



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Turkish People prevent shopping mall from replacing Istanbul's Gezi Park, 2013

**Time period notes:** *Resistance against Gezi Park construction plans began on December 2012 but the campaign did not ignite until May 2013.*

*The protest did not end on a specific date - rather, it gradually fizzled out.*

28th May

2013

to: 2nd July

2013

**Country:** Turkey

**Location City/State/Province:** *Gezi Park, Istanbul; Ankara; Izmir; Nationwide*

**Location Description:** *Protests began in Gezi Park and spread nationally*

**Goals:**

Protection of the Gezi Park from demolition

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › Declaration of support by lawyers
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Wearing black as sign of protest
- 025. Displays of portraits › "Woman in red"
- 027. New signs and names › New street name in occupied park
- 028. Symbolic sounds › Banging pots, pans, blowing whistles
- 045. Demonstrative funerals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 051. Walk-outs › of school by children
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Blockade of road and construction machinery
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 028. Symbolic sounds › Banging pots, pans, blowing whistles

- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Road blockade
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 028. Symbolic sounds › Banging pots, pans, blowing whistles
- 036. Performances of plays and music › Piano concert by external ally
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 028. Symbolic sounds › Banging pots, pans, blowing whistles
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 097. Protest strike › One day strike by unions, architects, engineers, and doctors
- 162. Sit-in › to prevent police intervention
- 163. Stand-in › "Standing Man"
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 033. Fraternalization › throwing flowers at police and calling out for them to defect
- 039. Parades › Protesters join in the LGBT Pride Walk
- 045. Demonstrative funerals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott › of businesses refusing to support protesters
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 028. Symbolic sounds › Banging pots, pans, blowing whistles
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- Other... › Social Media Campaign

**Notes on Methods:**

Protest became less frequent following the closure of Gezi Park on 15th June 2013. Although there were certain spikes in activities as with the "Standing Man" and the LGBT Pride Walk, 15th March generally marked an end to occupation of Gezi Park, and with it the energy of the campaign.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Majority are youth and housewives but the demographics of protesters included all political socioeconomic and religious affiliations

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

### Leaders:

None Applicable. The movement stayed decentralised throughout its duration.

### Partners:

Taksim Solidarity, Taksim Gezi Park Protection and Beautification Association, Fan clubs of all three major football clubs in Turkey (UltrAslan Group, Vamos Bien, Carsi), Erdem Gündüz ("Standing Man")

### External allies:

Amnesty International, Kelime Oyunu (TV Game Show), Abdüllatif Şener (Former Deputy Prime Minister), Anonymous, Red Hack, (hacktivists) and Syrian Electronic Army (hackers supporting Syrian government), David Martello (pianist)

### Involvement of social elites:

Sirri Sureya Onder (MP), Gulseren Onanc (CHP MP), Gursel Tekin (Republican People's Party Vice President), Can Bonomo (singer), Gonca Vuslateri, Memet Ali (actors and actresses), Orhan Pamuk (Nobel Prize winner)

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

### Groups in 1st Segment:

- Majority are youth and housewives but the demographics of protesters included all political socioeconomic and religious affiliations

### Groups in 2nd Segment:

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

### Groups in 4th Segment:

- Deputies of CHP
- Trade and labour unions
- architects
- doctors
- engineers

### Groups in 5th Segment:

### Groups in 6th Segment:

### Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The campaign was initially composed of environmentalists but quickly broadened to include all demographics. As time progressed, and especially after the closing of the Gezi Park to protesters, the number of protesters started to dwindle to eventually fizzle out. This campaign was unique in that it brought all Turkish people together in solidarity.

**Segment Length:** 6 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Blockade of Gezi Park and Square from protesters; Prevention of movement of protesters; AKP counter rally

**Campaigner violence:**

Throwing of rocks and water bottles; burning down occupiers' tents

**Repressive Violence:**

Beatings, arbitrary arrest and detention, use of tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons by the police, AKP youth members beating protesters

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Although the Gezi Park has not been developed, it is questionable whether the Turks' call for greater democracy (freedom of speech, expansion of free media, right to assembly) has been fulfilled.

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Recep Tayyip Erdogan was first inaugurated as prime minister of Turkey in 2003 and enjoyed wide popular support, contributing to successive elections as prime minister. Erdogan gathered 47% of the vote in 2007, and he came into office in 2011 with 49.95% of the popular vote. However, public dissent began to rise against the increasingly authoritarian and anti-secular Turkish government. The government passed education bills reinforcing Islamism in high schools and elementary schools in 2012, and the sale and consumption of alcohol was banned on college grounds in 2013. The alcohol bill was passed in just two weeks, and public consultation was never sought by the government.

Erdogan also pushed for the building of Erdogan International Airport and nuclear power plants in the Black Sea region. Such plans added to the environmental concerns accumulating in the public and opposition began to arise. These environmental concerns were seen in the nuclear power plant protest (“Diren Karadeniz” (Resist Black Sea)) from which the Gezi Park protest drew its own Twitter hashtag: Diren Gezi (Resist Gezi). However, resistance to Erdogan’s policies proved less effective as he began to become more insensitive to criticisms. In an unprecedented move, Erdogan moved to dismantle the military in 2007, and capitalised on his strong electoral support to round up political opposition including journalists. The secularisation of Turkey, the increasing tendency of the government to refuse to listen to public criticism, and the disempowerment of the media all gave rise to a sense of political powerlessness and public frustration with Erdogan’s government.

