

10 Good Things About the Year 2014

By [Medea Benjamin](#) | [Common Dreams](#)



(Photo: Daniel Arauz/flickr/cc)

It's been a year of fervent activism on police accountability, living wages, climate change, personal freedoms, immigrant rights, an open internet and diplomacy over war. The electoral beating the Democrats received has prompted both the Administration and some spineless congresspeople to realize that support for progressive issues could reinvigorate their base –a realization that has already led to Obama's executive action on immigration and the opening to Cuba.

So here are some of the 2014 highlights.

1. Uprising for police accountability. The [movement for police accountability](#) has swept the nation, spawning brilliant new leaders from communities most affected, giving a voice to the families who have lost loved ones and opening people's eyes to the militarization of our police forces. It is an organic, grassroots movement destined to have a transformative impact

on the struggle for racial equality. Keep an eye out in 2015 for CODEPINK's campaign to demilitarize the police, [Communities Organize to Demilitarize Enforcement](#).

2. Historic opening with Cuba. President Obama's announcement that the US would work to restore full diplomatic relations with Cuba for the first time in over 50 years was [historic](#). It including a prisoner swap that led to the release of the final three members of the "Cuban 5"—a group unjustly imprisoned for trying to stop terrorist acts against Cuba. And it marks the end of Cuba policy being dominated by a small cabal of right-wing Cuban Americans. (CODEPINK is taking a delegation to Cuba for Valentines Day, learn more about it at [codepink.org/cuba](#).)

3. Progress in talks with Iran. Iran and the [six world powers](#) announced they would [extend an interim nuclear deal](#) seven more months, and gave themselves four more months to reach a political agreement for a comprehensive nuclear accord. Despite intense opposition from the Israel lobby group AIPAC, as well as Republican and Democratic hawks, the U.S. and Iran are [closer than ever](#) to securing a historic agreement. It is a rare and commendable example of the Obama administration engaging in Middle East diplomacy instead of militarism.

4. Triumph of the fractivists. Out of a year of environmental progress ranging from the People's Climate March to the US-China bilateral agreement on climate change, one of the most monumental victories has been in the anti-fracking movement. The New York State ban on fracking imposed by Governor Cuomo followed a long campaign waged by [tireless grassroots activists](#). But that wasn't the only victory. Voters in eight locales from Mendocino County, California to Athens, Ohio to Denton, Texas, won fracking bans on the ballot in the 2014 election. So did Canadian citizens in [Quebec](#) and [New Brunswick](#). These victories have spawned a national conversation on fracking, with public support for the practice [plummeting](#).

5. New gains for [legalizing marijuana](#). With the majority of the country now supporting legalization, and Colorado and Washington proving that it actually works, new gains were achieved at the ballot box in Oregon, Alaska and Washington D.C. World leaders like former UN head Kofi Annan and [presidents from Latin America](#) called for an end to the drug war and for legally regulating drugs. U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder continued to speak out against racist mandatory minimum drug laws and mass incarceration, while President Obama made national news [declaring](#) that marijuana is not more harmful than alcohol.

6. Massive wins for gay marriage. In decision after decision, courts in 18 states struck down gay marriage bans. It is now legal for gay couples to marry in 35 of the 50 states. A year ago, only about a third of Americans lived in states that permitted same-sex marriage. Today, nearly [65 percent of Americans](#) do, making 2014 perhaps the biggest turning point in the history of same-sex marriage in the United States.

7. Raises for minimum wage workers. From ballot initiatives and grassroots organizing to major legislative efforts, campaigns to raise the minimum wage [gained momentum](#) across the country. [Voters, cities and statehouses passed](#) minimum wage increases. The states included Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, New Jersey and South Dakota; cities included San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Louisville and Portland, OR. And the calls for raises came from workers themselves: Black Friday saw the [largest strikes ever against Walmart](#), with pickets and strikes at 1,600 stores in 49 states. And on December 5, fast-food workers went on strike in 190 cities. Congress might not be able to push through national legislation, but workers and local communities are not waiting!

8. Reform of immigration policy. In November, President Obama signed an executive order stopping five million people from being deported and allowing many to work legally. While it

does not offer a pathway to citizenship, it does provide relief for millions of immigrants. And it was only possible because of the sophisticated organizing and sacrifices made by so many activists in the immigrant community.

9. Release of the torture report. For years, human rights advocates have been pushing for the release of the 6,000-page torture report compiled by the Senate Intelligence Committee—against vehement opposition from the CIA. The full report remains classified, and the 600-page executive summary was redacted by the CIA itself. The public deserves to see the entire report, but the fact that any of it was released is also a tribute to Senator Dianne Feinstein and her colleagues. It marks the beginning of our nation coming to grips with this sordid page of our history. The next chapter should include accountability—bringing to justice all those who authorized and participated in these shameful acts.

10. Palestine solidarity becomes mainstream. 2014 was horrific for Palestinians, with the Israeli war against the Gaza killing nearly 2,200, mostly civilians. But the invasion spawned unprecedented international solidarity with Palestine and huge steps forward for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. BDS won the support of Christian congregations including the Presbyterian Church USA and academic groups like the American Studies Association. Activists shut down ports in California to stop the unloading of Israeli ships; they forced SodaStream to close its settlement-based factory, and the online shopping site GILT [dropped AHAVA](#) cosmetics, made in an illegal Israeli settlement in Palestine. In Europe, the movement has been hugely successful with country after country voting to recognize Palestine as a state and the [European court ruling to remove Hamas](#) from its list of terrorist organizations. Keep an eye out in 2015 for CODEPINK's new campaign, [No Open House on Stolen Land](#), targeting RE/MAX real estate company for selling illegal Israeli settlement homes.

The 2014 low electoral turnout and the Democratic defeat revealed how unenthused the public is about national politics. But it also revealed the popularity of progressive ballot measures. And the campaign pushing Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders to run for President is putting populist economic issues into the national limelight and already influencing the positions of likely presidential contender Hillary Clinton. With this framework and the new energy infused into social justice and environmental activism, the progressive movement is poised to make significant gains in 2015.

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