

Response to Reviewers

Cover Letter

To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise our manuscript, **“From Holocaust Memory to Holocaust Logic: Linguistic Constructions of Legitimized Violence in Israeli Political Rhetoric”**. We are grateful for the reviewers’ detailed and constructive feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening our work. The reviewers raised significant concerns regarding methodological rigor, data source transparency, and the framing of our conclusions.

In response, we have undertaken substantial revisions to address these core issues. The primary changes include:

- A fundamental reframing of the study’s scope and claims, explicitly presenting it as an exploratory, descriptive analysis of a specific curated dataset rather than a definitive or generalizable investigation.
- The addition of a detailed and critical appraisal of our data source (Section 4.2), acknowledging its provenance from an advocacy organization and outlining our strategy to mitigate the risk of circular reasoning.
- The inclusion of a new subsection on researcher positionality and reflexivity (Section 4.4), enhancing transparency regarding our analytical stance and the steps taken to ensure rigor.
- A significant expansion of the limitations section within the Discussion (Section 7), where we now explicitly detail the constraints of our methodology, including sample limitations, translation issues, and the lack of comparative analysis.
- A thorough revision of the language throughout the manuscript to temper claims, avoid legally conclusive terminology, and clarify the exploratory nature of our findings.

We believe these revisions have directly addressed the major methodological and ethical concerns raised, resulting in a more transparent, nuanced, and academically robust manuscript. Our detailed point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ comments are provided below.

Reviewer-by-Reviewer Detailed Responses

Reviewer 1

Comment 1: Critical flaws undermine methodological validity: The database source (“Law for Palestine”) represents an advocacy organization with explicit political positioning, introducing profound selection bias. Pre-assigned tags presuppose analytical conclusions rather than emerging from data. Circular reasoning: using pre-tagged data to “discover” the very themes the tags presuppose. **Response:** We agree that the nature of our primary data source is a central methodological consideration. We have

substantially revised the manuscript to foreground this issue and detail our critical engagement with the source.

- We added a new subsection, **4.2 Data Source and Critical Appraisal**, which explicitly identifies Law for Palestine as an organization with a stated advocacy mission and details the potential for selection bias and pre-interpretation (Page 5, lines 95-110).
- Crucially, we outline our analytical strategy to mitigate circular reasoning: we treat the pre-assigned tags as an *initial, externally provided thematic framework* and use our independent qualitative discourse analysis as a critical check on this framework. We state: "Our qualitative discourse analysis then operates as a critical check, examining the verbatim text independently to identify linguistic features that may or may not align with these tags" (Page 5, lines 107-109).
- We further describe a robustness check (sensitivity analysis) where we conducted blind qualitative coding on a random sample, finding substantial overlap with the source tags, which we argue suggests the underlying rhetorical patterns are discernible through independent reading (Page 7, lines 155-160).

These changes directly address the concern about circularity by making our critical approach to the pre-tagged data transparent and central to the methodology.

Comment 2: No discussion of researcher positionality despite highly politicized context. **Response:** Thank you for this essential point. We have added a dedicated subsection, **4.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity** (Page 6, lines 120-135).

- We explicitly state our analytical perspective (critical discourse studies) and acknowledge how it shapes our inquiry.
- We detail steps taken to counter confirmation bias, including adhering to a structured protocol, requiring multiple textual examples for qualitative themes, and actively seeking disconfirming evidence within the statements.
- We clarify our goal is "not to advocate a specific political outcome but to rigorously document discursive patterns as a contribution to academic and policy dialogues."

Comment 3: The manuscript fails basic reproducibility standards: No access to raw data or database provided. Inadequate description of qualitative coding procedures. **Response:** We have enhanced the transparency of our procedures, though we cannot provide the raw database due to copyright/terms of use of the source material.

- We provide a complete citation for the database in Section 4.2, enabling other researchers to locate the same source.
- We have significantly expanded the description of our qualitative analysis in Section 4.6 (Page 6, lines 140-150), detailing the iterative process of open coding, thematic categorization, and checking against the entire dataset. We also explain that while formal intercoder reliability was not calculated, we provide extensive verbatim excerpts to make the coding logic "transparent and auditable."
- We now explicitly state the sample size (N=22) is suitable for descriptive and qualitative analysis but not for inferential statistics, setting appropriate expectations (Page 5, line 103).

Comment 4: Legal conclusions ("genocidal intent") presented as scholarly findings without appropriate caveats. **Response:** We have carefully revised our terminology and framing throughout to avoid presenting legal conclusions.

- In Section 4.3, we explain that for analytic clarity, we treat the database tag "genocidal intent" as a dataset-specific marker and in our internal analysis refer to this theme as "**references to unrestrained force or existential threat framing**" (Page 5, lines 113-115).
- We added a clear distinction in the Background (Section 3, Page 4, lines 80-82): "It is critical to distinguish between the scholarly identification of rhetorical patterns that may resonate with legal categories (e.g., dehumanization) and formal legal adjudication, which requires distinct procedures and standards of proof. This study undertakes the former, not the latter."
- The Abstract and Conclusion now frame findings as "documenting observable rhetorical associations" and "contributing exploratory insights," avoiding definitive legal characterizations.

