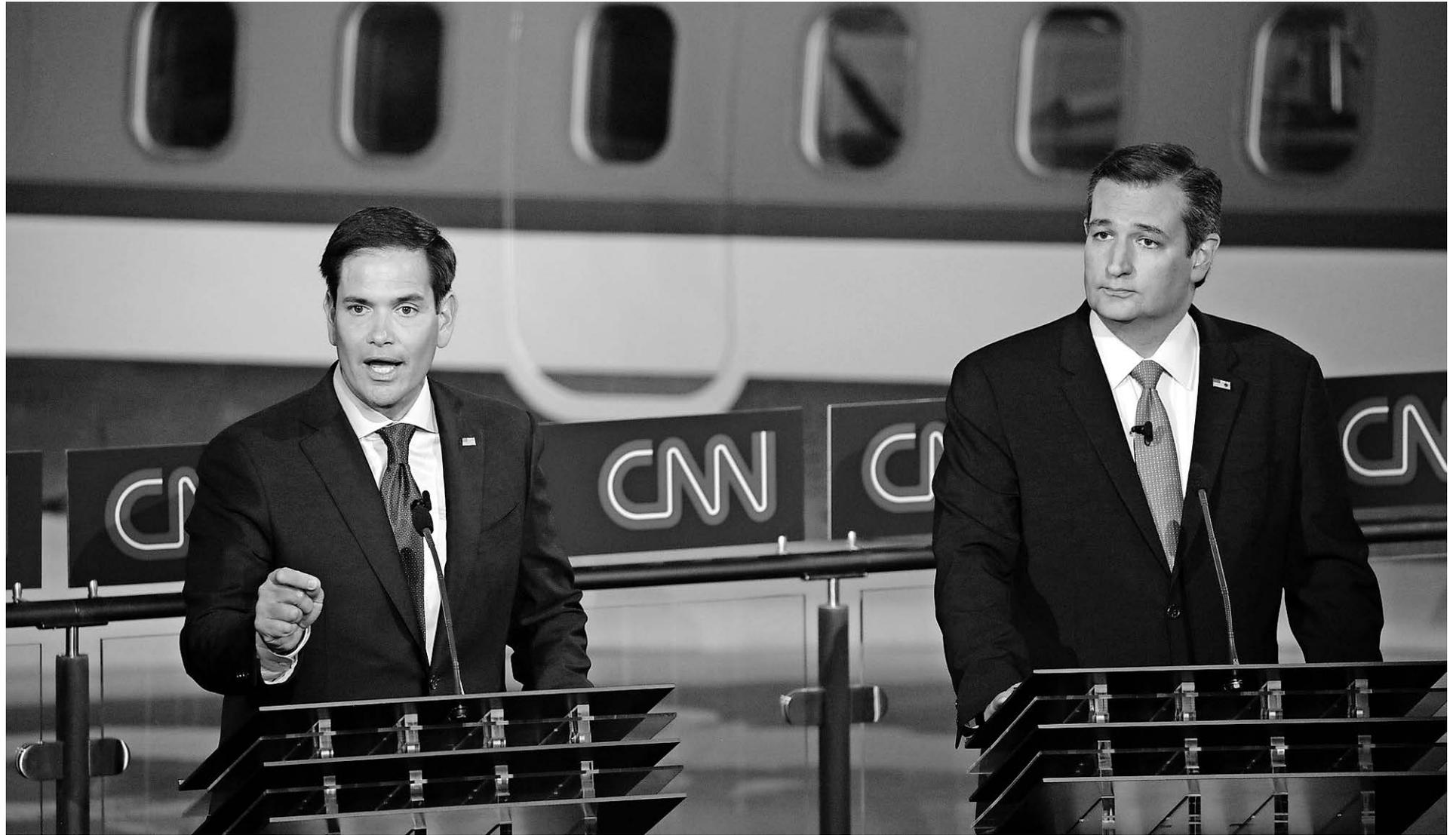
By James Cooper  
and Luis Gonzalez

The upcoming New Hampshire primary continues the battle between Republican presidential hopefuls Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio. The conflict between the two senators has exposed the deep division on immigration within the Latino community and demonstrated that the Latino community is anything but monolithic in its approach to most issues, particularly immigration.

