

Is Rep. Brad Sherman's Congressional Candidacy in Trouble?

In California's June 2, 2026, primary election, 15-term, 30-year, Democratic incumbent Brad Sherman finished first in the 32nd Congressional District with **36.8% of the vote**.

Republican Larry Thompson, Entertainment Attorney, Talent Manager, and Film Producer, finished second with **32.7%**.

The difference between them was only **4.1 percentage points** — **8,460 votes out of more than 208,000 cast**.

For an incumbent who has served in Congress continuously since 1997, that is a result worth examining.

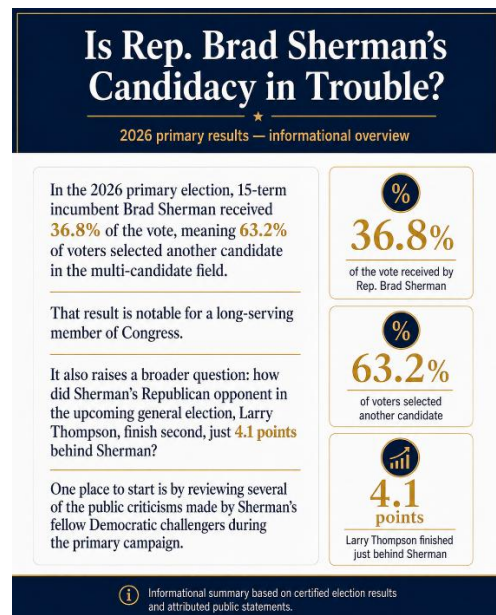
And there is another way of looking at the numbers: **63.2% of the voters in the nine-candidate primary selected someone other than Sherman**.

That does not mean those voters will automatically oppose Sherman in November. California's primary was a crowded top two election involving seven Democrats, one Republican and one No Party Preference candidate.

But the result does demonstrate something significant: **a large majority of primary voters were willing to consider an alternative to the incumbent**.

And Thompson, who refers to himself as "The Sanity Man," did considerably more than simply survive the primary.

He came within 4.1 points of Sherman while six Democratic challengers were simultaneously making their own arguments that the district needed different leadership.



Thompson's result looks even more interesting when the district is divided geographically

The county-by-county results reveal a striking difference.

In the Los Angeles County portion of CA-32, Sherman received 66,751 votes and Thompson received 49,120. That translated to approximately **39.2% for Sherman and 28.9% for Thompson** once all nine candidates were included.

But in the Ventura County portion of the district, the outcome reversed dramatically.

Thompson received **19,175 votes**, compared with **10,004 for Sherman**.

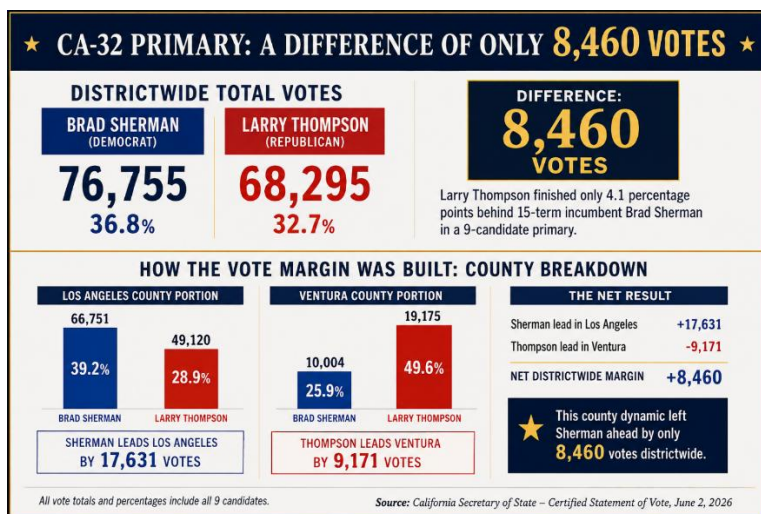
That gave Thompson approximately **49.6% of every primary vote cast in the Ventura portion of CA-32**, even though there were nine candidates on the ballot. Sherman received approximately 25.9%.

That is potentially one of the most consequential facts in the primary results.

Thompson did not merely edge Sherman in Ventura County's portion of the district. He received **9,171 more votes than Sherman there, nearly twice as many votes as Sherman**.

Sherman's Los Angeles County advantage was 17,631 votes. Thompson's Ventura County advantage erased more than half of that difference, leaving Sherman with his final districtwide margin of just 8,460 votes.

For a general election that will contain only Sherman and Thompson, that geographic split deserves attention.



Sherman's own Democratic challengers were already asking whether 30 years was enough

The primary numbers did not occur in a political vacuum.

Throughout the campaign, Democratic candidates running against Sherman repeatedly questioned whether three decades of seniority continued to translate into effective representation.

