

Gaslit Nation Transcript

02 November 2022

“We’ve Been Through This Such a Long, Long Time”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/weve-been-this-74108702>

[opening clip]

Pastor Jamal Bryant (00:00):

Ladies and gentlemen, when the Republican Party of Georgia moved Herschel Walker from Texas to Georgia so that he could run for Senate, it's because change was taking too fast in the post, Antebellum South. The state had been flipped blue and there are some principalities that were not prepared for a Black man and a Jewish man to go to Senate at the exact same time, so they figured that they would delude us by picking somebody who they thought would in fact represent us better with a football than with a degree in philosophy. They thought we were so slow, that we were so stupid, that we would elect the lowest caricature of a stereotypical broken Black man as opposed to somebody who is educated and erudite and focused. Y'all ain't ready for me today. Since Herschel Walker was 16 years older, white men been telling him what to do, telling him what school to go to, where to live, where to eat, where to buy a house, where to run, where to sit down, where to sleep, where to pay for abortions, where to buy a gun.

Pastor Jamal Bryant (01:18):

And you think they're not going to tell him how to vote in 2022? We don't need a walker. We need a runner. We need somebody who gonna run and tell the truth about January 6th. We need somebody who gonna run and push for the cancellation of student loan debts. We need somebody who gonna run and make the former president respond to a subpoena. We don't need a walker. We need somebody who will be steadfast, unmovable, always abounded, knowing that your labor is not in vain. Georgia, I need you to know the slave Negros y'all are used to don't live here no more. We can think for ourselves. Function for ourselves and vote ourselves. Why? 'Cause we don't need a walker.

[intro theme]

Sarah Kendzior (02:22):

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, out now.

Andrea Chalupa (02:36):

And I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, the film the Kremlin does not want you to see, so go watch it. Our opening clip was Pastor Jamal Bryant explaining who Herschel Walker is. If you wanna make votes for Reverend Rafael Warnock, one of the best people to ever grace the halls of the US Congress, and keep him in the Senate, go to [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) and check out our 2022 Survival Guide. Right at the top, we'll have a link on where you can go to make calls to keep Reverend Warnock in the Senate where we need him.

Sarah Kendzior (03:15):

And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. And so this has been one hell of a week. If you do not subscribe to us on Patreon, I highly recommend that you do so to get our bonus episode for this week where we discuss Elon Musk's

takeover of Twitter in great detail. We're gonna touch on that again today. We're actually gonna release part of that bonus publicly because we believe this information needs to be heard. The independent venues of media are under attack just from structural impediments, not necessarily in some sort of direct way, so we could use all the support we could get. But also there's a lot more information on that. I know that's something our audience is interested in.

Sarah Kendzior (04:07):

Another topic related to Elon Musk that our audience has been clamoring for information about is the attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of Nancy Pelosi, that happened over the weekend; an attack that spurred a number of theories which were debunked and an attack that is extremely frightening in the consistency that we've spoken about so many times on *Gaslit Nation* over the last six years of threats to elected officials and threats to their families. It does not matter if you like the elected official in question. We should all be able to condemn an 82-year-old man getting hit on the head with a hammer. And this is part of a rising wave of threats and sometimes assaults on our officials that our institutions have simply failed to stop. They've had ample warnings. There have been ample cases. We've seen this in events that Pelosi herself was participating in, like the first impeachment.

Sarah Kendzior (05:17):

There were threats to the witnesses. There were threats to many events that came before it. The Manafort trial, the Roger Stone trial. There was January 6th, where bands of insurrectionists threatened to assassinate members of Congress. None of this should come as a surprise and we're gonna discuss the questions about preparation and how it affects the upcoming midterms. But first I just wanna go over what actually happened and how the theories put forth by Musk, among others, as well as many on the right wing, were formed because it's important to understand that process. So, on October 28th, Paul Pelosi was attacked alone in his home by a 42-year-old man named David DePape with a hammer at around 2:30 in the morning. And so when this news first broke, there was a lot of misinformation and the information did not come from trolls or bots or purveyors of purposeful propaganda.

Sarah Kendzior (06:22):

It came from the mainstream media. Initially, I believe it was a local San Francisco outlet reported that Paul Pelosi had been attacked while wearing his underwear only and the attacker, who was a well known nudist, was wearing his underwear. *Politico* reported that there is a third party at the home that answered the door, or at least worded their article in a way that that was the assumption. There was a 911 call that was released where the dispatcher was saying that Paul Pelosi knew the attacker and that the attacker's name was David and that Paul Pelosi sounded confused. There was a report that both of them were gripping hammers. Basically, there were a lot of things that led people to believe that this was not a break in, but that this was some sort of relationship, that they knew each other and something had gone awry.

