







Grading the Candidates on Tech

Are the 2016 presidential candidates passing or failing on the most critical issues for startups and tech?

	Overall Score	Privacy & Security	Intellectual Property	Education, Talent, & Workforce	Broadband Access & Infrastructure
 CLINTON	B+	B-	incomplete	B+	A
 SANDERS	B	B	B	D+	A
 CRUZ	D	C	F	C-	D-
 KASICH	C+	C-	incomplete	B-	B
 RUBIO	C+	D	B	A	D
 TRUMP	F	F	incomplete	F	F

Grading Methodology: These grades represent the average grades for candidates' positions on several important issues within each category. Candidates were rated based on their level of support, show of understanding, and familiarity with technology, startups, and the priorities of this community.

A = Great! Supportive and understanding of the issue.
 B = Good, but room for improvement or clarification of position.
 C = Mixed record on the issue.

D = Bad. Has expressed problematic positions on the issue.
 F = Failing. Shows no understanding or complete lack of support.
 Incomplete = No statements on the issue.

The Issues

Privacy & Security



Encryption: Does the candidate recognize the importance of strong encryption?

Privacy and Surveillance: Does the candidate support reforming and modernizing digital privacy and government surveillance laws?

Democrats led in this category, with both Clinton and Sanders expressing support for NSA reform and a relatively nuanced approach in the encryption debate. Trump, Kasich, and Cruz were given the lowest grades on encryption due to statements that show little understanding of what encryption is and its role in protecting user safety and security. Rubio also received a low grade in this category, mostly for his vehement defense of the NSA's surveillance practices.

Intellectual Property



Patent Reform: Does the candidate support reform to weaken patent trolls and improve patent quality?

Clinton, Kasich, and Trump received an incomplete in this category for not having made any statements (or taken any votes) on patent reform. Cruz received the lowest grade, as one of only four Judiciary Committee members who voted against a comprehensive patent reform bill in 2015 that would have combatted the patent troll problem. Rubio and Sanders received a B grade for their support of the America Invents Act, a bill that represented an important, if not incomplete, first step to cleaning up a broken patent system.

Education, Talent, & the Workforce



Education and Workforce Development: Does the candidate support expanding STEM education and tech-oriented workforce training?

The On-Demand and Gig Economy: Does the candidate recognize the emergence of the on-demand economy and show a thoughtful approach to supporting this new class of workers?

High-skilled Immigration Reform: Does the candidate support expanding opportunities for global technical talent and entrepreneurs to work in U.S.?

Rubio has the best record on these issues, earning an A for sponsoring several bills to expand computer science education and for his consistent support of high-skilled immigration reform (though his record on comprehensive reform is mixed). Rubio has also highlighted the importance of the emerging on-demand economy on the campaign trail. Sanders earned one of the lowest grades for his overall opposition to the U.S. attracting and retaining global talent through immigration policies and while he hasn't said much about the sharing or on-demand economy overall, he did state he has "serious problems" with Uber. Trump also received a low grade in this category. He's been mostly silent on education and the changing labor force and he's said virtually nothing positive about immigrants. While Trump did recently concede he may be changing his position about high-skilled visas, his staff later clarified that Trump believes that the H-1B program "is neither high-skilled nor immigration."

Broadband Access & Infrastructure



Open Internet: Does the candidate support net neutrality?

Access: Does the candidate support policy and investments to expand and improve Internet connectivity (e.g. spectrum policy, municipal broadband, infrastructure improvements)?

Clinton and Sanders received the highest grades in this category thanks to their unwavering support of net neutrality and efforts to expand broadband access. The Republican candidates did not fare so well. Cruz, Rubio, and Trump oppose net neutrality (with Cruz going so far as to call it "Obamacare for the Internet"). Rubio has a great record on improving commercial access to government spectrum, but both his and Cruz's opposition to municipal broadband brought their grades down in the access category. While Kasich's role as Ohio governor has kept him out of the net neutrality debate, he has launched programs in his state to build and expand advanced fiber networks to promote research and entrepreneurship.

