



Let's Talk Latina Power in This Election

She Se Puede founders Jess Morales Rocketto and Stephanie Valencia get real about what's at stake this election, including Covid recovery, the environment, and immigration policy. Stephanie reminds us there are lives on the line. Jess encourages us to think about how our choices affect others. And Alicia gets emotional about the power of the Latino vote.

Alicia Menendez:

It is almost my favorite day of the year, election day. Our last chance to vote in what's being called the most important election of our lifetime. Today, I'm talking with two of my closest friends, Jess Morales Rocketto and Stephanie Valencia about what's at stake and how our country would change if Latinas showed up to vote in full force. They have a dozen political jobs between them, so I'm gonna skip the formal bios. I invited them together because they're co-founders of She Se Puede, a new movement to politically activate incredible Latinas like all of you.

Stephanie Valencia:

There's so much at stake in this election and it's hard to really kind of boil it down, because I think everybody has their own thing that is at stake in this election. You know, some of us who have friends or family who are at risk for deportation. If another four years of Donald Trump will mean another four years they're being in extreme fear and paranoia. For some people, it is about healthcare, and access to healthcare, and pre-existing conditions, and making sure that we don't have to worry about the doctor that we go to, or going into debt because of an emergency, health emergency, or putting off a doctor's visit.

It is about the economy and it is about coming out of COVID and how we respond to the both health emergency of COVID, but the economic emergency of COVID that has disproportionately affected our community. But this truly is, there are lives on the line this election, and we're determining whether or not a racist nationalist who has from day one of his campaign singled out Latinos and Latinas as others and as people who we should fear, not embrace. That is what we are deciding this election, whether or not we are going to choose a leader who will bring this country back together, or whether we will continue to divide, and deflect, and blame. But this is a time where we are at a pivotal moment. I think we will all remember where we were, not just this election, but this period of time when we survive it and we look back, and we're building the country that we want.

Menendez: Jess, there's this concept in urban planning which is about resilience, that when you have something like a hurricane or an earthquake that decimates a city, that the old school model used to be to just build things back to the way they were pre-earthquake, pre-hurricane, but that really in as much as there can be a tragedy, there can be an opportunity to rebuild things to be bigger and better and more resilient than they were before, an opportunity for reimagination. What would that look like?

Jess Morales Rocketto:

I think it would look like a place... I always say that it's a place where everyone can make mistakes. Right now, you have a world in which only some people can make mistakes. Latinos certainly cannot make mistakes. Black people cannot make mistakes. And I will know that we have completely reimagined a world where everybody has opportunity, everybody has equal treatment, when we can not worry about being the best, or the first, or the only, because there's so many of us who have had the opportunity to realize our dreams. And then also like fail, you know? You never hear stories about Latino failure, because we're not allowed to fail. We have to be totally exceptional to get what is available to a lot of people in this country just by being born, just by the virtue of their existence.

So, when I think about how do we get to a place where we're allowed to make mistakes, it's a place where we recognize that all work is valued, and the way that we show that value is by making sure it's like paid a minimum wage, and people have time off, and people have the ability to seek the care that they want. It also means really thinking about the ways in which each of us has the responsibility to make sure that we're trying to leave the world better than we found it. I think that what we've seen in the context of the pandemic is that our individual decisions we make about our behaviors ripple out and affect so many other people. And so, I really believe that if we lived in a world where we thought about how our behaviors affected other people, how our policies affected other people, and tried to make sure that we were doing the least amount of harm and enacting the most amount of good, that would lead to a more equitable system that valued care, which I think is just the most, most important thing, but also really valued an equality of expression.

Honestly, I feel like if this time has shown us anything, it's that these systems aren't working for literally anyone, and if we don't reimagine those things, we may not have the kind of country, but also planet, literally the planet that we want, and need, and deserve.

Ad: *Is there something that's getting in the way of your happiness or that's preventing you from achieving your goals? I have found in my own life that talking with someone can make a big difference, but sometimes the logistics, finding the right person, the time to connect makes things complicated. BetterHelp Online Counseling connects you with a professional counselor in a safe and private online environment. You can get help on your own time and at your own pace. You can schedule secure video or phone sessions, plus chat and text with your therapist. BetterHelp's licensed professional counselors specialize in everything from depression, to relationships, to self-esteem.*

In fact, so many people have been using BetterHelp that they're recruiting additional counselors in all 50 states. Best of all, it's an affordable option. Latina to Latina listeners get 10% off your first month with the discount code Latina. So, why not join one million people who are taking charge of their mental health? Go to [BetterHelp.com/Latina](https://www.betterhelp.com/Latina). That's BetterHelp, H-E-L-P, .com/Latina.

