

June 07, 2005

Update: Hillary Rodham Clinton and the 2008 Election Slight majority says they would consider voting for her

by Frank Newport

GALLUP NEWS SERVICE

PRINCETON, NJ -- New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton has yet to formally declare her candidacy for the 2008 presidential nomination, in part because she faces a re-election bid for her U.S. Senate seat from New York next year. However, Sen. Clinton's husband, former President Bill Clinton, did nothing to dampen speculation about her presidential bid when he was quoted as saying last week that his wife would make a "magnificent" president.

Like her husband, Hillary Clinton has been no stranger to controversy over the last 13 years. Her near-celebrity status -- coupled with the chance that she could become the first female president in U.S. history -- have served to make her the most talked about potential presidential candidate more than two and a half years before the first 2008 primaries.

History indicates that it is too early to make any realistic assessments of what will happen in a presidential election this far in advance. But it is interesting, nevertheless, to take stock of several interesting aspects of public opinion about Clinton, based on several recent polls.

1. Hillary Clinton has near-universal name recognition, which could be either a blessing or a curse.

It is no great shock to find that well over 9 out of 10 Americans have an opinion about Clinton. In fact, only 6% of Americans interviewed in Gallup's mid-May poll claimed that they did not know enough about her to have either a favorable or unfavorable opinion. This "no opinion" percentage for Clinton has been in the single digits for over 10 years, suggesting that she is a figure on the American political scene who, in general, certainly needs no introduction to the population.

Whether this level of very high name recognition is good or bad for a presidential candidate is open to discussion. A well-known figure doesn't have to waste time and money gaining name identification in a political contest, but at the same time a very well known figure often has an ingrained image in the minds of the public that is hard to change. It is perhaps interesting to note that the last two Democrats who won the presidency (Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter) were virtual unknowns on the national political scene three years before their election year. At the same time, as a sitting vice president, Al Gore was very well known to the public three years before his failed bid for the presidency in 2000.

2. Hillary Clinton has a generally favorable image in the eyes of Americans, but there is a core of about 4 in 10 who view her unfavorably.

Clinton's current numbers are 55% favorable and 39% unfavorable, remaining stable over the past year, but slightly improved from January 2001 through 2003 -- after her husband left office. Clinton's lowest favorable rating of 43% came in January 1996, when Congress had been shut down and at which time her husband also had low public opinion ratings. Sen. Clinton was most favorably evaluated during the Monica Lewinsky/impeachment crisis, reaching an all-time high of 67% favorable in December 1998, presumably as a result of sympathy from the public for her "aggrieved spouse" role at that time.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
2005	%	%	%
2005 May 20-22	55	39	6
2005 Feb 25-27	53	41	6