Sarah Kendzior (07:17):

I'm just gonna flat out say that when all of this broke, I certainly did not think along the lines of Elon Musk and Elon Musk put out the baseless information—there's no credibility to this—that Paul Pelosi had sought out a gay prostitute, and that that's who David DePape was, and that that's how the assault happened. He linked to a kind of a blog, you know, known for false reports. But I did wonder given Paul

Pelosi's history, did they know each other? Did something go wrong? You know, this is a guy who got arrested for DUI back in May. He pled guilty to his DUI in August. This is Paul Pelosi. He has a track record of, you know, drunkenness. I thought maybe he went out, maybe he went to a bar, maybe this guy, you know, they got in an argument, they got in a fight, he followed him home, and then he attacked him with a hammer.

Sarah Kendzior (08:11):

I thought it might be something along those lines. The difference between me and many, many other people on Twitter is I kept all of this to myself because when there is an ongoing attack of some kind, or a criminal incident, you should wait until you have the facts. And this was very early, and there was a lot of information missing, and this is a big deal. This is the husband of the Speaker of the House. As I said, it does not matter how you personally feel about Nancy Pelosi. This is very dangerous. If it can happen to him, it can happen to anyone. And it has been happening, or at least threats of it have been happening consistently for a very long time. I wanna say though that the right-wing conspiracy theories, which a lot of media outlets have been labeling baseless, they weren't baseless.

Sarah Kendzior (09:02):

They were based on misleading info or false info from mainstream sources and then they were twisted and contorted into a smear on Paul Pelosi, you know, meant to humiliate him, to humiliate the Pelosi family. But we need to look at multiple failures at play here. You have deliberate propagandists or people spreading the propaganda like Musk, but you also have reporters really jumping the gun on a touchy subject and screwing things up. The thing is, I'm actually in favor of the whole, "I'm just asking questions and doing your own research". People always mock those concepts but I think when they are in good faith, those are acts of civic inquiry. We live in a country that is not transparent about matters of governance. It's not transparent about elite crimes and those networks. We've been witnessing this for a long time.

Sarah Kendzior (10:01):

So therefore, because the media fails us, because the government fails us, it falls to citizens to figure things out. The thing is, when new facts emerge that contradict all the previous information, you have to incorporate them into your conclusions instead of simply pretending that they do not exist, which is what many people on the right are doing right now. They have a conclusion and they're trying to find the facts to fit it. That said, there are some really strange things about this case. One thing that I think is a legitimate question is where was the security? The Pelosis are certainly among the most wealthy people in Congress and probably among the wealthiest in the United States. They obviously can afford personal security. They obviously should have personal security as demonstrated through not just this assault, but the decades of threats toward Nancy Pelosi.

Sarah Kendzior (10:58):

So it is somewhat startling that there wasn't somebody guarding the house, particularly when an 82-year-old man with a history of DUIs is alone. I think just for their safety, this is a basic thing. So I am curious about this. There's also an element of this that I can't quite figure out, which is that the attacker, David DePape, apparently hit Pelosi with this hammer, bludgeoned him, after the police were there. And again, I'm thinking, Why did the police not take the guy down immediately? They certainly have jumped

the gun, so to speak, in many other cases. It seems like something that did not need to happen. And I'm curious if the body cam video will be released on that. And then I guess, you know, a little more just to kind of establish what happened here.

Sarah Kendzior (11:51):

There was a lot of debate, especially initially, about what inspired this attack, what led him to do this, and part of that is because David DePape is basically a sponge for conspiracy theories of any kind, like anti-vaxxer, QAnon, anti-Semitism... I'm trying to think, I mean, there was, you know, I think there was UFOs. It just goes on and on and on. GamerGate. He said that he was radicalized by GamerGate. When he made a statement to the investigators, he was very explicit that yes, his target was Nancy Pelosi, that he had brought zip ties and tape and rope. He planned to interrogate her. According to the report, he said that if she didn't tell the truth, she would be punished.

Sarah Kendzior (12:41):

So yes, this was a threat toward Nancy Pelosi as well, even though she was not there at the time. And despite his rambling and a lot of questions about his mental state, he seemed to be able to get a detailed plan together. There was some question about the glass spilled in the door. They said, you know, he smashed it with a hammer. That makes sense to me. There are some other strange things about his background. I'm just gonna tell you about this and then we'll talk more generally about the problem of streamlined political violence. DePape is connected to a woman named Gypsy Taub, who I had never heard of but I guess in San Francisco, she's fairly well known. She's originally from Russia. She came here in 1988 and then went to MIT and then afterwards has basically lived her life as a nudist activist saboteur before it takes an even darker turn.