Both Cruz and Rubio are children of Cuban immigrants. Cubans have supported and filled the ranks of the Republican party since the early 1960s because of the GOP's staunch anti-Castro stance and its refusal to engage in any political dialogue with the Communist regime in Havana. For more than a half-century, Cubans have maintained a virtual stranglehold on U.S. foreign policy related to Latin America, viewing everything in the Western Hemisphere through a Cold War paradigm. Yet, Cubans comprise less than 4 percent of all the Latinos in the United States.

Mexicans, on the other hand, make up an overwhelming number of Latinos in the U.S. today — some 64.1 percent according to the Pew Research Center. But they too are not the only voice for Latinos. There are over a million Salvadorans in Los Angeles and 75 percent of Latinos in Philadelphia come from Puerto Rican backgrounds. In New York City, there are 750,000 Dominicans and close to half a million Ecuadorians. And don't forget about the Argentines and Colombians in Florida and the Brazilians in Pacific Beach, a suburb of San Diego.

Even the Mexican-American community does not speak as one. The indigenous people of Oaxaca (who make up large parts of the Latino community in Chicago for example) are not the same people as the *chilangos* who left Mexico City for the better climate and the safer streets



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Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), left, and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) during a Republican presidential debate last September.

of La Jolla. Those communities that dot the southwest border region have little in common with the challenges facing Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the urban jungles around the U.S. Sadly, the Mexican American community has not yet produced an electable presidential candidate, save former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

So Cuban-Americans continue to dominate the Latino dial tone at the national level of U.S. politics today. Cubans are not affected by immigration reform since many of those who arrive in the U.S. can petition for asylum and obtain legal status by simply getting one foot on U.S. soil. As relations between the Cuba and the U.S. continue to normalize and human rights are better pro-

tected in Cuba, the U.S. will likely begin declining asylum petitions from Cubans. We'll then see how Cuban-Americans feel about comprehensive immigration reform.

The media highlights the importance of the Latino vote and that a presidential candidate needs to win the Latino vote to make it to the White House. Would Latinos vote for a Latino presidential candidate just because the candidate is Latino? Probably not. According to a Univision public opinion poll several months ago, Latino voters are more interested in "kitchen table" issues like jobs and the economy, education and healthcare, with immigration following in importance.

The Latino community, however constructed, should by no means be

defaulting to the Democrats in its support. The Obama administration has deported far more people than the Bush administration ever did. Obama's executive actions of November 2014 were but a mere band aid, easily reversible by the next president, to problems that should have, and could have, been dealt with in the first two years of his first term when the Democrats held both chambers of Congress. Even President Bill Clinton's two terms saw harsher immigrations laws enacted.

Most Latinos come from a conservative religious background making them more naturally Republican. Many are small business owners. Given their experiences in their respective homelands, many do not want a strong role for the govern-

ment. What deters most Latinos from voting Republican, however, is the GOP's harsh policies on immigration and the perception of discrimination.

Cruz has done little to assuage this. He has failed to assist the Latino community during his time in the Senate and has made it clear that he is not looking for support from Latinos. Maybe that is because he was born in Canada. Rubio tried his hand at leading a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform in 2013 and has been walking it back ever since — a clear sign of political expedience. Maybe that is because he was born in Florida.

As the battle between Cruz and Rubio makes clear, there is not even one Cuban-American voice. Latinos

are going to vote on the issues just like all Americans do, not because a candidate has a Latino surname or speaks Spanish. Those candidates, like all those on the stump, must appeal to the values and concerns of all Americans and not use our country's broken immigration system as a political piñata.

**James Cooper** is a professor at California Western School of Law in San Diego where he directs international legal studies. **Luis Gonzalez**, a third year Juris Doctor degree student at California Western School of Law, is currently interning at the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations agency headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.