Summary

These four races in California could help determine which party ends up with control of the House. Democrats probably have at least a slight edge in all of them, but they could go either way on Election Day. Here's what you need to know about the candidates.

In Fall 2024, I posted about six hotly contested House races in California. Republicans ended up with control of the House thanks to winning some of those seats. This year, the picture is different due to California's decision to gerrymander in response to Texas's one-sided House map. I can only see four districts where Republicans seem to have any reasonable chance (apart from those where Republicans have been packed as part of the gerrymander). They all lean at least a bit Democratic, but the Democrats are far from having these races locked down. I'll start with the race that seems most in question and move to others that are tougher challenges for Republicans.

CA 22 is probably the district with the closest race, though the odds may favor the Democrats just a little. (Cook: Tossup, Sabato: Leans D). The district contains a bit of Bakersfield and then heads northeast up the San Joaquin Valley. The race pits incumbent Republican David Valadao against Democrat Randy Villegas. Valadao has a 12% 2025 score and a 9% lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). Villegas, a college professor and activist, is a progressive who defeated a more moderate Democrat in the primary. His website emphasizes the threat of rising temperatures and other environmental issues in the Central Valley.

CA 13 leans Democratic but is still in play. (Sabato & Cook: Leans D). It's another San Joaquin Valley district, starting at Stockton and heading southwest from there. The incumbent Democrat, Adam Gray, has 61% LCV scores (both 2025 and lifetime). His opponent is Kevin Lincoln, a former Marine and mayor of Stockton. His website doesn't mention environment or energy, but does contain an enthusiastic endorsement of data centers, which might cause him problems.

CA 48 also leans Democratic but is still in play. (Cook & Sabato: Leans D). The district starts east of San Diego and heads North until it's about level with San Clemente. This is Darrell Issa's old district. Marni von Wilpert, the Democratic nominee, is a member of the San Diego City Council and a former prosecutor. Her website pledges to "stop Trump's environmental destruction." Jim Desmond (R), the

Republican candidate, is a former airline pilot and county supervisor, who criticizes current California climate policy for being too costly and forcing EVs on people. He says, however, that “common-sense climate solutions can protect our environment, provide clean water, lower costs, and support our communities.”

Of the four districts I discuss, **CA-45**, has the most pronounced Democratic lean but remains in contention. (Sabato: Leans D; Cook: Likely D) It’s kind of boomerang shaped, starting near Huntington Beach, heading Northwest and then turning back to the east. The incumbent, Derek Tran, is an environmental stalwart with 97% scores from the LCV. The challenger, Chuong Vuo, is a retired police officer and former mayor of Cerrito. His website is focused on other issues but does pledge to “streamline permits and infrastructure that lower costs” under the heading of Affordability.

Given how close control of the House is right now, these are important elections for both parties. It wouldn’t be surprising for some of these races to shift in the next two months. Given the potential for polling errors and uncertainty about turnout, we won’t know anything for sure until election night.