

MAY 19, 2015, AT 4:54 PM

Hillary Clinton Was Liberal. Hillary Clinton Is Liberal.

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Filed under 2016 Election



Hillary Clinton at a coffee shop Tuesday in Independence, Iowa. SCOTT OLSON / GETTY IMAGES

A [bunch of reporters](#) have recently discovered a shocking truth: Hillary Clinton is [liberal](#)! (I heard a rumor that Columbo has been helping with the investigation.)

We've gotten this raft of "Clinton is liberal" exposés as Clinton has revved up her 2016 campaign, speaking out in support of gay marriage, a pathway to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. illegally, and criminal justice reform. But what many of these articles miss is that Clinton has always been, by most measures, pretty far to the left. When she's shifted positions, it has been in concert with the entire Democratic Party.

To see how these different issues fit together to form an overall political ideology, we [usually use](#) three metrics: one based on [congressional voting record](#), one based on [public statements](#) and one based on [fundraising](#).

Clinton was one of the most liberal members during her time in the Senate. According to an analysis of roll call votes by [Voteview](#), Clinton's record was more liberal than 70 percent of Democrats in [her final term](#) in the Senate. She was more liberal than 85 percent of all members. Her 2008 rival in the Democratic presidential primary, Barack Obama, was nearby with a record more liberal than 82 percent of all members — he was not more liberal than Clinton.

Clinton also has a history of very liberal public statements. Clinton rates as a "hard core liberal" per the [OnTheIssues.org scale](#). She is [as liberal](#) as Elizabeth Warren and [barely more moderate](#) than Bernie Sanders. And while Obama [is also](#) a "hard core liberal," Clinton again was rated as more liberal than Obama.

Sometimes I wonder whether people are confusing Clinton with her husband. Bill Clinton's statements have been [far more moderate](#). He has also had a more moderate donor base, according to Adam Bonica's [fundraising scores](#).

There have been a few issues on which Hillary Clinton has taken more centrist positions. She, of course, voted for the Iraq War (she now says that was a mistake). Clinton has been mostly pro free trade (although she hasn't said [much of anything](#) on the Trans-Pacific Partnership). And she has been against marijuana legalization, and [seemingly remains so](#).

When Clinton *has* shifted left, she has usually done so with her party and — on the issues she’s highlighted in the 2016 campaign so far — the country. Some examples:

- **Gay marriage** was something that split Democrats almost right down the middle in 2008, with 50 percent in favor per the [Pew Research Center](#). Just 39 percent of the population overall supported same-sex marriage back then. Clinton flipped her position in early 2013, just about when [the polls were showing](#) that 51 percent of Americans and around [two-thirds of Democrats](#) were in favor of gay marriage. In late 2007, an [ABC News/Washington Post poll](#) found that Americans and Democrats were in the same place then on civil unions, which Clinton supported, as they are now on gay marriage. In other words, Clinton’s moved left — along with everyone else.
- **Immigration** is a little trickier because so much depends on how a poll is worded, but most of the polls with neutrally worded questions seem to show support for Clinton’s position. A [May 2015 CBS News survey](#) shows 57 percent of Americans favor a pathway to citizenship (an all-time high in that survey), compared with 29 percent who want those here illegally deported and 11 percent who want them to have legal status but not citizenship. Among Democrats, 71 percent want a path to citizenship.
- On **criminal justice reform**, which has drawn considerable national attention recently, Clinton called in late April for rolling back mandatory minimum sentencing laws, a position that has more support than it used to. A 2006 survey from Princeton Survey Research Associates International found that 54 percent of Americans and 55 percent of Democrats thought judges should have leeway in sentencing nonviolent offenders, instead of having to abide by the sentencing laws. In a November 2014 Public Religion Research Institute poll, 77 percent of Americans, including 83 percent of Democrats, [wanted mandatory minimum sentences eliminated](#) for nonviolent offenders.

Clinton isn’t tacking to the center; she’s simply staying on the left.

In 2008, while Clinton had trouble with her position on Iraq, Democrats didn’t view her as out of step ideologically overall. In February 2008, just 12 percent of Democrats and people who lean Democratic said Clinton was too

conservative (the same as Obama). Likewise, Pew Research Center found the same percentages of Democrats, as well as the same percentages of all Americans, thought Clinton and Obama were liberal in [January](#) and [April](#) of 2008.

The fact that Clinton was seen as just as liberal as Obama is probably the reason she did as well with liberals in the 2008 primary as she did overall. According to exit polls, Clinton received, on average, 46 percent of the vote from those who identified as liberal and 45 percent from those who identified as very liberal. Overall, she received 48 percent of the vote, according to exit polls.

Clinton got beat on the left on one issue the last time she ran for president: the Iraq War. But unless [your name is Jeb Bush](#), the Iraq War just isn't as important to a presidential candidacy in 2016 as it was in 2008, when it was the [second-most-important issue](#) in the Democratic primary. Clinton beat Obama on the other big issues, including the longtime liberal cause of health care.

Overall, the “liberal Clinton” isn't a new phenomenon. Given her support for liberal positions in the past and the support that liberals have given her, it shouldn't be surprising that Clinton is staking out liberal positions to start the 2016 campaign.