

Settlements

Settlements are Jewish communities established in the [West Bank](#) and [Gaza Strip](#) after these territories came under Israel's control at the end of the [1967 War](#).

In the 1970s, successive Israeli governments believed that settlements in certain sections of the West Bank, particularly in the Jordan Valley and eastern slopes of Samaria, as well as in areas of the Gaza Strip, would provide Israel with an important military buffer zone. Settlement expansion was also spurred by activists – notably the [Gush Emunim](#) movement – who established Jewish settlements (both authorized and unauthorized).

Palestinians and some in the international community consider any Jewish neighborhood built in areas acquired in 1967, including East Jerusalem, as settlements. Israel disputes that Jewish neighborhoods and building in East Jerusalem constitute settlement activity.

Several of the first settlement communities in the West Bank were established in locations where Jews had lived prior to 1948, often in areas where there was continuous Jewish life for centuries, such as Hebron. Kfar Etzion and other villages in the Jerusalem-Bethlehem corridor, for example, fell to Arab forces in May 1948, and those captured were massacred. Sons and daughters of those who lived there until 1948 were the first to return after the 1967 war and establish a renewed presence.

While often characterized as “ideological, right-wing, nationalist and religious,” the settler population is diverse and includes secular Israelis, new immigrants, ultra-Orthodox, as well as those who chose their homes in these communities

based on affordability and convenience rather than on religion or politics. To be sure, there are many settlers and supporters of the movement who believe there is a religious and political obligation to settle and hold on to this territory. In addition, the vast majority of settlers and their supporters believe they play an essential role in providing security for the State of Israel, by providing a “first line of defense” against Palestinian or other Arab attack.

Over the decades, settlement building has grown substantially, and the estimated number of Israelis living in the West Bank is around 400,000 in 131 different settlements and 97 outposts. Approximately 80% of settlers reside in the main “settlement blocs” in the outskirts of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, with the rest living in more remote communities deeper within the West Bank. There is a growing phenomenon of illegal “outposts.”

In 2005, all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip were uprooted as part of Israel’s [disengagement](#) from Gaza.

Palestinians assert that settlement building is the main obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel rejects that notion, arguing that settlements are only one of numerous difficult issues to be determined as part of final status negotiations with the Palestinians. At the same time, however, there is growing concern that the growth of settlements, especially in areas deep within the West Bank and outside of the main settlement blocs, are creating so-called “facts on the ground” which could physically impede the layout and borders of a future Palestinian state, and thereby undermine the viability of an eventual two state solution.

Since 1967, Israeli governments have maintained a willingness to withdraw from areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of a peace agreement with the Arabs. In the event of such an agreement, it has always been expected that settlements – particularly those outside the main settlement blocs – would be uprooted, just as the Israeli town of Yamit in the Sinai was dismantled following

Israel's peace agreement with Egypt. There are some settlers who have expressed a desire to remain in their homes even if their settlement is incorporated into a Palestinian state, accepting Palestinian jurisdiction over the area.

In recent years, Israel has reportedly proposed "land swaps", whereby areas of Israeli territory within the [Green Line](#) would be incorporated into a Palestinian state, in exchange for modification of the line to include large Israeli populations living in West Bank settlement blocs within Israel's permanent boundary.

Periodically, over the years, Israeli-Palestinian negotiation facilitators have pushed for Israel to "freeze" settlement building as a gesture of good faith. In such an effort, in 2010, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to a 10-month moratorium on settlement construction in the West Bank. However, the Palestinians delayed participating in direct negotiations which only began in the 9th month of the moratorium, and fell apart soon after.