

Missing 70% Opponent On Coco County Ballot, Kathrani launches Youth Democracy Contest

Chirag Kathrani Assembly candidate lunches Youth Democracy Contest, and a Slate of Challengers Aim to Restore Competitive Democracy

SAN RAMON, CA, UNITED STATES, May 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As of today, Contra Costa County and Richmond City Council election records show that 65 percent of races on the primary ballot are missing opposition candidates — a sign, says civic leader and State Assembly District 16 candidate [Chirag Kathrani](#), of a democracy in urgent need of repair.

"When 70 percent of elections go unchallenged, democracy is not functioning — it is simply ratifying whoever already holds power," said Kathrani, founder of [Open Governance News](#) (OpGov.News). "The most dangerous thing we can do is call that normal."

A Candidate Who Ran to Break the Silence

Kathrani first entered electoral politics when he ran for Mayor of San Ramon rather than allow the seat to go unchallenged. He later learned, through a conversation with a sitting council member, that an appointment had already been arranged before votes were cast — a detail he describes as the moment that crystallized his mission.

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The Roots of Democracy Are Local”

Chirag Kathrani

His experience also revealed a systemic transparency gap: city council minutes rarely capture the substance of public comment, leaving residents with no accessible record of what was said on their behalf. YouTube recordings of meetings became his workaround — and eventually, the seed of a larger idea.



The poster for the Youth Democracy Contest features a cartoon dog character on the left. The main text reads "YOUTH DEMOCRACY CONTEST VOTE" with a checkmark inside the letter 'O'. Below this, it says "Your vote matters more than you think!". A dark blue button with a smartphone icon says "CREATE SOCIAL MEDIA POST TO GET PEOPLE VOTING!". To the right, there are three icons: a speech bubble for "YOUR VOICE", a checkmark for "YOUR CHOICE", and a bar chart for "OUR FUTURE". A QR code is located on the right side. A section titled "WHY YOUR VOTE COUNTS" lists: "Primitives shape your choices", "Local votes have huge impact", "Low turnout = YOUR voice amplified", "65%+ races unchallenged - why?", and "\$ impact value of your vote.". Below this, it says "Send by May 31 2026" and "All Participants will be awarded on stage of Chokhi Dhani to Lokrang Festival on May 31st, 2026 (11:00 am to 7:00 pm)". A "CASH PRIZES!" section shows three trophies: \$500 GOLD, \$250 SILVER, and \$100 BRONZE. A list of rules includes: "All entries posted!", "All posts or videos are on your creativity.", "Youth = Youthful Minds.", and "Criteria is Engagement!". A "CONTACT" section lists "Chirag Kathrani" with "Call/Text: 925.435.7161". The OpGov.News logo is at the bottom left. The bottom right features a photo of a diverse group of young people taking a selfie and the text "Youth Democracy Contest".

Open Governance Initiative: Making Local Government Accessible

At the Contra Costa County Art and Wind Festival, Kathrani and his team launched the Open Governance Initiative — a project that summarizes city council meetings, amplifies the voices of public speakers, and connects residents directly with the decisions that affect them. The initiative has since grown into OpGov.News, a multi-city platform that covers local government across the region.

The initiative has engaged more than 50 youth speakers at city council meetings and has built relationships with dozens of community members who now see themselves as participants in local democracy rather than spectators.

Youth Democracy Contest: Deadline May 30, Award Ceremony May 31

OpGov.News is currently running its Youth Democracy Contest, calling on young people to submit a 20–60 second creative video encouraging their peers to vote. The contest is open through May 30, 2026 at 10:00 PM.

The winner receives \$500 and will be honored at an award ceremony on May 31 at Chokhi Dhani, hosted by the Lokrang India Community Center (ICC). The contest draws inspiration from figures like climate activist Greta Thunberg — proof, Kathrani says, that young voices move mountains when given a platform.

"Great individuals get overlooked on the primary ballot — but not if OpGov.News has anything to do with it," Kathrani said. "That same energy is what we are looking for from youth contestants."

Submissions and contest details: chirag@lead4earth.org

A Slate Challenging the Status Quo

Kathrani is also throwing his support behind several community candidates who are stepping up to contest races that would otherwise go uncontested:

Pratima Sonavne — Candidate for Contra Costa County Clerk-Recorder. Kathrani argues the incumbent office failed in its basic duty to inform voters about filing deadlines, leaving 65 percent of races with no competition.

Kismat Kathrani — Candidate for CoCo County Assessor. (32 yrs run by same person costing taxpayers multiple litigation bills)

Deepika Naharas — Candidate for CoCo Auditor-Controller. (30+ years has not seen change, real accountability needs change)

Valery R. Polyakov — Candidate for CoCo Superior Court Judge.

Media Accountability

Kathrani notes that Contra Costa County news media has largely declined to host candidate forums during this election cycle, leaving voters without the comparative coverage they need to make informed choices. OpGov.News is filling that gap through its platform, community conversations, and the Youth Democracy Contest.

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About OpGov.News

Open Governance News (OpGov.News) is a Community Inspired News, a project under the non profit founded by Chirag Kathrani, I covers local governance news by engaging community members who speak at the council and question on their behalf to the authorities. We are hiring reporters too. More information: chirag@lead4earth.org

About Chirag Kathrani

Chirag Kathrani is a civic leader, community organizer, and candidate for California State Assembly District 16. He is the founder of the Open Governance Initiative and OpGov.News. He previously ran for Mayor of San Ramon. Contact: chirag@lead4earth.org | support@lead4earth.org

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