

# Profile: Benjamin “Ben” Vazquez – Santa Ana Mayor Pro Tem and Councilmember (Ward 2)

## Early Life and Education

Benjamin “Ben” Vazquez was born and raised in Santa Ana, California, to working-class immigrant parents <sup>1</sup>. He grew up on Center Street in Santa Ana and attended local public schools in the Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) <sup>1</sup>. After high school, Vazquez continued his education at Santa Ana College, then earned a Bachelor’s degree from California State University, Long Beach, and a Master’s degree from UCLA <sup>2</sup>. His upbringing in Santa Ana instilled in him a deep connection to the community; many of his family members also work in local education, reflecting a family commitment to giving back to Santa Ana’s youth <sup>3</sup>.

## Career as an Educator and Community Worker

Vazquez has been a **public school teacher for over 21 years** in Santa Ana <sup>4</sup>. He teaches **Ethnic Studies** at Valley High School and is known for **starting the school’s Ethnic Studies program** and organizing SAUSD’s first annual Ethnic Studies conference <sup>5</sup>. His dedication to education earned him recognition as an *award-winning teacher*, and he often emphasizes empowering youth through curriculum and mentorship <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>.

Outside the classroom, Vazquez has been deeply involved in **grassroots community initiatives**:

- He serves as a “*cultural worker*” with **El Centro Cultural de México**, a Santa Ana community cultural center <sup>6</sup>. In this role, he helps promote arts, culture, and community engagement, especially among Mexican-American and Chicano residents.
- **Founder of “I Bike Santa Ana”**: Vazquez founded this initiative to promote health, community building, and bicycle use in Santa Ana <sup>5</sup>. Through community bike rides and events, I Bike Santa Ana encourages alternative transportation and brings neighbors together.
- **Director of “Barrio Writers”**: He was the director of *Barrio Writers*, a writing workshop for teens in underserved communities <sup>5</sup>. This program provides a platform for youth to develop creative writing skills and share their voices.
- **Co-founder of “Taco Trucks at Every Mosque”**: Vazquez co-founded this innovative interfaith program which brings together Muslim and Latinx communities through shared meals and cultural exchange <sup>5</sup>. The initiative uses taco truck gatherings at local mosques to build bridges and solidarity between diverse Santa Ana residents.

Through these roles, Vazquez has demonstrated a longstanding **commitment to community engagement**, youth empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding. He is also a **homeowner in the Heninger Park neighborhood** of Santa Ana <sup>6</sup>, reinforcing his personal stake in the city’s quality of life and future.

## Entry into Politics and Early Campaigns

Vazquez's first major entry into local politics came in **2016**, when he ran for **Mayor of Santa Ana**. At that time, he was known primarily as a teacher and community activist challenging the decades-long incumbent Mayor Miguel Pulido. Vazquez's 2016 mayoral campaign focused on **investing in youth services and community programs** as a strategy to improve public safety and quality of life, positioning these priorities against calls for expanded policing <sup>7</sup>. The election highlighted a divide in Santa Ana's vision: Pulido and police union-backed allies campaigned on hiring more police officers, whereas Vazquez and like-minded candidates argued for boosting youth services to address root causes of crime <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup>.

In the **November 2016** mayoral election, Miguel Pulido defeated Vazquez. Pulido won approximately **53% of the vote to Vazquez's 33%** <sup>10</sup>, a decisive margin (roughly a 20-point difference). Despite the loss, Vazquez's campaign elevated his profile as a **voice for progressive change** in Santa Ana – advocating for youth, working families, and accountability over the status quo. Observers noted that Vazquez was part of a post-“Santa Ana Spring” wave of reformers, although in 2016 the police-backed establishment retained power <sup>11</sup> <sup>10</sup>. (Notably, Vazquez's platform in 2016 foreshadowed many of the issues he would continue championing, such as youth programs and resisting special-interest influence at City Hall.)

## Santa Ana City Council – Ward 2

In 2022, Ben Vazquez ran for the Santa Ana City Council and **won the Ward 2 council seat**, unseating incumbent Councilmember Nelida Mendoza. The **November 8, 2022** general election for Ward 2 was extremely close – Vazquez secured roughly **50.9% of the vote, defeating Mendoza by only 80 votes** <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup>. He officially assumed office on December 13, 2022 <sup>14</sup>. This victory marked Vazquez's first elected office and reflected voter support for his community-first platform in the ward encompassing western and southern portions of the city. (*Ward 2 stretches roughly from 1st Street in the north to Edinger Avenue in the south, between Fairview and Standard Avenues* <sup>15</sup>.)

