

A Force More Powerful

According to Michael X Delli Carpini, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania who studies how individuals engage in public life, the definition of civic engagement is:

...individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting. Indeed, an underlying principal of our approach is that an engaged citizen should have the ability, agency and opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of civic acts.

Peter Ackerman has made a career out of studying the power of people-powered movements to overthrow authoritarian regimes. In a book about that subject, A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict, coauthored with Jack Duvall, he says,

The real story is about common citizens who are drawn into great causes, which are built from the ground up. It is about people staying home from work or occupying their factories and offices, refusing to carry identity papers, printing newsletters in their basements, and not leaving when they are told to go.