Menendez: Stephanie, when you look at Latinas, just the numbers, what is the power of us as a voting bloc?

Valencia: So, this year, in 2020, the broader Latino electorate, 32 million of us will be eligible to vote, making us the largest minority group in the country who can vote. That being said, Latinas specifically represent some of the largest and most fastest growing parts of the

electorate, and some of the most critical battleground states. So, when you look at the Latino electorate in say a place like Florida or North Carolina, Latinas and specifically Latinas under 50 represent the largest share of the electorate in those states, which just makes us really powerful deciders for this election, and we're not getting smaller. We are driving population growth in this country. U.S.-born Latinos and immigrant populations are driving the population growth of this country, and so the number 32 million eligible Latino voters, our overall numbers in the country are closer to 60 million, and so we're continuing to grow in this country, and so now is the time for us to really understand how we tap into and realize that power, and I truly believe the Latinas will decide in 2020 who is sitting at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Menendez: It's a lot you just threw at us, Steph.

Valencia: It is. And it is-

Menendez: I can barely remember my phone number, so I'm not sure how you have those numbers committed to memory. Jess, if Latinas came out to vote the way that other groups come out to vote, what would that mean for American democracy?

Rocketto: I think the individual act of voting is really important, like it matters that you go and exercise your vote. The second part of this, though, is that if we voted as a bloc, the issues that matter to us, the economy, immigration, minimum wage, those things would also have to matter to the elected officials that we elected. And that is a really big deal, because it means that if you ever wonder like does this affect my life, yes, it does. But if you're not seeing the effects of that, it's in part because there is not a clear mandate for our issues. There's not the pressure that we have as citizens and frankly people who are exercising our rights for those who are not citizens, as well, to make sure that we are representing those interests.

And that's also what we're doing when we go and vote. We're saying, "I believe in this candidate." But we're also saying, "I believe in this issue. I believe that what I care about and what makes a difference in my life deserves a vote in Congress, a bill put forward, a new policy." If we can understand that our individual vote makes a difference, and also our votes collectively as a bloc of people, as Latinos, make a difference, all the things we hear about how Black women are the backbone of the Democratic Party, how white working class voters need to be persuaded, how suburban moms really matter in this election, you could additionally hear about Latinas, single moms who are in community college, being the people who are deciding this election. And I think our country would change in those... Look at me. Civics, democracy is making me-

Menendez: Llorona! A llorona! Wouldn't be an episode if someone didn't cry.

Rocketto: What did we do here? And I do, I mean part of why I'm crying is that it's like that is who decided who led our country, and what policies mattered, and the country would be better. It would affect our lives, and that's what all of this is supposed to be about. All of it.

Ad: *Latina to Latina is brought to you by First Republic Bank. As your focus turns to what matters most to you and your community, First Republic remains committed to offering personalized financial solutions that fit your needs. From day one, a dedicated banker will be there to listen to you and understand your unique values and goals. Because now more than ever, what matters to you matters most. Learn more at FirstRepublic.com. Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.*

Menendez: I think part of the reason that this makes me, and Jess, and you emotional, is that there's both the change that could grow out of this, but there's also frustration with the fact that we've gotten the message that you need to have a PhD in order to be able to vote, that somehow the fact that we make all the decisions inside our families is not enough. How do you get around the sense that you need to be a political scientist to go to the polls?

Valencia: Yeah. I have a cousin here in New Mexico, and she has told me for a very long time that she thinks that voting and that politics is my job, not hers, and that she thinks that it's too complicated, and Stephanie, that's what you do. It's not what I do. And the point I always try to make to her is like your voice is more important than mine, like you are dealing with issues on the front lines of COVID, on the front lines of the healthcare crisis in this country every single day and seeing where the system is broken. You need to be voting.

