

Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe, Vote for the Guy Whose Name Ends in "O."

Jerry Krase (June 15, 2010)



Two (or perhaps three) people with Italian-sounding last names are simultaneously running for governor of the State of New York. This means that Italian American voters will have to decide between them. My advice to them is find out on which side your bread is buttered and which one of them would butter it better as governor.

I hope one is not offended by my poetic title "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, vote for the guy whose name ends in 'O.'"

I assumed that since [Andy Cuomo](#) [2] and [Rick Lazio](#) [3] have thrown their relatively large hats into the ring in an effort to replace one of the most inept unelected governors in the history of New York State, David Paterson, that I might be called upon to comment on this Italian American embarrassment of riches. So I did [Boolean](#) [4] searches on Google to determine who deserves half of my ethnic vote. Boolean searches allow you to combine words and phrases using the words AND, OR, NOT and NEAR to limit, widen, or define your search. They are statements that mimic [Venn](#) [5] diagrams that show all hypothetically possible logical relations between a finite collection of sets. (Pardon the pedantry but it's what I do for a living.)



First I combined the name "Rick Lazio" AND "Italian." This combination produced "About 3,730 results (0.24 seconds)." When I discovered that "Rick" was really "Enrico," I did "Enrico Anthony Lazio" AND "Italian" and got "About 24 results (0.57 seconds)." I then gave "Andy Cuomo" the same Boolean treatment and got "About 535 results (0.34 seconds)" and "Andrew Cuomo" for "About 42,700 results (0.29 seconds)." As a control variable I did "Jerry Krase" as well as "Jerome Krase" which gave me about 12,200 results (0.35 seconds) and About 6,400 results (0.37 seconds) respectively. I am sure that "Andrew"'s results were skewed by his ethnically notable papa (Mario) and especially his mama (Matilda).

Since I know that there is a big difference between being "Italian" and "Italian American" (because my Italian friends are constantly saying so), I repeated the process with the hyphenated version of Italianita with similar result. If I take out the "Cuomo" family name factor from "Andy/Andrew," it is clear that I did better than both of them put together. This makes me more of an Italian and/or Italian American kind of person than either of them, and therefore more deserving of the non-existent Italian American block vote. Unfortunately, I am not running.

It's not unusual for Italian American politicians seeking higher (as opposed to local) office to keep their Italianita under the bushel; that is unless they are playing an especially local ethnic role on a larger stage such as did United States Senator "Pot Hole" Al (Alphonse Marcello) D'Amato, or showing operatic oratory passion as did Mario C.. Italianita doesn't play well on the national political stage despite the numerous Italian Americans one can find thereupon from Alito to Pelosi and back again; although it is fun to watch them trying to act Italian while meeting with the various Italian (in)dignitaries who visit our shores upon occasion.

Both deracinated Rick and Andy are presenting themselves not as Italo-ethnics but as tough-minded, prosecutorial, level-headed budget cutters. They seem to be emulating the campaign of British-born immigrant Abraham David Beame whose ethnically provocative campaign slogan "he knows the buck" got him elected Mayor in 1973 so he could use his lack of business acumen to lead The Big Apple into near-bankruptcy. After showing that he actually didn't know the buck he came in third to Edward I. Koch, and Mario Cuomo ("not the homo") respectively in the [1977 Democratic Party primary](#) [6].

Part of the fiscal tough guy stance of both Rick and Andy is their public animus toward those on government payrolls. Although it is laudable, it is also laughable since both of them spent most of their adult life at that same trough in one way or another. Rick's first job after law school was as a prosecutor in the Suffolk County District Attorney's office and proceeded onward and upward from there to the U.S. Congress. He only left the cushy House after his failed try for the even cushier Senate against Hillary Clinton. Even more ironic as to calling for fiscal austerity and responsibility, when Enrico got off the dole he enlisted with J.P. Morgan Chase, which knew the buck as well as Abe, and had to be bailed out by 25 billion taxpayer TARP dollars. Andy's dependence on public generosity is two generations long as he served in his father's campaign and then on dad's Governor staff in 1983. He went on from there to other public service work such as with David Dinkins' New York City Homeless Commission, Assistant Secretary of HUD in 1993, and now as New York State Attorney General.

