

VALUES, VILLAIN, VISION: MOVING LOS ANGELES BEYOND THE POLITICS OF FEAR

Messaging and policy takeaways from public opinion research

June 2026

FIGHTING THE POLITICS OF FEAR

Since 2022, Vera Action (VA) has conducted **40+ rounds** of qualitative and quantitative research on voter attitudes toward crime and public safety.

Vera's **January 2026 poll of 1,048 likely 2026 CA voters** shows that LA County wants real solutions to prevent crime and break its cycle. Residents are particularly receptive to prevention-focused, comprehensive approaches to crime and respond well to messaging that emphasizes comprehensive solutions for public safety.

To inoculate against and overcome “soft-on-crime” attacks, affirm a message that is serious about safety, accountability, and justice.

TAKEAWAY #1

Instead of going silent in the face of attacks, lead with a message that's serious about safety and solutions.

Most LA voters prefer a “serious-about-safety” message over a “tough-on-crime” one

Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

[SERIOUS]: Fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street.

[TOUGH]: Do more to get tough on crime—like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.



TAKEAWAY #2

When talking about solutions for homelessness, voters prefer a housing-and-services approach over sweeps

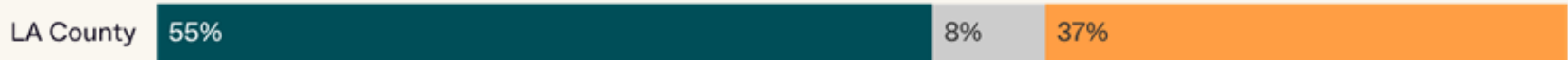
On homelessness, LA County voters prefer a housing-and-services approach over sweeps

Which of the following candidates would you rather vote for?

[SERIOUS]: We all want safe, clean streets. But homelessness can't be solved by sweeping people from one street to the next. The most effective solution is to streamline our systems to get people housed faster, and provide them with services, like mental health treatment and job training, to help them get back on their feet with dignity.

Not sure

[TOUGH]: California has spent billions on homelessness with nothing to show for it, because this isn't a lack of housing problem — it's a personal addiction and mental-health problem. We need law enforcement to clear dangerous encampments, and we must require treatment instead of letting people deteriorate on our streets.



TAKEAWAY #3

When talking about policing, emphasize support, accountability, and effective crisis response.

The majority of LA County residents support police accountability

Which of the following candidates would you rather vote for?

[SERIOUS]: Law enforcement should be responsive, trustworthy, and accountable. We need to support the police to do the difficult jobs they are asked to do and hold them accountable if they abuse their power or break the law.

Not sure

[TOUGH]: Police officers put their lives on the line to keep our communities safe. They need the freedom and discretion to do their jobs without excessive oversight.

LA County

76%

7%

17%

Vera ACTION

LA County voters prefer experts respond to crises involving mental health and homelessness, reserving police for serious crimes

Which of the following candidates would you rather vote for?

[SERIOUS]: Mental health and homelessness are serious challenges, and while police play an important role in public safety, we shouldn't ask them to do everything. We should invest in rapid response by trained mental health experts to handle cases where people are in mental health crisis and need help so police can focus on solving more serious crime.

Not sure

[TOUGH]: Crises involving mental health and homelessness require a strong police presence. We need to hire more police officers so they can respond quickly to crises, enforce the law, and keep our neighborhoods safe for law-abiding citizens.



TAKEAWAY #4

When attacked as a defund candidate, lean into values and solutions

Responding to “defund” attacks, lean into values, call out the villain, and lay out your specific vision

Values

Angelenos deserve real solutions—not scare tactics. All of us have a right to feel safe in our homes, in our schools, on our streets, and in our communities.

Villain

While some push failed “tough-on-crime” rhetoric, I will fight for safety and justice.