Their criticisms differed in tone, ideology and subject matter, but there was a surprising degree of overlap.

Jake Levine: Is seniority producing results?

Jake Levine's campaign described Sherman as:

“out of step with California's Democratic primary voters.”

The Levine campaign went considerably further. It argued that after 30 years Sherman had produced too little major standalone legislation and said he had done too little to modernize the district or move major priorities forward.

Levine's campaign publicized the particularly provocative claim that Sherman had passed only four bills and that two involved naming post offices.

That statement needs an important qualification.

The more precise factual formulation is that the federal legislative record reviewed identifies **four standalone House bills sponsored by Sherman that became law** before the 2026 primary. Two named post offices, one was a private immigration-relief measure, and one was the Hong Kong Autonomy Act.

The Hong Kong legislation was significant substantive foreign-policy legislation, and lawmakers also influence legislation through amendments and provisions contained within larger bills. For example, Congress.gov records a Sherman amendment concerning competitive contracting in Iraq reconstruction that was adopted by the House.

So the four-bill figure should not be interpreted as "Sherman accomplished only four things."

But Levine's broader political argument was unmistakable: **30 years of seniority should be judged by results.**

Josh Sautter: "Brad Sherman is status quo"

Josh Sautter's criticism was even more explicit.

His campaign website said Sherman had:

"grown out-of-touch with our communities."

It continued:

"Brad Sherman is status quo."

Sautter also advocated term limits and stated plainly that **30 years in office was long enough.**

Those comments are notable because they came not from Thompson, Sherman's Republican opponent, but from another Democrat seeking his seat.

Sautter's campaign characterized the race as a choice between entrenched politics and generational change.

Dory Benami: "It is time to pass the torch"

Dory Benami took a much less confrontational approach.

He began by acknowledging Sherman's service and saying that three decades in public office deserved respect.

Then he reached a different conclusion:

"It is time to pass the torch."

In his accompanying video, Benami said Sherman had served admirably but argued that the district required **"new energy and a fresh face."**

That criticism is perhaps more revealing precisely because it was not hostile.

Benami's argument was essentially that an officeholder can have served honorably and nevertheless reach a point when voters should consider new leadership.

Chris Ahuja: "Missing in action"

Chris Ahuja was considerably harsher.

During congressional debate over Republican proposals affecting Medicaid and SNAP, Ahuja asked:

"Where is Brad Sherman?"

He accused the incumbent of being **"all too often missing in action"** and said constituents needed a representative who showed up and fought visibly for them.

That criticism concerned Sherman's response to a specific legislative controversy and should be understood in that context.

But Ahuja's attacks did not stop there.

In another dispute involving comments Sherman made regarding deportations and a possible third Trump term, Ahuja called Sherman's remarks **"morally bankrupt and disgraceful"** and said Sherman had "failed" a test of leadership.

Those were Ahuja's judgments, not neutral findings, but they illustrate how unusually aggressive the Democratic primary became.

Ahuja also accused Sherman of having sided with real-estate interests while rents and evictions increased. That remains an allegation from Ahuja's campaign and should be described as such rather than presented independently as established fact.

Anna Wilding: "The old guard"

Anna Wilding offered another variation of the same anti-incumbency argument.

She wrote:

"Brad Sherman represents the old guard."

She argued that CA-32 needed "real solutions" rather than the same status quo and tied that criticism to housing costs, disappearing entertainment-industry jobs, transportation problems, crime and environmental concerns.

Wilding also criticized Sherman's financial support from real-estate interests, although specific dollar claims she made require care because direct campaign contributions, PAC contributions and independent expenditures are not interchangeable.

The cleaner point is the one Wilding herself emphasized: she believed the district's unresolved problems were evidence that long incumbency had not produced sufficient change.

Marena Lin: follow the money — and the congressional office budget

Marena Lin pursued a notably different line of attack.

Rather than relying primarily on slogans, Lin built public databases examining campaign financing and Sherman's taxpayer-funded congressional-office expenditures.

Her campaign analyzed House Statement of Disbursements records and highlighted how Sherman allocated his roughly \$2 million annual office budget.

For 2022, Lin's analysis showed Sherman using approximately **58% for personnel compensation**, while reporting roughly **\$198,000 in constituent mail**. She contrasted those figures with several other Democratic House members whose offices devoted substantially higher percentages of their budgets to personnel.

Those comparisons represent Lin's analytical methodology, although the underlying spending records come from House disclosures.

Lin also investigated independent political spending benefiting Sherman, including an \$800,000 pro-Sherman television expenditure from Valley-Westside United PAC after that organization received \$800,000 from Opportunity Forward Alliance.

The important distinction remains that this was **outside spending supporting Sherman**, not an \$800,000 contribution to Sherman's own campaign.

