



Commentary: Albany's ranked-choice voting proposal goes too far

There's a place for ranked-choice voting, but this proposal would eliminate party primaries and fusion voting and weaken the role of political parties in our democracy.

By **Ivette Alfonso and Andy Kaier**, *For the Times Union*

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At a moment when voting rights are under attack nationally, we should make voting easier and democracy stronger. But not every proposal labeled “democracy reform” advances those goals.

A petition submitted to the Albany Common Council includes a sweeping rewrite of how our city elects its leaders. It was sold as ranked-choice voting to many signers. In reality, this proposal would do far more: It eliminates party primaries, dismantles fusion voting and, perhaps worst of all, it allows candidates to choose their parties rather than allowing parties to choose their candidates.

Under the proposal, a candidate could appear on the ballot identified with a political party without winning its primary or earning the consent of its members. They would simply need to join that party.

New York City's 2025 mayoral election shows why this change is unnecessary and potentially dangerous. Democratic voters chose Zohran Mamdani in a crowded primary. Andrew Cuomo and Eric Adams secured independent ballot lines for the general election, and voters remained free to support them. What Cuomo and Adams could not do was claim the Democratic mantle without the consent of Democratic voters.

By allowing candidates to list the party of their choice on the ballot, the Albany proposal would erase that distinction and sow confusion.

Ranked-choice voting has real benefits, but it must not become a Trojan horse for changes that weaken democratic functioning. Democracy functions better with parties, because parties provide a crucial signal to voters: They tell us,

imperfectly but still importantly, who stands for what.

Primaries empower party members to choose their champion for the general election.

Supporters claim this new system would give unaffiliated voters more say. But these voters are not disenfranchised; they have chosen not to join a party, and they can support candidates in the general election. This proposal dismantles an institution crucial for democracy — namely, political parties — that enables ordinary people to organize and act collectively.

This proposal also eliminates fusion voting, a key mechanism to challenge the mainstream political parties. Today, a voter who votes on the Working Families Party line supports both a candidate and a political agenda. Having separate vote totals by party demonstrates the strength of a party, and it helps its members hold elected officials accountable.

Under this proposal, separate vote totals from fusion voting would disappear, taking away smaller parties' ability to build coalitions.

Albany itself shows what organized people power can accomplish. In the past two years, our region has elected its first Latina representative to the state Assembly and Albany's first Black female mayor.

Those victories did not happen because organized politics disappeared. They happened because people organized: Neighbors talked to neighbors, unions and community organizations mobilized members, and parties built coalitions. That infrastructure is not an obstacle to democracy. It is democracy in action.

There is an appropriate place for ranked-choice voting. It plays a useful role inside closed party primaries when there is a multi-candidate field. But this proposal is not about using ranked choice in party primaries. The additional changes it includes would fundamentally weaken democracy in Albany.

Albany should bring voters, civil rights groups, labor unions, neighborhood leaders, election experts and political parties together to design reforms that expand participation without weakening collective political power.

Democracy requires active participation and political community. It requires giving people the power to organize, build movements and shape their future.

Any reform Albany adopts should strengthen that power, not dilute it.

Ivette Alfonso is co-chair of the Capital District Working Families Party. Andy Kaier is the party secretary. They both live in Albany.