



Factsheet

Silwan Under Siege: Mapping the Mechanisms of Displacement

Silwan is a Palestinian neighborhood located directly south of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem's Old City walls. Recognized by historians as the original core of ancient Jerusalem built by the Jebusites over 5,000 years ago, it spans a network of valleys and hills, playing a vital role as the historical "guardian of Jerusalem."

Today, it is home to over 22,330¹ Palestinian residents, but it faces intense pressure from Israeli settlement expansion, land confiscation, and home demolitions led by the municipality and different settler groups. Between 2011 and 2026, 371 structures across Silwan were demolished, including 219 residential structures, displacing 1,040 people. Currently, about 12 outposts housing around 700 Israeli settlers operate within these residential areas, protected by state-funded armed guards and border police as displacement and community struggles continue.

Displacement in Silwan takes different forms depending on the neighborhood - from settlement outposts to infrastructure projects to punitive demolition campaigns - but each mechanism adds to the cumulative pressure facing the community. This factsheet focuses on five of the most pressing cases currently facing Silwan: Batin al-Hawa, Al-Bustan, Wadi Hilweh, Wadi Yasul, and the Cable Car project.

Batin al-Hawa

Batin al-Hawa illustrates how a decades-old land claim can be reactivated to displace an entire community through the courts.

At the center of the case is a cluster of eviction lawsuits based on Ottoman-era Jewish trust claims. This neighborhood faces a systematic displacement campaign

orchestrated by Ateret Cohanim², targeting 86 Palestinian families comprising over 800 people. Ateret Cohanim claims 5 dunums based on a late 19th century Yemenite Jewish trust (waqf). The Yemenite community left in 1936 due to regional instability. In 1963, under Jordanian administration, Palestinian families - many of whom were 1948 refugees - legally bought or leased these lands and built homes over decades.

¹ Within this paper, we are referring Silwan to the 6 quarters only (Wadi Hilweh, Bustan, Bat al Hawa, Wadi Rababeh, Wad Yasul and Ein Al-Lozeh). It is worth to mention that the number of inhabitants of Silwan is 22,330 people (These quarters do not include Ras il Amoud 23,520)

² Ateret Cohanim is an Israeli religious organization that encourage Jewish to live in East Jerusalem

In 2001, the Israeli Custodian for Absentee Property secretly transferred management of the trust to Ateret Cohanim, and residents were not notified until eviction notices arrived in 2015.

The legal struggle of Batin al-Hawa unfolded over several decades of complex court battles. For decades, the community lived with security of tenure until the situation escalated in 2015, when Ateret Cohanim filed eviction lawsuits, resulting in initial default judgments. However, defense attorneys exposed that the courier had forged resident signatures on legal delivery receipts, prompting the court to reset the trial. This marked the beginning of a gruelling decade of litigation in the Magistrate's Court from 2015 to 2024. Furthermore, the court rejected statute-of-limitations arguments, ruling that the limitation period only began upon the 2001 title transfer.

As the legal avenues narrowed, the timeline accelerated into pivotal outcomes. In early 2025, the Magistrate's Court issued final eviction rulings and ordered each family to pay approximately 50,000 NIS in legal fees. Subsequent appeals failed; in June 2025, the District Court rejected the appeal and dismissed resident objections to a settlement deal, while making discriminatory remarks regarding Palestinian living conditions. The final judicial blow landed in September 2025, when the Israeli Supreme Court rejected the final appeal, ordering the surrender of the properties to settlers by the end of the year.

The enforcement phase brought immediate upheaval. In January 2026, police delivered 21-day eviction notices. Tensions and pressures mounted further on March 20, 2026, when Israeli authorities sealed the upper floors. Finally, between March 24 and

25, 2026, forced evictions commenced. Fifteen homes were cleared under heavy police enforcement, while 11 new expulsion notices were served to the neighboring family.

With 11 additional families now facing expulsion notices, Batin al-Hawa's displacement is far from complete. The case exemplifies a broader pattern in Silwan, where historic property claims are used to legally justify what international law recognizes as the forcible transfer of a protected population.

Al-Bustan

Al-Bustan shows how planning and zoning law can be used to engineer displacement without a single eviction lawsuit. Since 1967, the neighborhood has faced a slow-motion demolition campaign carried out under the guise of urban planning and archaeological preservation.

Al-Bustan is home to approximately 1,550 residents across 150 residential units. The neighborhood has been systematically targeted for clearance to establish the biblical "Garden of King David" national park.

The mechanism of enforcement relies heavily on restrictive planning strategies. Following 1967, the original Jordanian residential zoning was revoked and reclassified as a green zone, which legally blocks any possibility of obtaining new building permits. This planning lockout has resulted in an escalation of demolitions, with 67 homes currently facing active demolition orders.

The pressure on residents was intensified by new Israeli legal amendments³ in 2017 and

2018, which heavily restrict

Old City

court powers to

freeze demolition orders

unless proof of active permit progression is provided. Faced with

accumulating court fines and exorbitant municipal demolition fees,

residents are frequently forced to self-demolish their own homes to avoid

crushing debts.

Additionally, the municipality employs administrative orders - such as public hygiene bylaws, closure

orders, and "Gardening Orders" - to seize vacant or newly demolished

plots for public green spaces.

Efforts to find an technical solutions have faced rigid

roadblocks. In

November

Al-Bustan

2023, the

Jerusalem Municipality officially rejected a community-backed master plan. Instead of pursuing

negotiations, the municipality abruptly halted discussions and

demanding signed consent from residents for the demolition of their

homes, leaving over 112 legal files exposed to

imminent demolition.