And so, as Jess always likes to point out when we talk about this, voting is hard. Democracy is hard. But if we show up and the people who should be deciding what the government and the future of this country look like are actually participating in helping to determine who is sitting in Congress, who is sitting in the White House, and who is making those really important decisions about access to college, healthcare and who gets access to it, who gets access to birth control, like if those are the people who are participating in deciding, we have all we need. You do not need an advanced degree to participate in politics. And one of the benefits of 2020 for all of the hot mess that it has been is voting by mail is actually a huge opportunity for people to take their time and to actually do their research and to feel more prepared.

You know, Latinas don't turn out at the same levels as non-Hispanic Black or white women. In fact, we turn out anywhere between 10 to 15 points lower than both of those subgroups, and so one of the reasons that we don't turn out at those same rates is because we don't feel prepared and we don't want to mess up.

Menendez: So, we're talking about Latinas, because this is a Latina podcast, but I want to talk about Latinos, because one of the things that you, Stephanie, have found in your research, and I should say Stephanie and my husband are work siblings. I would like to also say that Stephanie introduced me to my husband, and so I am forever in her debt for that introduction. Thank you, Stephanie. But it means that I hear about this nonstop in my house, Stephanie, which is that... Listen, there was a freak out at some point around the Latino vote, and part of what my husband, Carlos, and you always try to remind people is part of that freak out is because there was an expectation that Joe Biden was gonna have this in a runaway, and that really what has happened is that as in past elections, you see a quarter to a third of the national Latino vote going to the Republican candidate, and so this is what would be a "normal" election. These are the numbers that you're seeing coming from a Republican, especially a Republican incumbent candidate.

But of the numbers that you're seeing, part of what interests me is that gender divide. That as fired up as the women in our community are against Donald Trump, there's some softness among men, and I wonder for someone who's having this conversation with their boyfriend, with their husband, with their dad, what it is about Donald Trump that is appealing to men in our community.

Valencia: Yeah. Well, the gender divide, as you pointed out, is one of the biggest findings that we have found in our research. We've interviewed close to 40,000 Latino voters across 11 different battleground states over the last year and one of the things that has emerged

and stayed completely consistent is the gap between where Latinas are and where their Latino counterparts are as with regard to Trump. And Latinas are deeply, deeply anti-Trump. It's almost like they can't get anymore anti-Trump, whereas men, you know, I like to say they have Trump intrigue in certain pockets. They're Trump intrigued, and then especially in states like Arizona, and Nevada, and even in New Mexico, you see an interest and you see kind of an infatuation with Trump, and maybe his cult of personality, the status of the economy like pre-coronavirus.

Even though many of these men weren't actually experiencing better economic situations in their own personal lives, they still think the fact that they see Trump as this "successful businessman" and somebody who takes on all these different interests and just says it how it is, there's something, an appeal to that they really enjoy. And so, I do think that for progressives and more broadly Democrats, they have to figure out how to talk to these younger Hispanic men, because I think whether Trump is in office or not, there is something that is not reaching them and not really speaking to them about kind of where progressives and Democrats are.

But as it relates to Latino men in this election and their behavior, I will say that while they are intrigued by Trump, they aren't yet ready to go vote for him. And in a place like Arizona, in one of our last polls, we saw upwards of 40% of Latino men who said they "supported" Trump. But when you asked, "Will you actually go and vote for him?" That number dropped to closer to like 25%. And so, there's a softness. It's like that they're interested but they can't quite stomach going to vote for him.

Ad: *I want to tell you about a comedy podcast that I think you'll love. It's called Spanish Aquí Presents. Each week, Spanish Aquí Presents highlights the best of the Latinx comedy and experience with exciting guests, discussions about Latinx culture, and even a little improv. Spanish Aquí Presents is hosted by comedians Carlos Santos, Raiza Licea, Oscar Montoya, and Tony Rodriguez, with special guests like actor Luis Guzman, first Latina Disney princess and my girl, Aimee Carrero, Hija de tu Madre designer Patty Delgado, and even Mr. 305 himself, Pitbull. And if you're asking yourself, "Do I need to know Spanish to enjoy this podcast?" The answer is no, but you might learn a little along the way. Listen to Spanish Aquí Presents in your podcast app now and subscribe so you don't miss an episode.*

Rocketto: The whole making us feel like we need a PhD to vote, all of the Latinos support Trump stuff, like I do feel like a lot of that is drummed up by kind of like conventional political wisdom and the people who pedal in that to make it feel like one, you don't know enough, you're not American enough, you're not smart enough to vote. You have to educate yourself more, because you couldn't possibly have all of the information that you need, because you're not well educated. Your families aren't the right type of families, right? It's all about othering us.