As **Councilmember for Ward 2**, Vazquez quickly became known for prioritizing **working-class families** and neighborhood needs. In line with his campaign promises, he pledged to ensure “limited citywide resources benefit working class families and improve quality of life for all Santa Ana residents” rather than serving special interests <sup>16</sup>. In practice, this has meant: pushing for affordable housing and tenant protections, supporting park improvements, and scrutinizing city budgets to favor community services. Vazquez often stresses that the city's policies and budget should “**reflect a vision that prioritizes working class families**” <sup>16</sup>.

On the council, Vazquez is generally aligned with its progressive bloc. He frequently works alongside colleagues like Councilmember Johnathan Ryan Hernandez and Councilmember Jessie Lopez on initiatives related to equity, transparency, and police accountability <sup>17</sup>. Conversely, he has been at odds with more establishment or police-union-aligned members on certain issues. For example, Vazquez has been described as **a vocal critic of the Santa Ana Police Officers Association's influence** in city politics <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>. (In fact, during his 2024 mayoral bid, the police union spent over **\$71,000 on advertising against Vazquez** <sup>20</sup>, highlighting the adversarial relationship stemming from his reform stance.)

**Committee Assignments and Roles:** As a councilmember, Vazquez also serves on various city and regional committees (the specifics of his assignments are typically listed on the City of Santa Ana website or council

records). His focus areas have included housing and tenant issues, parks and recreation, and police oversight policy, consistent with his stated priorities.

## Mayor Pro Tem of Santa Ana (2025)

On **January 21, 2025**, Ben Vazquez was unanimously selected by his fellow councilmembers to serve a one-year term as **Mayor Pro Tempore (Mayor Pro Tem)** of Santa Ana <sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> . The Mayor Pro Tem is essentially the vice-mayor – a councilmember chosen to **act as mayor in the mayor's absence** and to assist in ceremonial duties. The Santa Ana City Council rotates this position annually among its members. Vazquez succeeded Councilmember Thai Viet Phan in the role <sup>23</sup> .

As **Mayor Pro Tem**, Vazquez continues to advance his policy agenda while also taking on the additional responsibilities of the post. He often represents the city at community events, issue forums, and in regional collaborations when Mayor Valerie Amezcua is unavailable. His elevation to Mayor Pro Tem is noteworthy as it signifies the confidence of his peers and provides him a larger platform to highlight issues he's passionate about. For example, Vazquez uses the Mayor Pro Tem's platform to publish a **Ward 2 monthly newsletter** updating residents on community initiatives, city services, and events – frequently emphasizing themes of community empowerment and celebrating local improvements (from new park amenities to neighborhood clean-ups) <sup>16</sup> <sup>24</sup> .

**Quote:** *"Giving back to Santa Ana youth and community is not just my passion — it is a shared family goal,"* Vazquez wrote, reflecting on his and his family's dedication to service <sup>3</sup> . This spirit carries into his approach as Mayor Pro Tem, where he has stated his intent is to **"truly center families and residents"** in all city decisions <sup>4</sup> .

## Policy Positions and Voting Record

Councilmember Vazquez is regarded as a **progressive policymaker** with a track record of championing working families, renters, immigrants, and youth. Below is an overview of his key policy positions, initiatives he has led or supported, and notable votes during his tenure:

- **Housing Affordability & Rent Control:** Vazquez is a strong advocate for tenants' rights and **rent stabilization**. Santa Ana in 2021 enacted Orange County's first rent control ordinance, and **Vazquez has staunchly defended it from any attempts to weaken or repeal it**. He "voted to protect rent control, ensuring that our families can afford to live in the city amidst rising housing costs" <sup>25</sup> . This stance has earned him support from renter advocacy groups and ire from landlord interests. Vazquez consistently frames housing as a human need: he supports expanding affordable housing projects and policies that prevent displacement of long-time residents. *(In 2024, he opposed a controversial charter amendment that would limit certain renter protections.)*
- **Public Safety & Police Oversight:** Vazquez has worked to **balance public safety with accountability**. He supported the creation of Santa Ana's **Civilian Police Oversight Commission** (established in late 2022) aimed at reviewing police misconduct and use-of-force cases <sup>26</sup> . In mid-2025, when proposals emerged to dilute the commission's authority before it fully started work, Vazquez publicly **opposed gutting the commission's powers** <sup>18</sup> . *"The commission wasn't there to review, they were there to investigate,"* he argued, emphasizing that robust independent investigations

are still possible and necessary <sup>18</sup> . Vazquez voted **against ordinances that would curb the commission's investigative scope**, positioning himself as a defender of police accountability. He has also been a **critic of the police union's outsized political influence**, which he and others claim undermines reforms. (*Notably, Vazquez's skepticism of simply "tough on crime" approaches dates back to his 2016 campaign, when he prioritized youth investment over expanding the police force* <sup>7</sup> .) At the same time, Vazquez supports community policing and wants to build trust between law enforcement and residents – but through oversight and transparency rather than blank-check support.

- **Youth Services, Parks, and Recreation:** True to his educator roots, Vazquez consistently pushes for **investment in youth and community programs**. He has championed budget measures to **increase funding for parks and recreation facilities**, saying *"our children deserve neighborhoods that provide a good quality of life for them to grow up healthy."* <sup>27</sup> He backed upgrades to parks, the creation of new playgrounds and athletic fields, and programs like after-school activities and library services. In council budget discussions, Vazquez has argued that monies spent on youth programs and community centers are an investment in crime prevention and future economic growth. He often highlights success stories of Santa Ana youth and is seen at events like the annual **OC Black History Parade** or cultural festivals engaging with young residents <sup>28</sup> . His **votes on budgets** have reflected these priorities: for instance, he supported allocating additional funds to park improvements and opposed any drastic cuts to the youth services budget.
- **Economic Development & Labor:** Vazquez's vision of development in Santa Ana puts local workers first. He has **insisted on Community Workforce Agreements** (project labor agreements) for major developments, ensuring they employ local labor at fair wages. *"We need good paying union jobs in Santa Ana,"* Vazquez says, explaining why he **voted to approve development projects that include community labor agreements** <sup>29</sup> . He is pro-union and has been endorsed by labor-aligned groups; for example, the California Working Families Party and OC Labor Federation allies have supported him <sup>30</sup> . Vazquez also advocates for small business support, particularly helping street vendors and family-owned businesses thrive without excessive red tape, seeing them as part of Santa Ana's cultural fabric. However, he has opposed developments that he felt would lead to gentrification or displacement without community benefits. (He was a skeptic of luxury apartment projects that lacked affordable units or job guarantees.)
- **Homelessness and Public Health:** Santa Ana has one of the largest homeless populations in Orange County, and Vazquez has approached the issue with an emphasis on services and regional responsibility. In late 2024, when a proposal to **toughen the city's anti-camping laws** (banning camping in public spaces) came up, Vazquez and some colleagues **pumped the brakes due to humanitarian concerns**. He raised **concerns that the proposal "went too far," especially in penalizing people sleeping in their cars** <sup>31</sup> . The council initially delayed that ordinance in November 2024 following these concerns <sup>31</sup> . Vazquez argued that **"the city should instead increase [the] quality of life" services – like shelter, outreach, and mental health resources – rather than simply criminalize homelessness** (as reported of his comments at the meeting) <sup>32</sup> . By December 2024, a modified ordinance was passed with unanimous council support after removing the most contentious provisions <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> . Vazquez ultimately voted in favor of the refined anti-camping law (which, for example, excluded those sheltering in vehicles) as part of a broader strategy that coupled enforcement with increased funding for homeless outreach (he voted **yes** on a \$3.7 million outreach services contract the same meeting) <sup>35</sup> . Throughout, Vazquez maintained that

addressing homelessness requires compassion and regional cooperation – he’s urged the County to provide more support and often notes Santa Ana has borne a disproportionate burden.

- **Immigrant Rights and Government Transparency:** Representing a city that is roughly 77% Latino (many from immigrant families) <sup>36</sup>, Vazquez has been a **fierce advocate for immigrant communities**. In 2023-2025, he emerged as a champion of **Measure DD** – a Santa Ana ballot measure that, if passed, would allow noncitizen residents (such as legal permanent residents, DACA recipients, etc.) to vote in local elections. Vazquez **strongly supports Measure DD**, arguing that many noncitizen residents are long-time contributors to the community and deserve a voice in city affairs <sup>37</sup>. (His opponent, Mayor Amezcua, opposed it, citing legal concerns <sup>38</sup>.) This issue became a defining difference in the 2024 campaign, and Vazquez framed it as part of empowering working families and immigrants in Santa Ana.

Vazquez has also **authored a policy to increase transparency around federal immigration enforcement** in Santa Ana. In May 2025, he requested that the city establish a notification system to inform the City Council, the police oversight commission, and the public whenever Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducts operations in the city <sup>39</sup>. Explaining the intent, Vazquez said the policy is about **“transparency and trust.”** *“People should be empowered with information necessary to make informed decisions for themselves and for their families. It will make Santa Ana safe when we have trust in our government and our police department,”* Vazquez stated at a council meeting <sup>40</sup>. This initiative reflects his broader philosophy that an informed community can better protect itself and that openness from government builds confidence, especially in immigrant neighborhoods that might fear secretive ICE raids. Santa Ana has been a sanctuary city, and Vazquez’s efforts align with that ethos. *(The council voted to study potential legal risks of this ICE transparency policy, with Vazquez advocating for its eventual adoption.)*