I should also note that both candidates have had what each of them recognize as some 'minor' ethical/legal issues raised about them. However, when they talk about each other the 'minor' issues become 'major' ones. In my opinion, their ethical challenges are more likely political smoke and vindictiveness than real fire. In fact, if someone is in office and hasn't been accused of something it



means they haven't done anything while in office. Despite the fact that they are, for elected officials, pretty clean, they are certain to sling as much mud at each other as they can.

As to disclosure, I must admit that the only one of the two candidates with whom I have been in reasonable proximity is Andy whose company I did not have the pleasure of when I was active in Brooklyn electoral politics in the campaigns of Major Owens for Congress and Mario Cuomo for Governor in 1982 doing a kind of liaison job between the two campaigns. Andy had a reputation as a "take no prisoners" campaigner, a personality trait that has served him well as Attorney General (unfortunately as it also did for Elliot Spitzer). My friend Azi Paybarah reminded me recently in the [New York Observer](#) [7] that Cuomo and Lazio weren't always opponents. Azi playfully wrote:

"On August 12, 2004, a caller to a Westchester radio show was speaking at length about politics with the two guest hosts, when the caller wondered aloud: When will America have an Italian-American president?

'Soon as Rick runs,' said one of the hosts, referring to the other host, Rick Lazio.

The other host? Andrew Cuomo."

The idea of Italian Americans rooting for other Italian Americans because they are Italian American is a foreign notion in America. Not so, it seems, for Italians rooting for Italians because they are Italians. I watched in jealous amazement as Francesca Schiavone beat Samantha Stosur in the French Open to win her (and Italy's) first Grand Slam women's championship. What impressed me most was the Italians in the stands who moaned and cheered with every lost and won point. When it was over, Francesca kissed the clay and climbed into the stands for the kind of touching and kissing fest that I dreaded as a child while visiting the Sicilian relatives. As heart-warming as the scene was, such ethnocentrism is terrible for electoral politics, but not of course for supporting Italian and Italian American educational and cultural efforts. In this regard Cuomo is tops, Matilda that is.

Allow me to digress. A few evenings ago, the phone rang while my wife was working in the study and I was lying on my back on the floor watching Blade Runner for the umpteenth time. Since she was less indisposed than I, she picked up and called out that it was "Jim." Unable to make out what she was saying because I was so engrossed with Joanna Cassidy's lack of costume, she brought the phone to me. "Jim" is a friend who is also a leading, "progressive," Democrat member of the New York State Assembly with whom I have worked on several projects. After exchange of pleasantries, he asked if I would carry nominating petitions for him. He knew the answer. People in politics seldom ask questions for which they don't already know the answer. My wife and my children are all active in one way or another in politics. My wife's family, about which I have often written, was much more political than mine. They were "Regular" Democrats. My politics were anti-Regular Democrats. It wasn't a marriage made in political heaven but over time we learned to "get along." The point is, neither Andy or Rick is going to call me and ask me to do something because I am more active in Italian and Italian American affairs than are they. If they call me at all, it will be because I can do something for them and if I do something for them, I expect them to do something for me and mine. That's my advice to Italians, Italian Americans, and everyone else. Support the candidate who will make the world better for you and your children, even if they don't speak Italian and have no idea who Carlo Tresca, or Carlo Levi, was.



PS: I should note that another person with an Italian sounding name, Carl Paladino, it seems, is also a candidate for governor, and may go the petition route to get the G.O.P. line. FYI: I also beat him in both the Boolean searches. Andy, Rick (and Carl) may also appear on a long list of other lines on the ballot such as the Conservative, Right to Life, Tea, Working Families, Independence, and Green among many other parties.

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- [1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/14641cuomolazio1276652377jpg>
- [2] <http://www.andrewcuomo.com/%20>
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- [4] <http://websearch.about.com/od/2/g/boolean.htm>
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