Sarah Kendzior (13:38):

She was involved in the 9/11 truth movement in a way that reminds me very much of Alex Jones because, you know, I think that there is some validity to the truth movement in terms of people asking questions like, "Why did our intelligence fail us so badly? Who benefited from the attacks? How did 9/11 lead to the word Iraq?" Things like that. Not things like, you know, I think the planes were CGI and none of it happened. Not things like that. Actors like Alex Jones, they show up to contaminate those movements, to make them lose credibility, to make them seem vicious as he did in other cases, or to make them seem ridiculous—and this is the same tactic as QAnon—and Gypsy Taub seems to have done that for a wide variety of social issues by showing up naked at all of them.

Sarah Kendzior (14:26):

She's a nudist activist. So, of course, if you're the media, that is what you're focusing on instead of the actual issues at play. It gets fairly frightening, though, when you look into her background. In 2019, Taub was charged with attempted child abduction, stalking and child abuse. In 2021, she was convicted on 20 counts of stalking, dissuading a witness, attempted child abduction, and then also misdemeanor accounts of child molestation. Her targets included a 14-year-old boy. This is to me a very dangerous actor who I'm surprised did not get more scrutiny. And I do wonder about the relationship between her and DePape. He says a lot of really crazy things on his blog, among them is that he was a victim of, I think what he's describing is literal mind control by this woman.

Sarah Kendzior (15:23):

And I would not trust things written on this blog. It has a lot of wild claims, but I think that it's worth investigating this individual. It's just something that stood out to me. But anyway, the point is that any official at that level with that amount of power, that amount of wealth, and who has experienced that amount of threats—including obviously January 6th, where people were storming the Capitol looking for Nancy Pelosi—should have security, should have armed security and it is puzzling to me that they didn't. We don't know the details of why and I'm not implying anything. I'm certainly not blaming Paul Pelosi for a situation that resulted in him getting bludgeoned with a hammer. But it opens up a broader question about political violence because we're seeing, now, threats to much less powerful people with much fewer resources; poll workers, election officials, local officials, all coming up in a culture of streamlined violence that the DOJ and Merrick Garland have refused to do anything about, despite promising to do so a year ago. And I'm really dreading the weeks to come. I hope I'm wrong, but I think we're in for violence and when you see it play out at this level, I mean, I just think it's going to be part of a bigger pattern and it's going to embolden people and encourage people and... I don't know. Andrea, what are your thoughts?

Andrea Chalupa (16:53):

Ugh... I guess this is what happens when you have a lack of accountability. We're living within a political violence crisis and expect more political violence if there's a red wave and Republicans sweep the House and Senate. Expect political violence. They can't wait for this to be stormtrooper central. They want America to be trapped under extreme gerrymandering and corruption and violent intimidation like Orbán's Hungary. They want Putin's Russia. They want to live in a dictatorship. Their base is openly advocating for that. Peter Thiel has his tentacles all over a lot of these races, including in Ohio, where JD Vance is basically Peter Thiel's puppet candidate running for Senate against Tim Ryan. And guess what? *The New York Times* has a report out saying how JD Vance and Peter Thiel are both invested in a Russian propaganda website that is pumping out all of this RT (Russia Today) produced disinformation spreading lies about Ukraine and glorifying Putin's mafia state of Russia.

Andrea Chalupa (18:09):

They even posted videos of two American veterans who volunteered to go fight in Ukraine when the total genocidal war broke out in February. They went there on their own accord. They went there believing in the cause of freedom, because it's a very clear good versus evil fight in Ukraine, as we keep saying on this show. These are people fighting against eradication, against a literal genocide. Several genocide experts have come out with their reports saying this is genocide that're all witnessing. And these two American veterans were not content sitting on the sidelines watching all this play out on Twitter, with their own money, their own goods, their armored vest, whatever they needed to protect themselves, went over there and volunteered as soldiers for the Ukrainian military to fight in a volunteer battalion. They got captured by Russia and the Russians, of course, tortured them. They were finally freed in a prisoner swap.

Andrea Chalupa (19:03):

But they reported how the Russians left their faces intact but did a major number, including electric shock, on the rest of their bodies. And when they were forced into these video interviews, they were forced to say horrible things against Ukraine, against the US. And these videos were played on a website that JD Vance, who's running right now for US Senate, has a financial stake in. How disgusting is that?

That's where we are right now. And so if you know any Ukrainian Americans in Ohio, if you know anybody who cares about the issues of Ukraine, send them this *New York Times* article because they need to know who JD Vance is. We're going to be living in a time of continued political violence. A lot of that has been the fault of Democratic leadership, like Nancy Pelosi, who slow-walked the impeachment trials against Donald Trump; the first one, certainly. There's been reporting on that in a new book that's out which people can find... I forget the name of that book.

Sarah Kendzior (20:00):

The name of it is *Unchecked* and yeah, there are some excerpts of it posted online, interviews with the authors. I haven't had the chance to fully read it, but I plan to, and I usually avoid these types of books. But this one looks good. Anyone who doubted our coverage of Nancy Pelosi's continued obstruction, which went to protect Trump, to protect the GOP, her refusal to act on the Mueller report, to impeach on that, her refusal or reluctance to impeach on the shakedown of Zelensky, she didn't wanna do that either. She did not want to impeach after the Capitol attack, even though she was a target and fellow members of Congress were targeted for assassination. And so the book goes into a lot of the behind the scenes details, including interviews with members of Congress who were very, very frustrated by the fact that they were held back in their constitutional duty by Nancy Pelosi.

Sarah Kendzior (20:57):

And they did try. You know, they tried to save our country. I mean, the thing is, I hate saying this. It's like we weren't kidding on this show when we told you in 2019 that we had very limited time and we were not kidding in the beginning of 2021 when we said, "You have to act quickly about this attempted coup and this Capitol attack because they are going to rewrite it. They are going to streamline it. It is going to happen again. A failed coup is a dress rehearsal. You know, you need to act quick." And so Andrea and I were worried in March that there was no January 6th Committee, that there were no—in March, 2021, let me emphasize—no January 6th Committee had even been formed, no indictments. There still are no indictments of elite operatives who again, are the same elite operatives that participated in illicit activity in the 2016 election; people like Roger Stone who called for a bloodbath if Trump didn't win.

Sarah Kendzior (21:50):

Bannon, Flynn, Manafort. These are all the people who Trump pardoned for a reason. And many people in government have refused to go after them. This is obviously not limited to Pelosi. You had Comey, you had Mueller, you had Garland, you had Cy Vance. But the thing is, the more time goes on, it becomes much more difficult to turn the situation around. And we see the repercussions of this every day. Today, once again, you have the Supreme Court protecting the release of Trump's tax returns, which is why Trump packed that court. It's why Trump, with the Republican Party, with these dirty bureaucrats, packed that court so that they have permanent impunity. And that is what we are trying to avoid.

Sarah Kendzior (22:39):

The best route to avoiding that would've been rigorous, thorough public hearings in 2019 before the pandemic, before people moved further into silos both online through algorithms, but also the demise, I think, of cable news as a network, a sort of shared venue of viewing. We had a chance then for people to listen to the full story of how Trump even got into power and who is in his criminal network, and everything Mueller uncovered regarding obstruction of justice, the whole greater context of criminality that could have been revealed. We could have had a national reckoning. It would've possibly led to

meaningful indictments. And Pelosi is among those who blocked it. And I'm not saying that she deserves what happened to her husband. No one deserves this.

Andrea Chalupa (23:30):

We're saying, what did you expect was going to happen if you didn't stand up to this sooner?

Sarah Kendzior (23:35):

Exactly. It's a tragedy for her. I think that in many ways this is a result of her inaction. But again, I wanna emphasize, no one deserves this. No one deserves to have their husband bludgeoned with a hammer. But you have to go beyond that to, no one deserves this. There are so many other people in Congress—AOC, Ilhan Omar—who were repeatedly threatened and who had to beg for security against those threats and she was initially reluctant to give it. And then I think, you know, January 6th kind of briefly woke people up as to how far the right wing will go, how organized they are, how top down this militancy is. This was not a bunch of randos that just happened to show up. This was very organized and deliberate. They abandoned the American people and they abandoned any pursuit of the rule of law with regard to elite criminal impunity which means, in the end, they abandoned themselves. They abandoned their own safety. They abandoned the safety of their loved ones.

Sarah Kendzior (24:39):

And I'm sure in Pelosi's case this was not her intent to put her own husband in harm's way. But that is the result. And it's a result that is shared by millions of innocent Americans, by all these poll workers, school board members, people running for office, journalists, whistleblowers, witnesses, an endless, endless list of people who have been threatened with violence and who frequently leave the political scene. They don't wanna participate anymore. They are just literally threatened out and sometimes they're replaced with Insurrectionists and other people like that because there actually is a network of protection if you wanna be an insurrectionist in America. There is a vast right-wing apparatus that will protect you, that will fund you, that will have your back. If you are on the other side, no one has your back. They hit you up for money in elections and then they leave you to be attacked. And that's the grim reality of the situation.

Andrea Chalupa (25:38):

So let's turn now to the midterms since this is the last time until election day when you'll hear from us. So I wanna just share an exciting story, some exciting updates. The early vote, of course, looks promising but should not be relied on to make predictions. We need the youth vote to turn out in a big way on election day for Democrats to stand a chance in this extremely close election for both the US House and the Senate and all the key governor races we need to win in order to protect our elections in 2024. According to bipartisan poll averages, Dems are doing well. There is a chance that yeah, they could hold on to both the House and the Senate. It's not unthinkable. It's within the realm of possibility, but it's going to be tough. That's why we're in for a brutal home stretch.

Andrea Chalupa (26:31):

Mandela Barnes and Lauren Underwood, we have an event within Indivisible to make calls for US senate candidate in Wisconsin, Mandela Barnes, who's running against an open and proud Kremlin propaganda machine, Ron Johnson, in Wisconsin. And then Lauren Underwood, of course, is a superstar who gets things done in the House. So join us to make calls within Indivisible. That's going to be this coming

Monday, the eve of the election. That's November 7th, 4:00 PM Eastern. You can sign up in the show notes for this episode. Out of all the volunteers that join us, we're going to select one person to win a signed copy of Sarah's latest book, *They Knew*, and a *Mr. Jones* poster. So we've been giving those away at all these events. And these events have been packed. We had a Christy Smith phone bank party with Swing Left on Sunday. We got through our entire call list within one hour.

Andrea Chalupa (27:28):

Within one hour. The campaign was shocked. I had such an amazing heart to heart with a young voter, 19-years-old and convincing him to vote for Christy Smith. He wasn't going to vote. After 10 minutes on the phone with me, he was writing down double checking all the information on where to go for early voting. That is why we need you. These calls make a difference. We had a John Fetterman phone bank party with Indivisible. We made over 15,000 calls getting out the vote in Pennsylvania. So please, these phone calls matter because every single vote matters. So join us on November 7th, election eve—it's our last chance America—where we're going to be getting out the vote for US Senate candidate Mandela Barnes, who is neck to neck with an open and proud Russian propagandist who spent 4th of July in Moscow, Ron Johnson. This guy needs to go.

Andrea Chalupa (28:20):

And, of course, Lauren Underwood, who's fantastic. So this is gonna be a big event and you could win Sarah's book and a *Mr. Jones* poster. There's also some very touching news we wanna share. Do you remember when we had this really inspiring conversation with five individuals from across America with very different stories that they shared here on our show. These five people had won the *Gaslit Nation* Get Out the Vote Challenge for 2020. We had selected them out of all the tweets we received from people, because remember we're always asking you to tweet at us, tweet at us and tell us what you are doing to get out the vote. And from the tweets we receive, we'll select five people to come on the show. So from the five people that came on the show—and we had a great *Gaslit Nation* slumber party with them—two of them have been featured in *The Nation* because they're both running for office—for state office—in Michigan! Which is so exciting!

Andrea Chalupa (29:16):

And they met for the very first time here on *Gaslit Nation* when they recorded the show with us. And that's Mark Zacharda, who is a farmer. He's running for an open state rep seat against a sheriff and he's looking really good in terms of polling and getting out the vote. And then you have Sarah May Seward who is running against a Republican, and that's in the 51st District. Sarah May Seward just got the endorsement—are you ready for this?—she just got the endorsement from the conservative-leaning *Detroit News*. Okay? They endorsed her. They wrote “Sarah May Seward gets our enthusiastic endorsement.” Yeah, she does, because she's fantastic. Mark and Sarah, we believe in you. You represent everything our country needs right now. Wherever you are in this country, you are powerful. If you live abroad, you are powerful. Everyone needs to pick up the phones. Phone bank.

Andrea Chalupa (30:12):

If you don't know where to start, go to [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). We have a 2022 Survival Guide there. Just pick a team, pick a phone bank, pick a door knocking canvas. Do whatever you can. You could also go to [mobilize.us](http://mobilize.us). Tons of volunteer opportunities there. Everyone needs to roll up their sleeves. This is such a

key time we need to go, fight, win. I'm very excited about all of it because I'm just really blown away by the level of engagement that we're seeing, by people like Mark and Sarah. This is exactly what we need to do; clean up our own communities, clean up our own backyard, put the fascists on the rope. Don't let any position of power that's up for election, don't let any of them remain open. Run. If you don't know where to start, go visit the organization Run for Something.

Andrea Chalupa (30:59):

They will help hold your hand on how to run for office. Or by Amanda Litman's book, *Run for Something*. It too will hold your hand on how to run for office. We need you to run for office. We're telling you, when people are up against authoritarianism like the Russians have been for so long, they waited too long to start running for office. They figured out, "Oh, we could really freak out the fascists in the Kremlin by running for office and organizing and working together and embarrassing them and naming and shaming them and creating this whole big global network of resistance". They waited way too long to figure that out. They stayed in their despair and nihilism way too long. We cannot allow that to happen. We need to look at ourselves and take ourselves, each of us, seriously as somebody that could be a public servant.

Andrea Chalupa (31:42):

And if it's not for you for whatever reason, then recruit someone who has a big heart and a great mind and get them to run for office because that's where we are right now. Remember, grassroots power is the most reliable power we have left and that is never going to change. No matter where we are in the world, we can be defiant and be a thorn in the side of fascism. And that is what we are morally obligated to do right now. So thank you to everyone who's doing it. Thank you to everyone who is showing up for your community and fighting for your community. This is how we win. And now we're going to run a special interview about one of the most powerful voting blocks in the country and what it says about where our democracy may be headed, because remember, the Republican Party, there was a lot of anticipation anxiety that the Republicans were going to be able to gerrymander their way automatically into a House majority, meaning their gerrymandering would be so extreme, it would just be automatic that they'd win the House. Certainly they tried this, but guess what held them back? Changing demographics in America. So now we're going to take a look at what that means with this must listen to discussion on Latino voters.

[transition music]

Andrea Chalupa (33:04):

All right everyone, welcome to Gaslit Nation. I am your co-host, Andrea Chalupa. Today, I am joined by Analilia Mejia, who is the co-executive director at the Center for Popular Democracy. She is a seasoned political strategist and Afro-Latina grassroots organizer focused on helping Black and Latinx working families. She previously served as the Deputy Director of the Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor, the National Political Director at the Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign, and the Executive Director of the New Jersey Working Family's Alliance. A daughter of immigrants, Analilia Mejia has dedicated her career to working toward a multiracial democracy and giving power to communities that have been historically excluded. She holds an undergraduate degree in comparative literature and two master's degrees from Rutgers University; one in public policy and the other in labor education. Welcome to the show. It's such an honor to have you here.

Analilia Mejia (34:05):

Oh, thank you. I'm so excited. Hard times, but we're ready to jump in.

Andrea Chalupa (34:09):

Absolutely. So I wanted just to chat, just to get a general overview. Everyone is very hyped up on the growing Latinx voter block. It is the second largest voter block in the US, the fastest growing, but it's a big mix of people from all sorts of different backgrounds and world views. And currently Democrats and Republicans are vying over being the party of this extremely important and increasingly influential voter block. How do Latinx voters tend to vote and why?

Analilia Mejia (34:43):

So the first thing to understand about the Latino electorate, one is that many liken it to a rising iceberg, right? We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg and we will continue to see a huge growth in this population. The thing to understand, however, is that it's not a monolith. The Latino/Latine, Hispanic, depends on what generation or region or country of origin, frankly, on what language this community uses to both define itself, but also what issues are both impacting them and therefore what political identity they're taking on for themselves. So whether it's how many generations have been in this country, or what country of origin the particular Latino/Latine voter comes from, what region of the country did they locate or relocate themselves into in this nation, their age group, all of these factors have an impact on political inclinations. I think both parties and people in general don't always pay attention to that. I think increasingly we have, but it's important to note because it's not a monolith and a lot of things impact where the Latino/Latine electorate falls.

Andrea Chalupa (36:14):

How do Democrats tend to reach Latino voters? And what do you think works well? What do you think falls flat and why?

Analilia Mejia (36:21):

I think that historically, you know, we've dealt with this community as a singular issue community, specifically immigration. And the reality is that, again, this community is very nuanced and diverse and cares about a lot of issues, not just immigration, immigration reform. A lot of pocketbook issues impact this community, especially because of the systemic inequality that exists in our nation, the economic instability that particularly hits working class people that we're experiencing and have experienced for a long time. And I think talking to the Latino/Latine electorate about issues that keep 'em up at night really resonate.

Andrea Chalupa (37:13):

What about republicans? Republicans are trying to make inroads here. How do Republicans tend to do with this voting block?

Analilia Mejia (37:25):

Smartly so, the Republican Party has focused on cultural, religious issues and tapped into/understood that, again, this diverse electorate had maybe touchpoints around conservative issues that they could tap into and then extend into economic and other social issues in a way that maybe I think Democrats were maybe slow to grasp. The Republican Party has tapped into a fast growing Latine/Latino evangelical

community, right? It was like the fastest growing, if not the fastest growing evangelical community within the Latino community. And so they tapped into some of those elements and have then connected to other social and economic policy and ideas. I think depending on what region you're in, you know, talking to folks in Florida how either conservative, I don't know if it's necessarily the Republican Party, but conservative entities, particularly through faith-based but other community groups, are using moments of need and offering mutual aid or support and then connecting into cultural political organizations that are capturing this community.