- **Government Accountability and Ethics:** Vazquez consistently calls for **greater transparency and accountability at City Hall**. He has pushed for measures like independent audits, campaign finance reform, and inclusive public engagement in city decisions. In his own words, he entered the 2024 mayor’s race “to improve government transparency and accountability” <sup>4</sup>. He supported Santa Ana’s adoption of a *“Sunshine Ordinance”* (strengthening public notice and input requirements) and has demanded ethical conduct from city officials. For instance, he was critical of incidents where Santa Ana’s former city manager alleged council interference on behalf of the police union <sup>41</sup>. Vazquez generally positions himself as a reformer aiming to *“clean up City Hall”*, a phrase he has used in campaign messaging. In council deliberations, he often asks pointed questions of staff and seeks disclosure of information, reflecting this accountability mindset.

In summary, Vazquez’s voting record and policy actions align with a **left-of-center, community-first agenda**. Whether it’s **voting for rent control protections, opposing unchecked police power, or investing in youth and public spaces**, he tends to prioritize the needs of **vulnerable residents and the long-term public interest**. This approach has earned him a loyal following among progressives in Santa Ana, even as it sometimes puts him at odds with more conservative or business-oriented factions.

# Election Campaigns and Platforms

## 2016 Mayoral Campaign

Vazquez's 2016 bid for mayor (as discussed earlier) centered on **"investing in our youth instead of more police"** – effectively, a platform of community investment vs. traditional law-and-order. He was a political newcomer then, and although unsuccessful, that campaign established his reputation as an **independent progressive voice** willing to challenge entrenched powers. A noteworthy aspect of 2016 was Vazquez's support from the grassroots: community volunteers, students, and activists rallied for his candidacy as part of a broader movement for change in Santa Ana politics. (Pulido's victory in 2016 was bolstered by heavy police union spending against Vazquez <sup>42</sup> <sup>10</sup>, a dynamic that would recur in later races.)

## 2022 City Council Campaign (Ward 2)

Running for the open Ward 2 council seat in 2022 (incumbent Mendoza had been appointed in 2020 and was seeking a full term), Vazquez outlined a **campaign platform focused on "putting families first."** Key planks of his 2022 platform included: strengthening tenant protections (as Santa Ana's rent control law was newly in effect, he pledged to defend it), expanding affordable housing, combating homelessness with humane solutions, increasing park space in Ward 2, and improving traffic safety and infrastructure in neighborhoods. He also emphasized **education partnerships** – leveraging his teacher background to bridge city programs with local schools.

Vazquez campaigned as an **outsider to City Hall** but an *insider* to the community. He was not backed by big developers or the police union, which helped him frame his candidacy as free of special-interest strings. Instead, he earned endorsements from community organizations, progressive Democrats, and figures like former Councilman (now O.C. Supervisor) Vicente Sarmiento. Ultimately, his door-to-door grassroots outreach and credibility as a long-time teacher contributed to his narrow 2022 victory. (*Vazquez won with ~51% in a two-person race* <sup>43</sup>, *reflecting both strong support in his base and a nearly evenly split electorate.*)

## 2024 Mayoral Campaign

In 2024, Councilmember Vazquez ran for **Mayor of Santa Ana**, challenging incumbent Mayor **Valerie Amezcua** in the November general election. His campaign message in 2024 closely mirrored his work on the council and amplified it citywide. Vazquez **ran on a progressive platform**, which can be summarized as follows <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup>:

- **"Putting Santa Ana Families First":** Vazquez's slogan and core theme was prioritizing working-class families in all policies. He promised to *"continue to fight for working families"* and ensure City Hall *"truly centers families and residents"* <sup>4</sup> <sup>46</sup>. This included affordable housing, rent control, childcare support, and community health initiatives.
- **Education and Youth Partnerships:** Vazquez called for **building stronger partnerships with the SAUSD School Board** and local educational institutions <sup>47</sup>. He argued that the City and schools working together could better address youth needs – for example, coordinating after-school programs, joint use of school facilities for community events, and investing in youth jobs/training. (*Mayor Amezcua herself was a former school board member, but Vazquez claimed more could be done to bridge city government and schools.*)