2004

2004 Jul 19-21 ^ 56 38 6

2003

2003 Oct 24-26 51 44 5

2003 Sep 19-21 54 40 6

2003 Jun 27-29 ^ 52 44 4

2003 Jun 9-10 53 43 4

2003 Mar 14-15 45 46 9

2002

2002 Dec 16-17 48 46 6

2002 Sep 23-26 47 44 9

2001

2001 Aug 3-5 51 44 5

2001 Mar 5-7 44 53 3

2001 Feb 19-21 49 44 7

2001 Feb 1-4 52 43 5

2000

2000 Nov 13-15 56 39 5

2000 Oct 25-28 52 43 5

2000 Aug 4-5 45 50 5

2000 Feb 4-6 55 39 6

1999

1999 Dec 9-12 48 48 4

1999 Sep 23-26 56 40 4

1999 Aug 3-4 56 41 3

1999 Jul 22-25 62 35 3

1999 Jun 25-27 56 42 2

1999 Mar 5-7 65 31 4

1999 Feb 19-21 65 30 5

1999 Feb 4-8 66 31 3

1998

1998 Dec 28-29 67 29 4

1998 Oct 9-12 ‡ 63 33 4

1998 Sep 14-15 61 33 6

1998 Aug 21-23 61 33 6

1998 Aug 10-12 60 36 4

1998 Aug 7-8 60 35 5

1998 Feb 13-15 60 36 4

1998 Jan 30-Feb 1 64 34 2

1998 Jan 24-25 61 33 6

1997

1998 Jan 23-24 60 35 5

1997 Dec 18-21	56	38	6
1997 Oct 27-29	61	34	5
1997 Jun 26-29	51	42	7
1997 Feb 24-26	51	42	6
1997 Jan 31-Feb 2	55	39	6
1997 Jan 10-13	56	37	7
1996			
1996 Oct 26-29 ‡	49	43	8
1996 Aug 28-29 †	51	41	8
1996 Aug 16-18 †	47	48	5
1996 Aug 5-7 †	48	45	7
1996 Jun 18-19	46	47	6
1996 Mar 15-17	47	48	5
1996 Jan 12-15	43	51	6
1995			
1995 Jul 7-9	50	44	6
1995 Mar 17-19	49	44	7
1995 Jan 16-18	50	44	6
1994			
1994 Nov 28-29	50	44	6
1994 Sep 6-7	48	47	5
1994 Jul 15-17	48	46	6
1994 Apr 22-24	56	40	4
1994 Mar 25-27	52	42	6
1994 Mar 7-8	55	40	5
1994 Jan 15-17	57	36	7
1993			
1993 Nov 2-4	58	34	8
1993 Sep 24-26	62	27	11
1993 Aug 8-10	57	33	10
1998			
1998 Aug 10-12	60	36	4
1998 Aug 7-8	60	35	5
1998 Feb 13-15	60	36	4
1998 Jan 30-Feb 1	64	34	2
1998 Jan 24-25	61	33	6
1997			
1998 Jan 23-24	60	35	5
1997 Dec 18-21	56	38	6
1997 Oct 27-29	61	34	5
1997 Jun 26-29	51	42	7
1997 Feb 24-26	51	42	6

1997 Jan 31-Feb 2	55	39	6
1997 Jan 10-13	56	37	7
1996			
1996 Oct 26-29 ‡	49	43	8
1996 Aug 28-29 †	51	41	8
1996 Aug 16-18 †	47	48	5
1996 Aug 5-7 †	48	45	7
1996 Jun 18-19	46	47	6
1996 Mar 15-17	47	48	5

^ Asked of a half sample

† Based on likely voters

‡ Based on registered voters

2002-March 2003 WORDING: New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton

By way of comparison, the same mid-May poll in which Clinton was most recently evaluated included a measure of the image of the Democratic and Republican Senate leaders. Senate Republican Leader Bill Frist (also a possible candidate in 2008) has a very mixed image (26% favorable, 24% unfavorable). Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid has a similarly mixed rating (22% favorable, 19% unfavorable). Both men have large "no opinion" percentages. Democratic National Committee chairman (and 2004 presidential candidate) Howard Dean has a 35% favorable, 33% unfavorable rating.

By comparison, the latest Gallup reading on the image of President George W. Bush from early April shows him with a 54% favorable and 45% unfavorable reading, just slightly more negative than Hillary Clinton's. Measured in early February, Bill Clinton had a 56% favorable and 41% unfavorable ratio.

3. Hillary Clinton's image has a significant gender gap, with a more favorable image among women than among men.

In the most recent poll, Clinton has a 61% favorable to 34% unfavorable image among women, compared with a 48% to 45% image ratio among men.

Women in general are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, so a Democratic politician usually has a more favorable image among women than among men. But previous in-depth Gallup analysis has shown that Clinton's gender advantage among women extends even to those women who consider themselves Republican and independent. This suggests that a Clinton candidacy might have the ability to bring in the votes of women who usually would not consider voting for a Democratic candidate, providing an edge that could be decisive in a close election.

4. Hillary Clinton is the front-runner for her party's nomination.

Gallup's last survey asking Democrats to indicate who they want to be their party's nominee in 2008 was conducted in early February, and showed Clinton to be far and away the front-runner among the Democratic candidates listed.

CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll. Feb. 4-6, 2005, Nationwide

Next, I'm going to read a list of people who may be running in the Democratic primary for president in the next election. After I read all the names, please tell me which of those candidates you would be most likely to support for the Democratic nomination for president in the year 2008: New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, former North Carolina Senator John Edwards, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry -- or would you support someone else? [Names rotated. N=383 Democrats and Democratic leaners who are registered to vote; MoE ± 6.]

