Illegal outposts are Jewish communities in the West Bank established without approval from the Israeli government.

Today, there are about 200 illegal outposts in the West Bank. They range in size from a few tents or caravans on a hilltop to developed settlements with houses and infrastructure that resemble those of legal communities. (There are 127 legal settlements in the West Bank.)
Many legal settlements also contain illegally constructed neighborhoods.

Illegal outposts are often built adjacent to Palestinian communities in areas with a large Palestinian population, in order to establish facts on the ground that prevent the creation of a Palestinian state by disrupting its territorial contiguity.

**Illegal Outposts vs. Recognized Settlements**

- **Outposts are illegal under Israeli law.** All settlements—regardless of their legality according to the Israeli government—are considered by most of the world to be in violation of international law.
- **Outposts lack building permits and were not established with government approval.** Recognized settlements have building permits and must be established by a government resolution.
- **Outposts are often built on private Palestinian land.** According to Israeli law, settlements must be built on state land.

**Background**

Many prominent legal settlements were started by private citizens without prior authorization from the government, but were later granted official sanction. The current phenomenon of illegal outposts began in 1993 amid the Oslo Accords, during which Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s government implemented a freeze on constructing new settlements.

A [2005 report by Talia Sasson](http://example.com), a legal advisor to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, documented that state institutions were breaking Israeli law by helping to establish and develop outposts. The West Bank Civil Administration, for example, was found to have been connecting illegal outposts to water and electricity networks, and Housing Ministry architects were being employed to plan illegal outposts.

Despite the report’s findings, the Israeli government has not taken action to curb the involvement of state institutions in facilitating illegal outposts.

**Retroactive Legalization of Outposts**

While the Israeli government does demolish some illegal Israeli construction in the West Bank, on other occasions it retroactively legalizes it.

21 outposts have undergone a process of retroactive legalization, many as neighborhoods of existing legal settlements.
Why are illegal outposts a problem?

- They entrench an Israeli population in Palestinian areas deep in the West Bank in order to prevent a two-state outcome.
- They are often constructed on private Palestinian land.
- Despite their illegality, the IDF guards them and Israeli government entities provide them with services, at the expense of the Israeli taxpayer.
- Their existence undermines the rule of law and the Israeli state.
- They are often home to the most ideologically extreme settlers who commit terror attacks against Palestinians. Not all residents of illegal outposts engage in violence and terrorism, but far too many do.

In coalition agreements with his far-right partners, Prime Minister Netanyahu reportedly agreed to grant retroactive legal status to illegal outposts.

This proposal would have the following implications:

- Effectively put an end to the restriction that private Palestinian land is off-limits for West Bank settlement
- Erase or meaningfully erode the notion of illegal Jewish construction in the West Bank
- Remove a crucial restraint on unchecked settlement development
- Damage prospects for an eventual transfer of the bulk of Area C to the Palestinians, thus posing a significant barrier to a two-state outcome

Additional resources:

- Annexation by Any Other Name (Michael Koplow, December 8, 2022)
- An Israeli-Palestinian Issue Almost Everyone Can Agree On (Michael Koplow, July 7, 2022)
- Opining on Outposts (Michael Koplow, September 8, 2016)