And then I think that second piece is about creating a place to blame us, like just to be totally honest. Because the question that that begs, which I think is somewhat fair, is like under all of the things that Trump has done to Latino community, especially around immigration, which is what they think is the only thing that we care about, how could they even consider voting for Donald Trump? Nobody is asking that of white women, who are voting against their own self-interests. Nobody is asking that of suburban, kind of Republican swing voters. Nobody is asking that of white, working class men whose factories have been closed because of Trump's policies. And that's because they're

allowed to vote however they want. They have enough information, they have enough history here, it's completely fine. But for us, it's like, "How dare they?"

And all of that is frankly about questioning our Americanness and our ability to participate in this democracy, so I actually just think that that concern trolling needs to be dismissed completely out of hand. Yes, some people may, who are Latino, will vote for Donald Trump, just like half of the country. The majority of Latinos are not voting for Donald Trump and are not even Trump curious.

Part of what I want to say to other Latinas is don't let anybody tell you that you need to know something else, or you're not worthy, or you might make the wrong choice. You will make the right choice, because you know about your experiences. And if you think that there are people in your family or community who are going to make a choice that doesn't live up to our values, it is on all of us to have that conversation with them, because actually all that stuff doesn't really matter. We're the people who can be the most persuadable to our uncles, our abuelos, our dads who are like, "I'm into that Trump guy because he's a good businessman."

Menendez: And part of what you're also identifying, either of you can take this, with these numbers is these questions around whether or not there is a common identity here, and whether there's a common identity both socio-culturally and socio-politically, with one clearly more in focus at this moment, Steph, than the other.

Valencia: Yeah. I think this is the question of the next decade, Alicia, which is how do we, as Latinos, relate to each other and create a collective identity, both as a community, but also politically? Is that possible? And how does our individual Latinidad contribute to how we participate in politics? And I think this is the question of the decade, because we are a very diverse community. We do not share one country of origin. We do not share one kind of common immigrant experience. We don't share a race. Not all of us speak Spanish. So, there are just so many things that make us different and as we grow rapidly, we are going to be intermarrying outside of the Latino community, which means like my half-Latino, half-white nieces, and nephews, how do they relate to their Latino identity and how that plays into politics? What does that actually mean for them and how do we continue to build a strong political identity as Latinos moving forward so we can actually build power?

Rocketto: I think we're really honestly at the beginning of figuring out what does it mean to have a Latino politic, if that does mean anything, and how do we do that in a way that really honors those people who are participating in our democracy, even though they're not afforded the rights to citizenship.

Ad: *I want to recommend a podcast that offers big ideas and surprising stories. It's called Pindrop from TED. You'll journey across the globe with filmmaker Saleem Reshamwala in search of the most imaginative ideas from each place. This season, hear from a handful of musicians, like Renata Flores, who are bringing pride back to Quechua, Peru's native language, with their music. And listen to locals from Rapa Nui, AKA Easter Island, to find out what happens to the tourism paradise when people stop showing up. Be sure to check out Pindrop wherever you listen.*

Menendez: You guys talked a little bit about down ballot races, and I want to acknowledge, I am super into this stuff, and even I sometimes end up in the voting booth with my ballot and being like, "Wait, what is this?" Walk me through some of the mechanics beyond that top of the ticket, beyond who's running for president, how you think about the rest of those choices.

Valencia: Google really becomes your friend. I find myself sometimes standing in line while I'm waiting to vote and there's like a judicial nomination in my local district court or whatever, and it's like, "Who am I supposed to be voting for here? I don't know these people." And so, I'm Googling and trying to understand who they are, so I think that is one. There are lots of different great resources like BallotReady.org, Vote.org, they have really good materials down to your kind of local level that you can personalize the ballot and understand just even what is the structure of the ballot gonna look like before you walk in the door, because I think half of that is like, "I don't know what I'm gonna vote for before I go into vote."

And so, just even knowing who is on the ballot and what I'm voting on and wrapping my head around that, and then oftentimes you can print something out and take it with you into the actual... If you end up going in person, you can take a piece of paper in there with you if you want.