The government drew up Gezi Park reconstruction plans as early as 2012, and environmentalist movements organized to fight against the plans. Important organizations of the Gezi Park protest, such as the Taksim Solidarity, Taksim Gezi Park Protection and Beautification Association, and the Taksim Platform were formed in the lead up to the massive public protest that began in May 2013. While the government accepted petitions produced by the Taksim Platform in 2012 for a brief period of time, the issue again came to a head when the government sent construction machinery to Gezi Park on 28 May.

Environmentalists and social activists including Taksim Gezi Park Protection and Beautification Association quickly moved to block the machinery and occupy the park. Opposition MP Sirri Sureya Onder personally joined in to block diggers and the campaign was widely publicised through social media. Other prominent people soon joined the protest on the 29 May including Gursel Tekin, the Republican People’s Party vice president, singer Can Bonomo, and actors and actresses such as Gonca Vuslateri and Memet Ali. The police cracked down on the protesters, using pepper spray, tear gas, and burning the tents of the

protesters, and sparked outrage from the Turkish public. The publication of the picture of “woman in red,” a protester who was pepper sprayed by the police, was widely circulated online. Subsequent protesters’ backgrounds transcended socioeconomic, political, and religious boundaries. Indeed, Turkish observers marveled that the protesters were not composed of a single demographic driven by a specific goal. Instead, the protesters represented all walks of life in Turkey: Kurds, communists, gays, middle class, the rich, the poor, students, children, the elderly, and housewives. Protection of the Gezi Park was continually reiterated throughout the campaign, along with many other unique concerns that each demographics held, but the unifying motivation among the protesters was the discontent at Erdogan’s authoritarian governance and outrage at police crackdown on peaceful protesters.

The police carried out two raids against the Gezi Park occupiers on 30 May and on 31 May using water cannons, pepper spray, and beatings. Amnesty International took notice of the police violence and denounced it as breach of human rights. Each time the park was cleared, however, the campaign attracted ever more protesters as the actions of the police became widely known through social media. As many as 100 000 protesters assembled on the evening of 31 May. At this point, much of the official media, such as CNN Turkey, did not broadcast the protests and instead famously aired a documentary on penguins – one of the many symbols then taken up by the protesters. In a further display of national solidarity, football club fans, who are usually extremely antagonistic towards each other, joined the Gezi Park protest. Protests also spread to other Turkish cities such as Ankara and Izmir. More than 10,000 protesters gathered at Izmir with banners to protest the government reaction. They were subsequently dispersed by the police with methods similar to those used at Gezi Park.

Protesters came out in mass numbers to Gezi Park on 1 June. They flew banners, banged pots and pans, and whistled as they marched. Protests also spread nationwide. The police started to withdraw in the afternoon, and the protesters subsequently took over the park. Still, Erdogan denounced the protesters as “a few looters.” Occupation of the park and the surrounding Taksim square proved extensive with protesters setting up schools and libraries, and even veterinarian clinics. Clashes between the police and protesters continued in other parts of Turkey. Lawyers made public statements to denounce government actions, children walked out of schools, and protesters organised a Facebook event to wear only black. Hackers, such as Anonymous, started hacking government websites in retaliation for police repression. While the protests were mostly peaceful, some threw water bottles and rocks at the police which drew further police retaliation. Counter movement demonstrators, notably from the AKP youth wing, joined the police to attack the protesters. Nonviolent rallies to support Erdogan were also held by pro-Erdogan groups.

The police returned to Taksim square and cracked down on the protesters on 11 June. Protesters repeatedly regrouped only to be rebuffed by the police. On 13 June, German pianist Davide Martello gave a day-long performance for protesters. Police brought in 1,000 additional riot police. Then, police moved in to clear Gezi Park on 15 June in the most flagrant show of force displayed so far. They also subsequently cordoned off the park and the square from public access. Deputies from the opposition party, CHP, staged a sit-in to prevent the break-up of protesters in Ankara by the police. The police limited the protesters’ movement and systematically blocked off highways to prevent the growth of the protests.

In a new phase of protests, Erdem Gunduz staged a stand-in protest in Taksim square on 17 June. The picture of a man simply standing to protest the police repression attracted great media attention and earned the name “Standing Man” and the hashtag #direndurandam (“Resist the Standing Man”) went viral on social media. Stand-in was adopted by protesters throughout Turkey such as Ankara and Izmir. On 20 June, they also called for boycotts of businesses that had refused to open doors to protesters being gassed.

On 22 June, protesters gathered to remember lives lost in the Gezi park protest and threw carnations at the police. The police responded by cracking down on them with the same methods as before, and the news of such reaction attracted nationwide attention. Still, protests lost momentum and those that continued had much smaller participation than the protests at the peak of the campaign. The last major event was a LGBT Pride March on the 30 June, which the Gezi Park protesters joined, making it the biggest Pride March ever held in Turkey. The march concluded without police intervention, and observers again remarked at the absence of insulting remarks usually volleyed against any movement for recognition of sexual rights.

On 2 July, a court blocked the effort to redevelop Gezi Park, officially ending the possibility that the park would be redeveloped. Although the Gezi Park remains undeveloped to this day, it is unclear whether the calls for greater democracy seen during the protests were fulfilled. Throughout the protests, eleven protesters died, and police arrested over 3,000. Protesters banging pots and pans were charged in August for disturbing the peace, and no reforms have been held to relax the tight media policies. The campaign did, however, increase public discontent with the Erdogan government and capacity for non-violent protest, which was seen in the strengthening of subsequent public protests against mining in 2014.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Protests against construction of nuclear power plants in the Black Sea region inspired the hashtag that would be used in the Gezi Park protests.

The Gezi Park protests led to general increase in protesters (for example in mining protests that followed a year later).

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