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Talking Points to Counter Criminal Justice Scare Tactics in Los Angeles

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Purpose: [Time](#) and [again](#), people who oppose criminal justice reform use political scare tactics to maintain the status quo and distract voters from hearing about policies that work. This has cropped up in LA city races where special interests have raised the prospect of former Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón becoming police chief.

After spending millions to unseat Gascón, these special interests invoke Gascón's name to induce Angelenos' fear of crime and to try to get candidates to distance themselves from effective reforms.

Repeated rounds of Vera Action polling have shown that most voters prefer a comprehensive approach to preventing crime. However, "law and order" rhetoric can win out in the absence of an alternative. Therefore, this rhetoric cannot be met with silence or deflection; the way to defeat it is to call it out as a political ploy and pivot back to an affirmative vision of safety.

To effectively counter "tough on crime" attacks:

1. Start with the shared **value of safety.**

For example: Everyone deserves to be safe and that is my priority.

2. Name the **villain, which is your opponent or special interests using a red herring to distract from the real solutions.**

For example: Special interests are trying to bring this person up to rile people up to win votes.

3. End with a **vision of what we need to do to invest in true safety.**

For example: I won't stop working until we make Los Angeles a safer place for everyone. I have a comprehensive plan to make sure law enforcement is trustworthy and accountable, response times are swift and consistent across our city's neighborhoods, and violence prevention initiatives are fully funded and supported.

A better response:

1. Will you appoint George Gascón as police chief?

- **Value:** Angelenos deserve a police chief that represents their values and ensures all community members are protected.

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- **Villain:** The police union is spending millions to promote false rumors about George Gascón to rile people up and win votes for their preferred candidate. They know I am not going to hire Gascón. They are trying to scare voters and distract from the issues Angelenos care about.
- **Vision:** So let me tell you what I will do: I will appoint a police chief who will make sure everyone, including our immigrant neighbors, feels safe. I will work with that person on a comprehensive approach to prevent crime and break its cycle. That includes making sure the right people, whether that be police or a mental health professional or a homeless outreach worker, respond quickly to crises. If elected, I will carefully consider each candidate and appoint someone who represents our LA values.

Note: a similar formula can be used to respond to any similar “are you associated with X unpopular person?” question.