Rocketto: I mean, can I be honest? I don't... I often do not know everybody that I'm voting for. Like here's how I do it. I'll just be like 100% real. I work really hard to understand what groups I trust their kind of like political assessment, and I think that does actually really matter, because those folks have done all the work to research this person's voting record and where they stand on stuff, so I go and look at what people who are aligned with my politics think. So, if I've heard that a race is really big on the environment, well, then I want to go see what the Sierra Club, and Sunrise Movement, and all those people have said. And if I've heard that the minimum wage is really important, then it's like, "Okay, well have the unions endorsed this person?" And I need that shortcut, because I just don't... I haven't researched everybody.

I move around a lot, so I'm not always connected to the local community where I'm voting, and I want to make sure that I'm representing those interests fully. When Steph and I say that you have everything you need to make the decisions, part of what we're saying is like it's okay not to know. There's so much on the ballot, there's so much going on. Make sure you know what you care about, because that can help you figure out how to make a decision quickly in those instances where you're voting for someone that you don't quite understand. And look at those endorsements, because in theory, those are shortcuts to understanding who shares your values, and then you know, when all else fails, try hard to follow your gut and get a little bit of information.

Menendez: There is a good chance, Steph, that we don't know the results of this election on election night, so what then are we buckling up and waiting for?

Valencia: Yeah. We should all be prepared not to know on election night, and we should be prepared that there could be a very different outcome on those who vote on election day versus those who vote by mail, and it is going to take some time to count those ballots. Different states have different systems for how they count the early votes and the absentee ballots.

Menendez: To make sure I'm clear, because a lot of Democrats are gonna be voting by mail, and a lot of Republicans are gonna be putting the preference on going in person.

Valencia: Exactly, and so while the election day vote tally is the easiest and the quickest to be able to get, and that's what we usually look at when we determine election results, and so there's a very good chance that for a couple of weeks, we may not actually know who won the election, and in certain states, there are gonna be different layers of certifying the

election. This is gonna be a very complicated process. It is a real test of our democracy and the systems that we have in place, and there are lots of different scenarios, and so it's really important that we get over any kind of confidence issues about whether or not we feel prepared to vote, and that we vote, and we take our families, and we catalyze our communities to do it, because that is the only way that it will be clear to make sure that there is an unquestionable result around who won for president.

Menendez: Last question. Jess, the first time we had you on Latina to Latina, you said that your work is to help motivate people to their purpose. I think about that a lot and I think there are a lot of people, a lot of our listeners, who are ready to vote, or they have already voted, but they have someone in their life who isn't sure that their vote matters. So, what is the pep talk that a listener who has now listened to 30 minutes of this episode gives to the person in their life who needs that extra push out the door?

Rocketto: In 2016, I was working for Hillary Clinton. My mom is a lifelong Republican. She voted for Ted Cruz in the primary, like very Republican, and I... She was my most important persuasion project. I helped talk to millions of voters, hundreds of millions of voters as part of my job, but the only person I really cared about was my mom, and I'll tell you what I told her. I was successful. This was a successful argument, which is you're not voting for Hillary Clinton, you're voting for me. It doesn't matter who's name is on the ballot. Your name is on the ballot and my name is on the ballot, and what you want for me in my life is to be able to live better off than you, is to be able to live freely, is to be able to have children who have a world that is better, where we don't have to work so hard for so little, where at the end of all that hard work, it leads to success and happiness. And if you vote for Donald Trump, you're not just voting for him, you're also voting for a life for me that is not as good as the one that you dreamed of, and everything you've done in my life was to make sure that I could be better off than you, and that I can be better off than our parents and grandparents, and it's not about him.

It actually has so little to do with him and it has everything to do with what we want and what we believe, and I know that we share the same values, and if you share those values, when you're casting that ballot, when you're filling in the name, you're not actually voting for him, you're voting for me. So, think about my name.

Valencia: Amen. You have my vote.

Menendez: Jess Morales Rocketto for president.

Rocketto: Thank you.

Menendez: Jess, Steph, thank you both so much.

Menendez: Thanks for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Cedric Wilson is our producer. Carolina Rodriguez mixed this episode. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please leave a review. It is one of the fastest, easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "Let's Talk Latina Power in This Election" *Latina to Latina*, Lantigua Williams & Co., October 25, 2020. LatinaToLatina.com

Produced by:

