Expanding Frontiers: Settler Violence in the West Bank 2016-2018

ACLED Middle East Research Manager Tom Hart and Middle East Assistant Research Manager Lauren Blaxter explore the changing nature of Israeli settler violence in the West Bank between January 1, 2016 and November 30, 2018.
Expanding Frontiers

Settler violence has been on the rise since 2016 as settlement expansion continues at an unprecedented rate, spurred by increased public and private Israeli and US support, high birth rates, and cheap housing. This, in addition to recent conflict in both Gaza and the West Bank, along with the radicalization of several settlements - particularly Yitzhar near Nablus - have led to increased settler-driven violence. Demonstrating the importance of renewed international support, a pro-settler advocate stated recently (concerning the Trump administration) that “This is the first time, after years, that we are surrounded by people who really like us, love us...”[1]. Continued settlement expansion is expected to precipitate further conflict.

Hebron, the largest city in the West Bank, contains a fortified settlement under Israeli military jurisdiction. Violence has increased as the settlement expands.

Note the rise in ‘price tag’ attacks - acts of vandalism which include racist graffiti - around the Nablus area.

October attacks on olive groves surged in Turmus Aya, just south of the Shiloh settlement.

On July 21, a Palestinian killed 3 settlers after breaking into the village of Halamish, sparking violent demonstrations and attacks afterwards.

Attacks targeting olive groves and farmers increase in 2017/18, especially during October harvest.

Among the variables causing local violence was a spate of Palestinian attacks known as the “Knife Intifada” in 2015 and early 2016, which led to an increasing settlement of Palestinians. This led to both retaliatory attacks by settlers and punitive demolitions by Israeli security forces (not shown). Rapid expansion of the settlements from 2016-2018, in large part by radical Jewish groups, has heightened that tension. Recently, there has been a shift towards agricultural and price tag attacks in areas surrounding settlements.

The majority of recent settler attacks have occurred in the Nablus and Ramallah districts, the former led by residents of the Yitzhar settlement which is known for its radical anti-Palestinian stance and for its impact on the trend of ‘price tag’ attacks.

[1] Times of Israel, 20 February 2018

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