Vera ACTION

MESSAGING GUIDANCE ON RESPONDING TO MASS RAIDS AND DEPORTATIONS

While President Trump's deportation agenda appears in recent polls to draw majority support, when voters hear about the specifics—mass raids, ending birthright citizenship, arrests in sensitive locations like schools and churches—they actually oppose these actions.

Elected leaders should take this opportunity to shift the narrative on immigration and, in doing so, move public opinion towards supporting real solutions for a fair, humane, and orderly process at the border and a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who have lived in the country for years. Remaining silent or reinforcing "tough-on-crime" and "tough-on-the-border" rhetoric is counterproductive. Voters want to hear their elected leaders own a strong, affirmative message about solutions for these challenges. Adopting a "GOP-lite" approach that sounds insincere or politically expedient can produce backlash.

Vera Action, the 501(c)(4) advocacy and political partner of the Vera Institute of Justice, has conducted extensive public opinion research and message testing on crime and immigration. We have found that the "values, villain, vision" framework is an effective way to message affirmatively and inoculate against attacks on wedge issues like immigration.

"Values, villain, vision" messaging framework
Effective messaging requires getting off the opposition's narrative turf and onto your own. Responding to a false or misleading claim by fact-checking or myth-busting often reinforces your opponent's message instead of helping yours to break through. That's where the "values, villain, vision" framework can help. When messaging about immigration, lead with strong values about safety, stability, and security to signal that you hear your audience's concerns; call out the "tough-on-the-border" and anti-immigrant rhetoric as the villain that gets in the way of finding real solutions; and then offer an alternative vision of real solutions that address the underlying concerns driving the debate.

Lead with the shared **values** of safety, stability, and security.
"I am focused on making life safer, more stable, and secure for all of us."

Call out your opponent's agenda as the **villain**.
"My opponent uses lies and hate for political gain. Mass immigration raids that terrorize our neighborhoods, disrupt workplaces, and tear apart families are a political tool to get attention and divide us. They are scare tactics, not real solutions to fix a broken immigration system or to address valid concerns about crime."

Pivot to a **vision** of concrete solutions to fix the broken immigration system.
"Let's focus on solutions that live up to our values and make life safer, more stable, and secure for all of us. Let's work to create a functional immigration system and a fair, secure,

and orderly process at the border. Let's fix problems at home by fully funding things proven to improve safety and everyone's quality of life, like good schools, good-paying jobs, healthcare, and affordable housing."

Countering "soft-on-crime" and "soft-on-the-border" attacks
The "values, villain, vision" framework also works to inoculate against and respond to attacks. To counter a false or misleading claim, start by blocking and bridging with the phrase, <u>"I'm about solutions, not scare tactics."</u> Our research has found that "solutions, not scare tactics" helps to block and call out the attack for what it is—exploiting fear without offering any answers. It also serves as a bridge sentence to get off the opposition's narrative turf and onto your own to then message using the values, villain, and vision framework.

<u>ATTACK: Immigrants are getting handouts while Americans are being left behind.</u>

RESPONSE: "While some politicians are trying to divide us with rhetoric and scare tactics about immigrants, I'm focused on real solutions that make life safer, more stable, and secure for <u>all</u> of us. Immigrants are a part of our families, workplaces, and communities. Let's focus on solutions that live up to our values and make us safer. Let's secure the border and create a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who have lived here for years. Let's fix problems at home by fully funding things proven to improve safety and everyone's quality of life, like good schools, good-paying jobs, healthcare, and affordable housing."

<u>ATTACK: Instead of coddling illegal criminals, we need to arrest and deport them.</u>

RESPONSE: "We all want to be safe, stable, and secure in our neighborhoods as we go about our daily lives. Exploiting tragedies and high-profile crimes for political gain is a scare tactic, not a real solution. The actions of one person should not define a group. Instead of enlisting law enforcement for mass raids that have swept up both U.S. citizens and immigrants alike, including people with no criminal history, police resources should be spent on investigating and solving serious crime—not disrupting workplaces and tearing apart families."

<u>ATTACK: We need to crack down on the border and stop illegal entry into the country.</u>

RESPONSE: "We all want safety, stability, and security. Bussing migrants to big cities and mass immigration raids that terrorize our neighborhoods, workplaces, and families are a political tool to get attention and divide us. Let's work to create a functional immigration system and a fair, secure, and orderly process at the border. Let's make sure immigrants who have been here for years have a pathway to citizenship. And let's fix problems at home by investing in things proven to improve safety and everyone's quality of life, like good schools, good-paying jobs, healthcare, and affordable housing. I'm about working together to make life safer, more stable, and secure for all of us."

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