Analilia Mejia (39:04):

So I think it's multiple ways. I think it's on culture and religion. I think it's taking advantage of opportunities or specific moments of need and, to be frank, conservative institutions like the church or faith-based groups, I should better say, that are making inroads into the Latino community. I think the thing to not lose sight of though is that Latine communities in this nation are facing—like many Americans are facing—economic instability, needs in terms of making work work, have real questions and issues regarding immigration and immigration reform. And the Democratic Party speaks more to those concerns and has ideas that address or meet those needs in a more concrete way. And as a result, the Latino community has a higher propensity to support the Democratic Party. And in order to sustain that, I think we have to continue to talk to and address those issues that keep people up at night.

Andrea Chalupa (40:11):

The pocketbook issues. And also it sounds like building more of a cultural connection, you know, with the churches and mutual aid, which the Republicans seem to be doing pretty well.

Analilia Mejia (40:24):

Yeah, I think so. I think taking into consideration that language matters... In my family alone, both my parents are registered voters. Their main language, their language of choice is Spanish. So these are Spanish dominant voters. I have, in my family, folks who are English dominant. In fact, if you ask their abuelitas, their Spanish needs some improvement but they're ineligible to vote. But they are English dominant and can participate in civic life by talking to other people to vote on their behalf. And everything in between. So like whether you're Spanish dominant, bilingual, English dominant, whether you are an eligible voter or ineligible but still can participate in the civic process, and everything in between. Plus, you know, this huge group of young Latinos, like I said, it's an iceberg. When we consider that there are 8 million young people who will be eligible to vote by election day, 2 million of them are within the Latino/Latine community. And that's going to just continue to increase.

Andrea Chalupa (41:41):

What about the far-right extremism, from Trump's chaos to the violence of January 6th? How does that influence this voting block?

Analilia Mejia (41:51):

I mean, it's clear that the right and the far right has invested an insurmountable amount of time and resources into getting into Latino/Latine digital spaces and collecting as much data as possible on a constant basis within this community. And it is, I mean, you don't do something for fun. They're not doing this for fun. They're doing it with an eye towards how to impact and influence that rising iceberg. Having so much information is allowing them to tailor their message, um, in a way that, again, is increasingly effective. Power and influence is essentially like organized people or organized money and

they're using these vast amounts of corporate money of conservative donors to tap into and try to organize and consolidate power within a rising significant community. And we really have to pay attention to this and counter it, to be frank.

Andrea Chalupa (43:03):

Absolutely. So there have been reports that “socialism propaganda” cost Democrats voters in 2022 who are from the Latinx community. How do you think Democrats and progressive groups can neutralize this harmful narrative this election year and beyond?

Analilia Mejia (43:24):

So first I'll say that what is impacting all of our communities is disinformation, right? It's having a massive amounts of resources and time and massive and well-funded donors, or programs backed by large corporate-backed donors, to feed either disinformation or distrust in the system and to use kind of polarizing language and create a terrain in which, you know, again, really smartly understanding the histories and countries and previous concerns that have existed in countries of origin for these communities and tapping into all of that with misinformation to manipulate communities. I mean, this is targeting the Latino electorate. This is targeting Black voters. This is targeting working class voters. All with an eye to getting people to vote against their own self-interest. And what we need to do to counter it is to return to this principle—it's an organizing principle—of meeting people where they are, of understanding their self-interests, and then connecting the dots between their concerns and the power they have to affect policy and change their conditions.

Analilia Mejia (44:51):

I reject this idea of saying that people like myself or the organizations that are affiliated with CPD, which are 48 organizations in 38 states, we reject this idea of like, we are leftists [laughs] and they are “on the right”. What we say is we're from the bottom and we are coming and looking to raise ourselves towards the top. And the policies that make work work, that allow us to thrive and not just survive, are what guide us, right? And so the idea that people deserve justice and dignity in our criminal justice system is not socialist. The idea that our children deserve a quality education that enriches them and supports their growth is not socialist. The idea that we deserve to have a clean environment and safe drinking water and communities that thrive and that are not over-policed and in fact have the resources, whether it's mental health, physical health, emotional health to thrive.

Analilia Mejia (46:01):

These are not socialist ideas. These are things that allow human beings to thrive. And I think we need to reframe the debate. They've been very savvy in denouncing what are really policies that allow people to thrive and grow and have enriching lives as socialism. But they're completely comfortable with corporate welfare, right? They're completely comfortable with giving massive tax breaks to corporations and say, “corporations and money are people” at the cost of human beings and their ability to live full rich lives. It's been savvy on their part and we have to take it back and call it for what it is, which is regular people organizing themselves and demanding justice in all the systems and structures that impact their daily existence.