	%
Hillary Rodham Clinton	40
John Kerry	25

John Edwards	18
Other	6
ALL/ANY (vol.)	1
NONE (vol.)	4
Unsure	6

(vol.) = Volunteered response

A more recent Marist College Poll, conducted in mid-April, shows essentially the same thing.

Marist College Poll. April 18-21, 2005. Nationwide.

If the 2008 Democratic presidential primary were held today, whom would you support if the candidates are [see below]? [N=376 Democrats and Democratic leaners who are registered to vote; MoE ± 5.]

	4/18-21/05	2/14-16/05
	%	%
Hillary Clinton	40	39
John Kerry	18	21
John Edwards	16	15
Joe Biden	7	5
Wesley Clark	4	4
Russ Feingold	2	2
Bill Richardson	1	2
Mark Warner	-	1
Evan Bayh	-	1
Tom Vilsack	-	-
Unsure	12	10

It should be noted, however, that trial heats this far out from an election are mostly a reflection of name recognition, rather than people's careful assessment of each candidate's position on issues or abilities to be president. For example, Democratic candidate Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman consistently led the early trial heats for the 2004 election, but didn't do particularly well in Iowa and New Hampshire and quickly dropped out of the race.

5. Over half of Americans say they would consider voting for Hillary Clinton in the general election, although there is a substantial minority who say they would not.

Gallup's mid-May poll asked Americans to indicate how likely they would be to vote for Clinton if she were to run for president in 2008. The results show that a slight majority of registered voters (52%) say they would be "somewhat likely" or "very likely" to vote for her, while 47% say they would be "not very likely" or "not at all likely" to vote for her.

If Hillary Rodham Clinton were to run for president in 2008, how likely would you be to vote for her -- very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	No opinion
National Adults	%	%	%	%	%
2005 May 20-22 ^	29	24	7	39	1
2003 Jun 9-10	21	21	12	44	2
2000 Nov 13-15 †	26	21	12	39	2
Registered Voters					
2005 May 20-22 ^	28	24	7	40	1

2003 Jun 9-10	20	21	12	45	2
2000 Nov 13-15 †	26	21	12	39	2

^ Asked of a half sample.

† WORDING: If Hillary Rodham Clinton were to run for president in 2004 or 2008, how likely would you be to vote for her -- very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?

The fact that 40% of registered voters are strongly against voting for Clinton ("not at all likely"), while 28% are strongly in favor ("very likely") suggests that she begins a potential quest for the presidency with a built-in core opposition that is larger than her built-in core support.

In recent months, several polls have pitted Clinton against selected Republican nominees in a hypothetical trial heat for the general election -- with varying results. It appears that Republican Arizona Sen. John McCain, a presidential candidate in 2000 and a potential candidate in 2008, tests best against Clinton at this time, owing in large part to McCain's significant appeal outside the Republican Party.

6. Hillary Clinton is still tagged with the "liberal" label by a majority of voters.

Here are the results of a question asking Americans to indicate whether they perceive Clinton to be a liberal, moderate, or conservative.

Do you consider Hillary Rodham Clinton to be -- [ROTATED: a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative]?

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	No opinion
National Adults	%	%	%	%
2005 May 20-22	54	30	9	7
Registered Voters				
2005 May 20-22	56	30	9	5

The fact that few voters perceive Clinton to be a conservative is not surprising in the least. But the gap between the views of Clinton as a "liberal" versus "moderate" may end up being more significant. There has been a good deal of press coverage in recent months about actions taken by Clinton suggesting she is trying to draw closer to the middle in her ideological positioning, including in particular some more moderate statements on abortion. Clinton may be attempting to avoid the "far left" label, which could make it more difficult for any Democratic candidate to win a general election. The current data suggest that she may have continued work to do in this regard.

There are no trend data on this question, so we have no way of knowing whether or not Clinton's image may have changed. But it's a fair presumption that she will be focusing on the challenge of moderating her image between now and 2008 (assuming that she makes the run for the presidency) while at the same time attempting to avoid the "flip-flopping" image that the Bush campaign used to hurt John Kerry's image in last year's election.

Survey Methods

These results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,006 adults, aged 18 and older, conducted May 20-22, 2005. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 3 percentage points.

For results based on the sample of 383 Democrats or Democratic leaners who are registered to vote, the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 6 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.