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Sanchez-Morales Debate: Historic Cockfight?

By Ed Rincon

What do you get when you pit two Latinos against each other in a political campaign? You guessed it --- a Mexican cockfight!

Or so it seems from news accounts of the Tony Sanchez vs. Dan Morales campaign for the Texas governorship. Rather than offering a thoughtful discourse of key issues, readers have been forced to endure tabloid-type discussions about alleged money laundering, efforts to buy an election, comparisons to political corruption in Mexico, and Spanish fluency as a litmus test for "Mexican-ness."

Give me a break! With the Democratic primary next week, perhaps it might be useful to provide some food for thought about these issues.

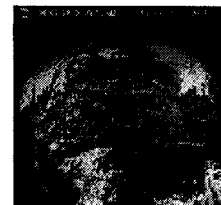
Contrary to some assertions, fluency in Spanish is not a litmus test for Mexican-ness in a candidate. It is, however a distinct asset in a state where one-third of the population is Latino.

My company's experience in conducting public opinion polls of Latinos confirms that 7 in 10 prefer to communicate in Spanish when given the choice, while 80 percent of the Latino television viewing audience tunes into Spanish-language television for newscasts.

Many Latinos not only comprehend issues better in their native language, but the ability to influence their beliefs and behavior increases accordingly.

Spanish-speaking skills, however, are not likely to help a candidate who has only recently discovered that Texas is home to 6.7 million Latinos. Some evidence of continuity with the Latino culture and issues that concern them are also necessary ingredients for any candidate seeking their support.

Dan Morales, a two-time state Attorney General, clearly has the advantage over Tony Sanchez in regards to political experience. Nonetheless, political experience may not always be an asset.



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