The Candidates



CLINTON

Overall Grade:

B+

Hillary Clinton has been rhetorically supportive of technology and the tech community's priorities, though she has not made explicit public statements during this current campaign on several of the most important tech issues (such as patent reform and high-skilled immigration). In other cases, she's opted for cautious, nuanced approaches, including on encryption, stating, "Maybe the back door isn't the right door, and I understand what Apple and others are saying about that...I just think there's got to be a way," a notion that tech experts consider unfeasible. Even in the absence of concrete policy proposals to help the tech sector, merely talking in positive terms about tech issues puts Clinton near the top of the class on this scorecard, which is far more of an indictment of the other candidates than a positive reflection of her policy agenda. Still, Clinton does have a strong record on broadband access policy. She's been a longtime proponent of net neutrality, expanding Internet access abroad was a pillar of her diplomacy strategy as Secretary of State, and she's committed to having 100% of American households online by 2020.



SANDERS

Overall Grade:

B

Bernie Sanders scored fairly well across tech issues, though received As only in the broadband category for his stalwart support of net neutrality and his calls to improve broadband infrastructure. He also deserves praise for his staunch and unwavering opposition to warrantless wiretapping and government surveillance, reflected in his senatorial record. He earned his lowest scores in the Education, Talent, and the Workforce category due to comments that show a lack of understanding about the need to bring global technical talent to America to address a shortfall in skilled workers and the new opportunities being created in the on-demand and gig economy (though his statements about the gig economy were limited to the vaguely ominous claim to have "serious problems with Uber").



CRUZ

Overall Grade:

D

Widely considered to be the least popular Senator among his colleagues, Ted Cruz seems eager to earn himself the same distinction among the tech community. Other than his staunch opposition to domestic surveillance programs, Cruz strikes out on nearly every other tech issue we analyzed, having voted against a bill that would have curbed patent troll abuse and famously calling net neutrality "Obamacare for the Internet." Additionally, his support for the FBI's position in the debate over encryption and his flip-flop on the H1-B visa program show both a lack of understanding of the issues and a lack of support for tech priorities.



KASICH

Overall Grade:

C+

As the only candidate other than Trump without a recent service record in DC, John Kasich hasn't yet weighed in on many of the most prominent tech issues in recent years. He has made no public statements regarding net neutrality, patent reform, or high-skilled immigration (though during his time in the House, way back in 1998, he voted for a bill to almost double the number of H-1B visas), and his stance on encryption reflects a misunderstanding of the issue (though he's certainly not alone in this regard). Among the policy areas he was most primed to address as Governor in Ohio, he has a mixed record. He has done an admirable job expanding access to fiber optic broadband in his state, but he has done relatively little to promote pro-STEM education policies.

The Candidates



RUBIO

Overall Grade:

C+

If Marco Rubio wants to be the tech industry's savior, he may want to reconsider a few of his policy positions. With an overall grade of C+, Rubio falls right in the middle of the candidate pool. On the positive side, Rubio is strong on workforce and skills issues. Even as his support for comprehensive reform has waivered, he has consistently supported high-skilled immigration reforms, co-sponsoring both the I-Squared Act and the Startup Act. He has also historically made STEM education a priority in his education platform and has highlighted the emerging on-demand economy on the campaign trail. But his assertion that net neutrality will give power over the Internet to "an unelected, unaccountable board" is patently false (and peculiar, considering he himself voted to confirm all five FCC commissioners), and his staunch support of government surveillance programs raises red flags.



TRUMP

Overall Grade:

F

Donald Trump's campaign has largely avoided policy discussions, and since he has never held political office, he predictably received the most "incompletes" of any candidate in our scorecard, failing to offer any policy agenda related to patent reform, STEM education, or broadband access. When he has talked about tech issues, he has done so in the only way he knows how: brashly and inaccurately. Trump has attacked net neutrality as an attempt by President Obama to control conservative media, even though the FCC (the body that actually passed net neutrality rules) has absolutely no authority under the Open Internet Order to regulate media content. Trump has called for a boycott of Apple until it helps the FBI crack the iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino shooters, though he revealed his lack of understanding of the issue by claiming that Apple should "give [the FBI] that security number," apparently believing that Apple was merely withholding the passcode to the phone. This technological illiteracy may come as no surprise, considering Trump also once claimed he would combat militant extremism online by talking to Bill Gates about "closing that internet up in some ways."



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