Vision

To make this city safer, I will work to expand our mobile crisis response teams to make sure we can respond to calls quickly and effectively, increase police clearance rates, speed up 911 response times, and expand proven violence intervention programs. To reduce homelessness, I will invest in mental health care, substance abuse treatment, rental assistance, and supportive and transitional housing.

How to Effectively Communicate Policy Reforms

Examples from mayors across the country

Janeese Lewis George (DC): Policy solutions to build community safety

Safe Communities for All platform

Strengthening and expanding resources to detectives to aid in solving more crimes.

Addressing gun violence through a public health approach and strengthening violence prevention programs.

Expanding access to adequate resources to heal for victims of violent crimes and survivors.

Reengaging disconnected young people with education, workforce development, and job opportunities.

Empowering crisis responders and other mental health professionals to reduce police workloads and ensure those in crisis receive appropriate responses.

Deepening investments where they matter most: mental and behavioral health services, educational opportunities for disengaged residents, and meaningful paths to employment.



Michelle Wu (Boston): Start with shared values, lead with vision, and provide an example with specifics

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Of course, any life lost, harmed, or otherwise impacted by violence and crime is one life too many.

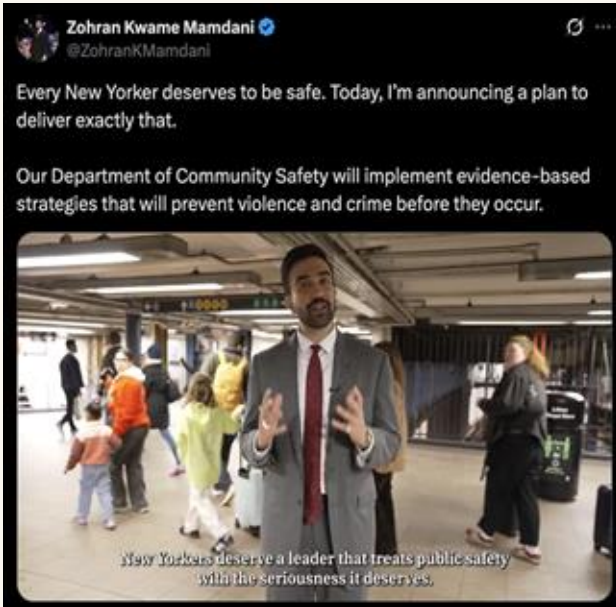
And our vision for Boston is not just one where we reduce violence and criminal activity—it is a city where every resident is safe; where every family has access to resources and opportunities.

Last summer, we guaranteed a paid summer job to every young person in Boston who wanted one—more than doubling the number of participants from just three years ago. When we tap into Boston’s anchor institutions to empower our students, we reduce youth violence and set young people up for personal and professional success.



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Zohran Mamdani weaved safety into his affordability message and released a lengthy platform with specific plans and metrics



Mamdani's 17-page [platform](#) addressing public safety, homelessness, and violence prevention

“ An affordable city must also be a safe one. As multiple categories of crimes remain stubbornly high and too many New Yorkers feel uneasy in our subways, we will create the Department of Community Safety to deploy evidence-proven methods of addressing mental health crises, homelessness and hate.

Police have a critical role to play. But right now, we're relying on them to deal with our frayed social safety net — which prevents them from doing their actual jobs

Police response times are more than 20% longer than they were in 2022 as they field hundreds of mental health calls each day. The DCS will coordinate across city agencies, including with the NYPD, creating a whole-of-government approach to improve safety outcomes ”

A “serious about safety” approach

- Speak to **specific** ideas and **concrete** plans
- Talk about the **tools** at your disposal if elected mayor
- Express **clear, consistent messages** that position safety and justice as core values and priorities
- Validate and acknowledge the **right for everyone to feel safe** and secure where they live
- **Neutralize** scare tactics by leaning into what most people want: real solutions to prevent crime, respond to crisis and stop violence
- Highlight specific proposals and how they will work, who they will serve, and the **impact** they will have

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