With over 112 legal files now exposed to demolition and no viable path to obtain permits, Al-Bustan's residents remain trapped in a planning regime designed to make their presence untenable.



³ This amendment is called "Kaminitz Amendment" which restricts court powers to freeze demolition

orders unless proof of active permit progression is provided

Wadi Hilweh and “Ir David” Project

Wadi Hilweh is a sub-neighborhood in Silwan. The area has been targeted by land seizure and a narrative campaign designed to erase its Palestinian character in favor of a religious-nationalist framing.

This area has been targeted by the Elad Foundation⁴, which has sought since its establishment to seize large swaths of land and properties in Wadi Hilweh, and to instrumentalize a biblical narrative in service of its colonial campaign. Resorting to the Absentee Property Law, among other draconian tools of seizure, the foundation has seized nearly 40% of Wadi Hilweh's properties.

Moreover, the foundation was appointed by the Israeli state as administrator of the national and archaeological site, which it named "The City of David," transforming it into a large touristic site devoted to promoting a Jewish religious-nationalist narrative while intentionally obscuring Palestinian history and culture. The Elad Foundation seeks to further increase the financial gains it accrues from administering the archaeological site by pushing for the implementation of the Cable Car project.

Through the combination of legal seizure, archaeological branding, and tourism development, Wadi Hilweh illustrates how heritage and commerce are mobilized as tools of displacement - a pattern that continues directly into the Cable Car project, covered in the next section.

Cable Car Project

The Cable Car project extends the same displacement dynamics into infrastructure and tourism development, threatening to reshape Silwan's landscape and economy in Israel's favor.

The Jerusalem Cable Car Project is a planned 1.4-kilometer transit system designed to connect West Jerusalem with the "Kedem Compound" in Silwan, East Jerusalem. The planned cable car, approved by an interim Israeli government in November 2019, is slated to connect the First Station complex in western Jerusalem with Wadi Hilweh, where the “City of David” is located and where the Elad Foundation is planning a massive touristic and cultural center known as the Kedem Center. The Israeli government has marketed the project as a transportation plan that will ease traffic congestion.

But the cable car, stretching to the walls of the Old City, will irrevocably damage the area's skyline, place foreign tourism under the full control of the Israeli government at the expense of the Palestinian tourism industry, lead to the demolition of Silwan homes along the cable car's route, and cause irreversible damage to Silwan's archaeology. On 24 February 2021, the Israeli High Court issued an order against the cable car plan, suspending construction until certain explanations and documents are provided by its backers -the Jerusalem Municipality, the Jerusalem Development Authority, and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism.

In the meantime, Silwan residents are forced to go through complex legal battles just to stay and survive on their ancestral land, conducted in a language they do not speak, based on laws designed by their occupier, in courts that perpetuate their oppression.

⁴ Established in 1986 with the explicit aim of "reviving and restoring the biblical City of David."

Although the High Court's 2021 order has stalled construction, the project remains active and continues to shape planning decisions across Silwan, including the demolitions linked to it in neighborhoods such as Wadi Yasul.

For residents, the cable car represents not transportation infrastructure but a tool that entrenches settlement expansion, tourism control, and heritage appropriation under the guise of urban development.

Silwan: Sub-Neighborhood Challenges



Sub-Neighborhood	Lead Settler/State Organization	Primary Displacement Mechanisms & Infrastructure Projects
Batin al-Hawa	Ateret Cohanim	19th-century trust claims; targeting 86 families; 12 outposts housing 582 settlers.
Wadi Hilweh	Elad Foundation (Ir David)	1950 Absentee Property Law; controls ~40% of properties; manages the "City of David" park (24 dunams).
Al-Bustan	Jerusalem Municipality	Green space re-zoning; 67 homes under direct threat for the "King's Garden" park.
Wadi Rababa	Municipality / Nature & Parks Auth.	Land confiscation for national parks, green belts, and public suspension bridges.
Wadi Yasul & Ein al-Lozeh	Jerusalem Municipality	Unapproved master plans; commercial closures; Cable Car project transit corridors.
Dar Sumrein	Elad / State Bodies	Property seizures for national monuments and burial site developments.

Wadi Yasul

Wadi Yasul sub-neighborhood demonstrates how infrastructure projects such as the Cable Car can drive displacement even without a formal eviction campaign or demolition policy of its own.

The neighborhood faces ongoing urban displacement due to the municipality's persistent refusal to process detailed neighborhood building schemes for the area.

As a result, dozens of commercial and residential structures are currently confronting active demolition orders, heavy financial fines, and severe land encroachment driven by cable car and regional settlement infrastructure projects.

With no approved planning framework and encroaching infrastructure development, Wadi Yasul's residents face a slow, compounding displacement that receives less attention than Silwan's larger, named cases — but follows the same underlying pattern of dispossession.

Last but not least, and in addition to seizing Palestinian property, settlers in Silwan seek to alter the identity of the place by appointing heavily-armored private security, harassing the indigenous Palestinians on a daily basis, and raising the Israeli flag on the buildings they occupy. Every new outpost also brings with it increasing presence by the militarized Israeli police, which serves as a tool for intimidation and provocation.

Across Batin al-Hawa, Al-Bustan, Wadi Hilweh, the Cable Car project, and Wadi Yasul, Silwan's displacement follows no single script - litigation, zoning law, archaeological branding, infrastructure development, and administrative neglect each serve the same underlying goal of **removing Palestinians from their homes**. Compounding these legal and planning mechanisms is a daily reality of armed private security, settler harassment, and militarized policing that reinforces displacement on the ground. Taken together, these cases reveal a coordinated campaign to reshape Silwan's demographic and physical character, one that demands sustained international attention and accountability before further irreversible losses occur.