- **Public Safety Reform and Accountability:** He advocated for **greater police accountability** and fully empowering the new oversight commission <sup>47</sup>. He also pledged to **hire a permanent police chief committed to reform**, implement community policing, and expand programs like the Be Well OC mobile response for mental health crises (to reduce reliance on police in non-criminal situations). Notably, he criticized what he saw as undue influence of the police union on the incumbent mayor; his campaign highlighted that Amezcua was under scrutiny for allegedly doing favors for the police union president (an allegation investigated but not officially sustained) <sup>48</sup>. By contrast, Vazquez positioned himself as *“not beholden to the police union”* and willing to hold police accountable.
- **Transparency and Ethics:** Vazquez emphasized **government transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility**. He promised regular town halls, participatory budgeting elements (giving residents a say in budget priorities), and stricter ethics rules to prevent conflicts of interest. He often repeated that Santa Ana residents “deserve a Mayor who...follows through on responsible spending and government transparency” <sup>46</sup>.
- **Investing in Neighborhoods:** His platform included improving basic city services – repaving streets, fixing sidewalks, enhancing lighting, and cleaning up public spaces in long-neglected neighborhoods. He also proposed **expanding the city’s Youth Resource Center** and creating more community centers in dense areas of the city.
- **Homelessness and Housing:** Vazquez proposed expanding shelter capacity in partnership with the County, but also took a firm stance that every part of the county must do its fair share so Santa Ana is not the “dumping ground” for the region’s homeless. He supported the anti-camping ordinance *only alongside* increased outreach and services. Additionally, he supported exploring a **“housing first”** model with permanent supportive housing development.
- **Noncitizen Voting Rights (Measure DD):** A distinctive part of Vazquez’s 2024 platform was his **support for Measure DD**, the local ballot measure to allow non-citizen residents to vote in city elections <sup>37</sup>. *“Santa Ana residents deserve a voice, regardless of citizenship status, in the local decisions that affect their families,”* he argued (as paraphrased from campaign statements). He frequently spoke at community forums about how many Santa Ana residents are immigrants who pay taxes and have kids in local schools, and thus should have a say in city leadership. This stance energized many immigrant and refugee community members, though it was controversial for others. The measure ultimately did not pass in 2024, but Vazquez’s advocacy on this issue solidified his standing as a champion for immigrant inclusion.

**Campaign Endorsements (2024):** Vazquez assembled a notable list of endorsements for his mayoral run, emphasizing his support from progressive groups and local leaders. For instance, he was **endorsed by Orange County Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento** (Santa Ana’s former mayor) and by **all members of the Santa Ana Unified School Board** <sup>49</sup>. He also earned backing from organizations such as the **California Working Families Party, OC Action, the Democratic Renters’ Council, and the Chicano/Latino Immigrant Democratic Club of OC** <sup>30</sup>. Two of his council colleagues, **Johnathan Ryan Hernandez and Jessie Lopez**, endorsed him as well <sup>50</sup> – a reflection of the council’s ideological split (with Amezcua being supported by other members and the police union). These endorsements underscored Vazquez’s positioning as the **progressive choice** in the race. On the other hand, Amezcua received endorsements from more establishment figures (e.g. a former police chief, some neighboring city officials) and did not secure the Democratic Party endorsement due to the split (the party remained neutral as both candidates were Democrats).

**Media and Debates:** During the campaign, Vazquez appeared in local candidate forums and interviews. In media coverage, he was often described as an *“ethnic studies teacher turned reformer councilman.”* The LAist voter guide, for example, noted that *“he was voted [onto council] on a platform to improve the life of working*

*class families*” and highlighted his focus on police oversight, youth investment, and transparency <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> . Vazquez frequently cited his record from his first council term to bolster his promises. In one forum, he stated, *“As a Councilmember, I fought tirelessly to ensure we have a City Hall that centers families... As Mayor, I’ll continue that fight”* <sup>4</sup> <sup>46</sup> . He also proudly pointed out that he refused donations from corporate landlords and had a campaign largely funded by small donors and volunteers, aligning with his message of accountability.

**Election Outcome 2024:** The mayoral election took place on November 5, 2024. **Valerie Amezcua was re-elected**, defeating Ben Vazquez. Early tallies on election night showed Amezcua with a significant lead – roughly **24 percentage points ahead**, equating to about **11,100 more votes** than Vazquez in initial counts <sup>51</sup> . The final certified results confirmed Amezcua’s victory by a wide margin (she secured a clear majority of the vote). Vazquez conceded the race and continued in his capacity as a councilmember. Despite the loss, his campaign succeeded in bringing issues like noncitizen voting and police reform into the local dialogue, and he solidified his role as a key voice on the council’s progressive wing.

It’s worth noting that Santa Ana’s mayoral seat is a two-year term (with a term limit of four consecutive terms) <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> . Amezcua’s win means she will serve until 2026, and Vazquez will have the option to run again in 2026 should he choose. Meanwhile, his council term for Ward 2 continues until December 2026, so he remains an influential elected official in Santa Ana’s governance.