Andrea Chalupa (46:54):

Ron DeSantis did that horrific stunt where he used vulnerable refugees from Venezuela trafficking them to Martha's Vineyard

Analilia Mejia:

Mmhmm. <affirmative>

Andrea Chalupa:

How would that play out? What sort of feeling would that have given the average Latinx voter in Florida and elsewhere, considering that DeSantis very clearly has national ambitions?

Analilia Mejia (47:17):

I think it's clear that it was this political ploy at the expense of human beings that very clearly represents who Ron DeSantis is as a human being, as a person, and who he values and who he finds completely disposable. And what I would hope all voters in Florida and across this nation, but particularly Latino and Latine voters to realize is Ron DeSantis does not care about us. Ron DeSantis does not see us as individuals, as human beings to be valued or to be concerned about. He sees us as pawns, as tokens that could be moved around for his political gain. The other thing that I think is important in that example is that this is part of a playbook that we have seen before. When you consider in the 1960s conservative right-wing anti-Black governors and powerful elected people who carried out what were called reverse freedom rights, where they tricked mostly working class, working poor Black mothers and their children to get on buses and ship them north as a political ploy against desegregation.

Analilia Mejia (48:43):

We've seen that before, just like we saw the same things that we see today; voter misinformation, the attempts on Capitols, systemic disenfranchisement. We saw that frankly since the inception of our nation but most certainly through post reconstruction, through the civil rights era, through the '80s and '90s and now today. The ploy, the game has been to take human beings, to take people who should have a rightful place in self-governance and strip them of their power and their humanity. And the way we counter that is through connecting in community, civic engagement, electoral participation, and really protecting the concept and actually bringing it to fruition, because sadly we've never had it, really building a truly participatory democracy where regular people who are impacted by policies and laws every single day, from birth to death, that they have a rightful place in shaping these. And the way they do it is through civic engagement; going to public meetings, engaging their elected officials, running for office, and participating in the electoral process. It is an old game. It is an old playbook. It repeats itself. And history has taught us that through collective action, we can counter it and we can win.

Andrea Chalupa (50:15):

That's wonderful. And for your organization, the Center for Popular Democracy, what are some ways that folks can get involved with your work to help get out the vote this election? What can they do in 2023? What can they do in 2024? How do they engage with your group and roll up their sleeves and pitch in with all the important collective actions that we need to do to protect ourselves?

Analilia Mejia (50:38):

There are a few things that you can do and I'll put it in kind of like rings of action. So for yourself, the thing that I would urge everyone that's listening to do is to welcome you to go to our website. I'm sure you'll share info. Make sure that you are informed about the races that will impact you. And take that power in your hands. Engage in the electoral process yourself. Go to vote, make sure you're... Well, I think registration dates have sadly come and gone in many places, but make sure that if you are eligible to vote, if you're registered to vote, go out to vote yourself. That's step one. Step two is your immediate community; your family, your friends. Reach out to them. Help them develop a plan to also take their power. This is about building your personal power and the power of the people immediately surrounding you.

Analilia Mejia (51:36):

Go talk to them, help them make a plan to engage in the process and develop a plan on how you're going to learn more and take that power of self-governance for yourself and your own. The next ring is your block, your precinct, your community. You got sneakers, go outside. Take a walk. Talk to people. You could engage with our community groups to get information on eligible voters that if you have a free afternoon on this weekend or the next couple weeks, go talk to your neighbors and tell them what you care about and tell them why it's important for us to build our power and go out and take it. You have it. You can exercise it. It is such a critical moment. And then finally, in the broader world, I think it's important for us to denounce the misinformation that we see on social media and to share information that is actually about building the power of community. You can most certainly access a lot of that through CPD and our network and our affiliates. And I just ask everyone, we are powerful, impactful people. We are important. We have letters of power that we can access and it's yours for the taking and our collective future depends on it.

Andrea Chalupa (52:59):

Thank you so very much, Analilia Mejia, of the Center for Popular Democracy. That website is [populardemocracy.org](http://populardemocracy.org). [populardemocracy.org](http://populardemocracy.org). Follow her on Twitter, we'll link to her Twitter account in the show notes. Thank you so much for coming on this show and for all the important work that you're doing.

Analilia Mejia (53:19):

Thank you so much. And thank you to everyone who's listening.

[outro theme, roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth-teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior:

Pakistan has been decimated by record floods and people need help. To help victims of the floods, donate to Pakistan Emergency Flood Aid at [www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan\\_emergency\\_flood\\_aid](http://www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan_emergency_flood_aid). Climate and economic crises are everywhere. So continue supporting

your local food bank as well.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom For Ukraine at [razomforukraine.org](http://razomforukraine.org). We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. Donate at [rescue.org](http://rescue.org). And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at [theorangutanproject.org](http://theorangutanproject.org). Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review and iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

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