



OCCUPYING PUBLIC SPACE



Occupation is a strategy built on time. By staying in a central space, movements create constant visibility and force authorities to respond. From Kyiv to Cairo, sustained occupations developed their own infrastructure, proving that resistance was organized, not momentary. Yet the method has limits. It requires resources, discipline, and a political path forward. Occupation may not always topple power but can still shape a generation and build long-term opposition.

01 CONTEXT

When and where the method first appeared

02 STRATEGY

How it works

03 RESULT

Immediate political effects

04 LIMITS

Limits

04 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

4 strengths · 4 weaknesses



01 • CONTEXT

THE METHOD: OCCUPY TO EXIST

Occupying public space means turning a moment of anger into a lasting political fact. Where a demonstration passes through, an occupation takes hold, forcing those in power to choose between repression and negotiation. Its primary weapon is neither numbers nor violence, but time. From Kyiv to Buenos Aires, through Cairo and Istanbul, this method has proven its power and its limits, across continents.

02 • STRATEGY

CHOOSING THE GROUND: THE SQUARE AS SYMBOL

In November 2013 in Kyiv, students set up camp on the Maidan (Independence Square) to challenge President Yanukovych's authoritarian turn. In 2011, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians converged on Tahrir Square to demand President Mubarak's resignation. In Buenos Aires, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have circled the square every Thursday since 1977, in front of the seat of power, to hold the military dictatorship to account. In all three cases, citizens chose the central square of their capital as their stage, a deliberate act of political geography that made their presence impossible to ignore.



03 • RESULT

DURATION AS ARGUMENT: TWO SUCCESSES

Holding the Maidan for three months, through a crackdown that killed over a hundred protesters, turned the occupation into an irreversible signal. In February 2014, Yanukovich fled Kyiv in the night - the next day, parliament voted to remove him, 328 votes to zero. At Tahrir, the same dynamic played out in eighteen days: an unrelenting occupation forced Mubarak to resign on 11 February 2011. In both cases, the occupation had built its own autonomous infrastructure (kitchens, medical care, self-defence) making it resilient under repression and embodying the idea that the movement would not be worn down. The permanence of the occupation proved that the protest was not a passing mood, but an organised collective will.

04 • LIMITS

WHEN OCCUPATION IS NOT ENOUGH

In May 2013, some fifty environmentalists camped in Istanbul's Gezi Park to block an Erdoğan construction project. Police brutality turned the sit-in into a national uprising: 3.5 million people took to the streets across 79 provinces. The park was saved, but Erdoğan did not fall. Without clear leadership or a political objective beyond the street movement, the occupation wore itself out. Yet Gezi shaped a political generation, brought together a cross-cutting opposition, and preserved the park. An occupation can fail to bring down a government while planting the seeds of long-term resistance.



05 • CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

FORCES ET LIMITES DE L'OCCUPATION

STRENGTHS

- *Creates continuous, impossible-to-ignore visibility*
- *Forces power to reveal itself: repress or negotiate*
- *When sustained, turns resistance into an accomplished fact*
- *Builds autonomous infrastructure that makes the movement resilient*

WEAKNESSES

- *Exhausting: demands discipline and resources over time*
- *Collapses without a political strategy for what comes next*
- *Toppling a regime does not guarantee a better one follows*
- *Vulnerable to violent crackdown with no exit*