## Public Statements and Notable Initiatives

Throughout his public service, Ben Vazquez has made numerous statements that shed light on his values and priorities. He is known for **plain-spoken, passionate rhetoric centered on community empowerment**. Below are a few notable public statements and initiatives he has been involved in, illustrating his approach:

- **Centering Families in Government:** *“I have fought tirelessly to ensure we have a city hall that truly centers families and residents,”* Vazquez wrote in 2024 <sup>4</sup> , emphasizing that every policy should be evaluated by how it benefits the people of Santa Ana rather than outside interests. This quote encapsulates his north star in public office – making local government responsive to everyday Santaneros.
- **Quote on Transparency (ICE Notification Policy):** When advocating for transparency about ICE operations, Vazquez articulated the link between information and public trust: *“People should be empowered with information necessary to make informed decisions for themselves and for their families. It will make Santa Ana safe when we have trust in our government and our police department.”* <sup>40</sup> This statement, delivered at a May 2025 council meeting, highlights how Vazquez ties transparency to public safety and community well-being, particularly for immigrant families who might fear government secrecy.
- **Resolution on International Human Rights (Israel-Palestine Ceasefire):** In December 2023, Vazquez co-authored a controversial **resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict**, amid the humanitarian crisis in Gaza <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> . He and Councilmember Hernandez introduced the resolution voicing support for civilians and a halt to violence. The issue sparked heated public debate in council chambers, with large turnouts from both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli community members. Ultimately, the council deadlocked and **no formal stance was adopted**, as there was not



enough support to pass any version of the resolution <sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup> . Mayor Amezcua opposed Vazquez's ceasefire resolution, and other members offered alternate wording, but none garnered a majority <sup>57</sup> . The meeting became chaotic, reflecting how global issues reverberated locally. Vazquez's involvement showed his willingness to take a stand on international human rights issues from the local dais – a move that supporters praised as moral leadership, but critics (including some local bloggers) derided as overstepping city purview or even labeled “anti-police” or “anti-Israel.” Despite failing to pass the resolution, Vazquez stood by the intent, stating that Santa Ana, as a diverse city, had residents directly affected by the conflict and thus “*couldn't stay silent on humanitarian concerns.*” This incident underscores Vazquez's activist streak and readiness to use his platform for advocacy beyond traditional municipal issues.

- **Joint Statements and Community Advocacy:** Vazquez has often joined forces with fellow progressive officials and community groups to issue statements or lead rallies on various causes. For example, he has spoken at **renter rights rallies**, at school board meetings in support of ethnic studies expansion, and in 2023 he was part of a **joint statement opposing the attempted recall of two council colleagues** (Hernandez and Lopez) which they attributed to special interests like the police union and apartment association <sup>48</sup> . In that instance, Vazquez stood with the targeted councilmembers and argued the recall was an undemocratic power grab. Such actions display his loyalty to allies and his consistent opposition to what he views as the undue influence of moneyed interests in Santa Ana politics.
- **Media Presence:** While not a national figure, Ben Vazquez does engage with local media and uses social media to communicate with constituents. He maintains an active **Instagram account (@benjaminvazquezforsantaana)** where he posts updates on community events, photos from neighborhood clean-ups, and short videos explaining his votes or stances. With a few thousand followers, his social media serves as a grassroots outreach tool (e.g., highlighting a recent recognition of the youth group *Chicanos Unidos* for community impact <sup>58</sup> ). Vazquez has appeared in local news articles and on podcasts focused on Orange County politics. The nonprofit newsroom Voice of OC frequently quotes him in articles about Santa Ana issues (such as those on police reform or housing), and he has been interviewed by community radio and Spanish-language media given Santa Ana's large Latino population. In all these appearances, Vazquez's tone is consistent: passionate about social justice and unabashedly proud of Santa Ana's communities. He often mixes English and a bit of Spanish when addressing bilingual audiences, reflecting his cultural background.
- **Community Engagement as an Official:** As a councilman, Vazquez makes a point to attend numerous community events – from neighborhood association meetings to cultural festivals. He has been seen rolling up his sleeves at park clean-ups, leading bike rides for health awareness, and reading to children at library story hours. In recognition of his community presence, local organizations frequently invite him as a guest or honoree. For instance, in 2023 he was honored by **Los Amigos of Orange County** (a longstanding community advocacy group) for his work in education and civic engagement. Vazquez often brings a teacher's touch to these appearances: listening to residents' concerns and explaining city policies in straightforward terms. Many community members know him on a first-name basis from years of activism before he held office.

In summary, Vazquez's public statements and media engagements reinforce the **personality of a grassroots activist turned public servant**. He remains accessible to the community and unafraid to speak out on contentious issues, always circling back to how decisions affect the people of Santa Ana. As **LAist**

described in a 2024 election profile: *“He was voted in on a platform to improve the life of working class families... championing police accountability, investments in youth and increased government transparency.”* <sup>59</sup>

These are the threads that tie all his public communications together.