Lin's larger criticism was one of institutional advantages: money, incumbency and the machinery surrounding a member who had occupied the seat for nearly three decades.

Then there was someone who knew Sherman from the inside

Perhaps the most unusual criticism came from a Democrat who once worked for Sherman.

Jake Rakov served as Sherman's deputy communications director in 2017 and subsequently announced a 2026 challenge to his former employer before later withdrawing.

ABC News reported that Rakov criticized Sherman as ineffective and questioned the value of the incumbent's seniority.

His memorable line was:

"Seniority doesn't matter if no one is willing to work with you."

Rakov also argued that voters wanted members of Congress who were accessible and accountable.

Sherman rejected that criticism. He pointed to his senior role on the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Capital Markets and noted that experienced members may be passed over for committee chairmanships for reasons that do not necessarily reflect their effectiveness.

That response deserves to be part of the story.

But so does another statement Sherman made during that ABC interview.

Responding generally to primary challenges against incumbent Democrats, Sherman said:

"I always have lots of opponents and I usually win by a huge margin."

The June 2026 result makes that statement particularly interesting in hindsight.

Sherman did win the primary.

But 4.1 percentage points is not a huge margin.

Even the NPP candidate challenged the system of long-term incumbency

Doug Smith, the race's No Party Preference candidate, was not as personally critical of Sherman as several of the Democrats.

In fact, Smith publicly praised Sherman's environmental work.

But Smith campaigned forcefully against long-term incumbency generally.

His platform called for congressional term limits, argued that House members should serve no more than 12 years and criticized a political system that, in Smith's view, protected career politicians.

Because those statements were broader systemic criticisms rather than always Sherman-specific attacks, they should not be presented as Smith personally calling Sherman corrupt.

Nevertheless, Smith's candidacy added another voice to the broader primary debate over whether lengthy congressional tenure remained an asset or had become part of the problem.

The primary produced two very different messages

There is an argument favorable to Sherman.

Democratic candidates collectively received approximately **66.6%** of the primary vote. Sherman can reasonably hope that many of the Democrats who supported Levine, Lin, Ahuja, Wilding, Benami or Sautter will return to the Democratic nominee in November.

That is why it would be incorrect simply to describe the 63.2% non-Sherman vote as an anti-Sherman general-election bloc.

But there is also an argument that makes the race more competitive than that party-total statistic suggests.

Thompson himself received 32.7%.

He did not need a divided Republican field to get there: he was the only Republican candidate and finished only 4.1 points behind Sherman.

And in the Ventura County portion of CA-32, Thompson approached an outright majority in a nine-candidate race.

That means the general election begins with something different from the usual hypothetical Republican challenge to a heavily established Democratic incumbent.

It begins with **two candidates who were separated by only 8,460 votes in the election that determined who advanced.**

The remaining 29.8% becomes the unanswered question

The six Democratic challengers other than Sherman collectively received approximately **62,209 votes — 29.8% of all votes cast.**

Those voters do not constitute a single ideological group.

A Levine voter is not necessarily an Ahuja voter. A Benami supporter may have very different priorities from a Lin supporter. And none can be assumed to support either Sherman or Thompson in November.

But their existence matters.

Nearly three out of every ten CA-32 primary voters chose a Democrat **other than the Democratic incumbent.**

And those six candidates spent the primary supplying voters with arguments against Sherman's continued tenure:

“Out of step.”

“Status quo.”

“Pass the torch.”

“Missing in action.”

“Old guard.”

Questions about money, accessibility, office spending and legislative effectiveness.

Those criticisms do not disappear merely because the primary has ended.

So, is Brad Sherman in trouble?

The evidence does not justify declaring the race decided in either direction.

Sherman remains a formidable incumbent. He has served for nearly three decades, possesses substantial institutional experience and represents a district in which Democratic candidates collectively won roughly two-thirds of the primary vote.

But the numbers also make it difficult to dismiss the general election as routine.

Sherman received **36.8%.**

Thompson received **32.7%.**

The difference was **4.1 points.**

And in the Ventura portion of the district, Thompson finished far ahead of Sherman.

At the same time, six Democrats spent months publicly challenging Sherman's effectiveness, longevity, responsiveness and identification with the political status quo.

Former Sherman aide Jake Rakov questioned whether the congressman's celebrated seniority actually translated into influence.

And voters themselves produced a primary in which almost two-thirds selected somebody other than the incumbent.

None of that guarantees what will happen in November.

But taken together, the certified results and the unusually broad criticism Sherman faced inside his own party support a more modest conclusion:

California's 32nd Congressional District enters the general election with a contest that is measurably closer — and politically more unsettled — than the words “15-term, 30-year incumbent” might ordinarily suggest.