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Making the World Better

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Making the World Better

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Non-violent resistance brings about political change much more effectively than the use of violence, say two scholars who have won the 2013 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order.

Erica Chenoweth, an assistant professor at the University of Denver, and Maria Stephan, a lead foreign affairs officer with the U.S. State Department, earned the prize for the ideas set forth in their book, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Non-Violent Conflict." Columbia

University Press published the book in 2011.

Chenoweth directs the University of Denver's Program on Terrorism and Insurgency Research. She holds a 2002 bachelor's degree in political science and German from the University of Dayton.

"It's surprising, deeply humbling — and a huge honor," she said in a phone interview. "It's especially an honor to be included with the past winners, many of whom have inspired my work."

Chenoweth and Stephan collected and analyzed data on all known uprisings between 1900 and 2006 involving more than 1,000 people that related to a country's secession, overthrow of a dictatorship or removal of a foreign occupation. They learned that the non-violent campaigns succeeded twice as often as the violent ones — even in the face of brutal repression.

They also found that the governments of countries where the peaceful resistance took place were far more likely to become or remain stable democracies afterward.

In the non-violent campaigns they studied, unarmed civilians used a mix of strikes, boycotts, protests and demonstrations, while bombings, assassinations and armed attacks were predominant among the violent movements.

"The implications of their work are enormous," said award director Charles Ziegler. "Not only do their findings validate the work done by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., but they shed new light on the political change we're seeing today, such as the Arab Spring process in Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations."

The book by Chenoweth and Stephan also won the 2012 Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for best book published in the United States on government, politics or international affairs.

The University of Louisville presents four Grawemeyer Awards each year for outstanding works in music composition, world order, psychology and education. The university and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary jointly give a fifth award in religion. This year's awards are \$100,000 each.

For more information, contact Charles Ziegler at 502-852-3248.