## Community and Political Affiliations

Ben Vazquez is officially a nonpartisan officeholder (all Santa Ana city positions are nonpartisan), but his affiliations and endorsements place him firmly in the **progressive Democratic** camp. He is a registered Democrat and aligned with the party's liberal wing. Some of his notable affiliations and support networks include:

- **Democratic Party & Clubs:** Vazquez has the support of progressive Democratic clubs. For example, the **Chicano Latino Immigrant Democratic Club of Orange County** endorsed him in 2024 <sup>30</sup>. He's also known to work with groups like **OC Progressive Coalition** and **Orange County Young Democrats** on voter outreach. In Santa Ana's Democratic circles, he is seen as an ally of figures like Vicente Sarmiento and Johnathan Hernandez who prioritize social justice issues.
- **Labor Unions:** As a career public school teacher, Vazquez is a member of the **Santa Ana Educators Association** (the local teachers' union) and has been endorsed by teacher unions and the **Orange County Labor Federation** in his campaigns. He often appears at union rallies – for instance, supporting hotel workers during contract fights or teamsters during labor actions. His emphasis on union jobs and labor agreements in development stems from these pro-labor values.
- **Community Organizations:** Vazquez has long-standing ties with local nonprofits and advocacy groups. He is associated with **Resilience OC** and **Chispa** (youth-led immigrant rights groups in OC) – he has attended their events and supported their policy asks such as language access and immigrant legal defense funds. **Coalition of Orange County Community Organizations (COCO)**, a network of grassroots groups, is another circle where Vazquez is respected; he worked with them on a successful push for Santa Ana's sanctuary city resolution years ago. Additionally, Vazquez's involvement with cultural and arts groups (El Centro Cultural de México, Barrio Writers, etc.) means he's well-connected in arts advocacy circles.
- **Allies on the Council:** Politically, Vazquez is often allied with Councilmembers **Johnathan Ryan Hernandez (Ward 5)** and **Jessie Lopez (Ward 3)**, who share similar progressive platforms. The trio, sometimes along with Thai Viet Phan (who is a swing vote on some issues), have formed a voting bloc on certain key votes (e.g., defending rent control, establishing police oversight). They were all opposed by a police union-led recall attempt in 2022-2023 (aimed at Hernandez and Lopez) and stood together against it <sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, Mayor Amezcua, Councilman Phil Bacerra, and Councilman David Penaloza have often taken positions opposite Vazquez's on issues like law enforcement and development, reflecting a split in Santa Ana's leadership. This dynamic has sometimes been described in local media as the “police-backed faction” vs. the “progressive/working families faction,” with Vazquez firmly in the latter.
- **Regional/State Connections:** Vazquez's advocacy has also connected him with statewide progressive movements. He was endorsed by the **California Working Families Party**, indicating he's part of a network of left-leaning candidates statewide <sup>30</sup>. He has appeared with State Assemblymember Avelino Valencia and State Senator Josh Newman at events (though those officials

remained neutral in the mayor's race). Moreover, Vazquez's platform overlapping with issues like rent control and immigrant voting rights has led to partnerships with statewide organizations such as **Tenants Together** and **Inclusive Democracy PAC**. There is speculation that if Vazquez continues in politics, he might seek higher office or regional boards, given his connections and support base.

Overall, Vazquez's affiliations paint the picture of a **community-rooted progressive Democrat** whose support comes from **teachers, union workers, immigrants, and activists** rather than corporate donors or law enforcement groups. This base both empowers him to push bold policies and also makes him a target for opposition from established interests (as evidenced by heavy police union spending to defeat him in 2024 <sup>20</sup>).

## Timeline of Public Service and Key Milestones

To summarize Vazquez's journey, the following table outlines the **timeline of his political and public service career**, along with notable initiatives and roles he has held:

Year(s)	Position/Role	Key Actions and Notes
<b>2000s – 2020s</b>	<b>Teacher, Santa Ana Unified School District</b> (Valley High School)	Developed Valley High's Ethnic Studies program and taught for 21+ years. Organized district's first Ethnic Studies conference <sup>5</sup> . Mentor to countless Santa Ana students; recognized for educational leadership.
<b>2010s</b>	<b>Community Organizer &amp; Cultural Worker</b>	Co-founded <i>I Bike Santa Ana</i> (promoting cycling and health) <sup>5</sup> ; Directed <i>Barrio Writers</i> youth program <sup>60</sup> ; Co-founded <i>Taco Trucks at Every Mosque</i> interfaith initiative <sup>61</sup> ; Active with El Centro Cultural de México. Built reputation as a grassroots leader.
<b>2016</b>	<b>Candidate for Mayor of Santa Ana</b>	Ran on a progressive platform emphasizing youth services over increased policing. Challenged longtime Mayor Miguel Pulido, but lost <b>53% to 33%</b> <sup>10</sup> (Pulido's favor). Campaign elevated issues of community investment vs. police spending <sup>7</sup> .
<b>2020</b>	<i>Community Advocacy</i>	(Appointed to Santa Ana General Plan Advisory Board – <i>tentative</i> , as a community representative) – Vazquez contributed input on equitable development during the General Plan update. ( <i>Not an elected office, but part of his pre-council civic engagement.</i> )
<b>Nov 8, 2022</b>	<b>Elected Councilmember, Santa Ana (Ward 2)</b>	Won Santa Ana City Council seat for Ward 2, defeating incumbent Nelida Mendoza. Received <b>~50.9%</b> of vote, with a narrow 80-vote margin <sup>62</sup> . Assumed office <b>Dec 13, 2022</b> <sup>14</sup> . Immediately focused on renter protections, working-family budget priorities, and establishing a police oversight commission (which was adopted in Nov 2022).

Year(s)	Position/Role	Key Actions and Notes
2023	<b>Santa Ana City Councilmember (Ward 2)</b>	Active in advancing progressive policies: e.g., supported a resolution calling for Gaza ceasefire (Dec 2023) which deadlocked <sup>54</sup> <sup>57</sup> ; opposed police union-led recall efforts; promoted tenant relief programs using pandemic funds. Launched campaign for mayor mid-2023.
Nov 2024	<b>Candidate for Mayor of Santa Ana</b>	Challenged Mayor Amezcua on platform of transparency, accountability, and prioritizing families <sup>4</sup> <sup>47</sup> . Endorsed by various progressive groups and leaders (Working Families Party, OC Action, Vicente Sarmiento, etc.) <sup>30</sup> <sup>49</sup> . <b>Lost election</b> – Amezcua won re-election by a significant margin <sup>51</sup> . Vazquez remained on the City Council (term continuing).
Jan 21, 2025 – Present	<b>Mayor Pro Tem of Santa Ana</b>	Selected unanimously by City Council as Mayor Pro Tempore for 2025 <sup>21</sup> . As Mayor Pro Tem, presides in Mayor's absence and helps set agendas. Continuing focus on equity: in 2025 led push to strengthen police oversight (opposing any weakening of the commission) <sup>18</sup> and introduced policy for public ICE activity disclosure <sup>39</sup> . Serves concurrently as Councilmember for Ward 2.
2025	<b>Ongoing Council Initiatives</b>	Advocating for Santa Ana's financial stability amid looming budget shortfalls (after Measure X sales tax phase-out) – pushing for audit of expenditures and protection of services. Working on implementation of Santa Ana's rent registry and enforcement of rent cap. Regularly convening Ward 2 community town halls and newsletters to increase resident engagement <sup>24</sup> . Term as Mayor Pro Tem runs through end of 2025.

*(Table: Timeline of Ben Vazquez's public service career and key initiatives.)*

## Conclusion

**Ben Vazquez** is a figure who bridges roles as an educator, community activist, and elected official. From his early days empowering youth in the classroom and on the streets of Santa Ana, to his current position as Mayor Pro Tem, Vazquez has consistently **championed the underrepresented**. His profile is that of a **progressive reformer**: he centers working families in policy, stands up to powerful interests like the police union, and isn't afraid to introduce bold initiatives (be it rent control or immigrant voting rights) to advance equity in his city.

Vazquez's impact on Santa Ana can be seen in various ways – a strengthened rent control ordinance protected under his watch, a nascent police oversight body reflecting his accountability ethos, new bike lanes and park improvements in Ward 2 neighborhoods, and heightened civic engagement among residents who feel heard by leaders like him. His public statements often invoke **transparency, trust, and community**, reflecting a belief that democracy works best when people are informed and involved. *“Santa*

*Ana residents deserve a Mayor who respects all residents, prioritizes investment in youth and neighborhoods, and follows through on responsible spending and government transparency,” Vazquez wrote during his campaign* <sup>46</sup>, effectively summing up the standard he strives to meet.

Looking ahead, Councilmember Vazquez remains a pivotal voice on the City Council. With two years left in his term, he will likely continue to advance his policy agenda and could seek the mayor’s seat again or other higher office in the future. For now, he remains **deeply engaged in Santa Ana’s civic life** – attending community events on the weekends, teaching his ethnic studies classes on weekdays, and spending long evenings in council sessions debating how to make Santa Ana a better place for its **310,000 residents** <sup>63</sup>. Through all these roles, Ben Vazquez exemplifies the motto of servant leadership; as he often reminds constituents, *“Giving back to Santa Ana isn’t just my duty as a councilmember – it’s my passion as a neighbor.”*

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