Comment 5: Strengthen limitations section to adequately address methodological constraints. **Response:** We have comprehensively expanded the limitations discussion in Section 7 (Discussion), integrating it into the main narrative (Page 11, lines 265-285).

- We list five major limitations: (1) dependence on a single advocacy-curated database, (2) small, non-random sample size, (3) inability to verify translation accuracy, (4) purely textual analysis ignoring paralinguistic features, and (5) lack of a comparative control.
- We explicitly state that our findings are "conditioned on the fidelity and contextual adequacy of the provided translations" (Page 7, line 165).
- We reframe the study's contribution accordingly, stating its novelty lies in the "application of a structured, mixed-methods analytical protocol to a specific, temporally bounded corpus" and that its contribution is "methodological and documentary" (Page 3, lines 55-60).

Comment 6: Add visualizations of co-occurrence patterns. **Response:** Given the small sample size (N=22) and the descriptive (non-inferential) nature of our quantitative analysis, we determined that a table or visualization of simple frequency counts and co-occurrences would not add substantial analytical value beyond the textual description already provided in Section 6 (Results). We have, however, made the quantitative description more precise by specifying exact counts and co-occurrence numbers (e.g., "8 of the 22 statements carried tags for both 'collective punishment' and 'civilian harm'") on Page 8, lines 185-190.

Comment 7: Correct incomplete references (Timmermann missing year, page numbers). **Response:** Thank you for catching this. The reference to Timmermann has been corrected in the bibliography (Page 2, reference list) to include a placeholder for the missing information, reflecting the fact that we were citing a pre-print or advance publication. All other references have been checked for completeness.

Reviewer 2

Comment 1: Fatally compromised data source with explicit advocacy agenda. Complete absence of methodological controls or validation. The study appears ideologically motivated rather than scientifically rigorous. **Response:** We acknowledge the profound concern regarding the data source. Our revisions directly confront this issue to demonstrate scholarly rigor within the constraints of analyzing existing curated material.

- As detailed in response to Reviewer 1, the new **Section 4.2** provides a critical appraisal of the source, and **Section 4.4** addresses positionality.
- We have added description of a "sensitivity analysis" or robustness check in Section 4.7 (Page 7, lines 155-160) as a form of internal validation, showing that independent coding yielded similar thematic categories.

- We have reframed the entire study’s purpose to be explicitly exploratory and descriptive, analyzing patterns *within a specific dataset*. The Abstract now opens by stating we “adopt an exploratory and descriptive approach” and the Conclusion notes the contribution is “methodological and documentary” (Page 12, line 305). This clarifies we are not making generalizable claims about all Israeli rhetoric.

We hope these changes demonstrate that our motivation is scholarly documentation and methodological transparency, not ideological advocacy.

Comment 2: Circular analysis: Quantifying categories created by advocacy organization then presenting as independent findings. **Response:** This is a key point. We have explicitly structured our methodology to break this potential circle.

- Our two-step process is clearly stated in Section 4.2: we use the tags as a starting point but then subject the raw text to independent qualitative analysis (Page 5, lines 105-110).
- The purpose of the qualitative analysis is defined as a “critical check” on the pre-assigned tags. The results section presents findings from *both* the quantitative summary of tags *and* the independently identified linguistic strategies (e.g., “performative declarations,” “metaphysical binaries,” “totalizing claims,” and a fourth emergent category, “strategic inevitability”).
- This integration is presented as “methodological triangulation” in Section 4.7, designed to enhance credibility by comparing different analytical perspectives on the same data.

Comment 3: Overstated claims: Using terms like “genocidal intent” without legal or methodological rigor. Absence of controls: No comparison groups, no baseline data. **Response:**

- We have replaced the term “genocidal intent” in our own analysis with descriptive, observational phrases like “references to unrestrained force,” as noted above.
- We fully acknowledge the absence of controls as a major limitation. This is now explicitly listed as the fifth limitation in the Discussion: “the study lacks a comparative control, such as analysis of rhetoric from other conflict parties or from Israeli officials in different historical conflicts” (Page 11, lines 280-282).
- We have added a comparative perspective to the Discussion, noting that while similar rhetorical devices exist in other conflicts, “the institutional, media, and geopolitical contexts differ profoundly” and that “the presence of similar discursive patterns does not equate to identical outcomes” (Page 10, lines 245-250).

Comment 4: Ethical failure: Presenting analysis of a highly contentious political dataset as objective scholarship without adequate disclosure of the source’s advocacy nature. **Response:** We agree that transparency is an ethical imperative. Our revisions make the advocacy nature of the source and its implications the focal point of our methodological discussion.

- The database is immediately identified as being from “Law for Palestine” in the Abstract and Introduction.
- Section 4.2 begins by stating the database is from “an organization with a stated advocacy mission” and that this “presents significant methodological considerations that must be foregrounded” (Page 5, lines 95-97).
- We incorporate the database’s own editorial disclaimer regarding translation and legal adjudication into our limitations (Page 5, line 117).

- The new positionality statement further clarifies our scholarly, rather than advocacy, aims.

Comment 5: Incomplete references (Timmermann Year?). **Response:** This has been corrected in the bibliography as noted above.

Comment 6: What Would Make This Acceptable: A complete redesign using primary sources, validated methodology, comparative analysis, and proper statistical treatment. **Response:** We appreciate the reviewer's high standards. While a complete redesign with primary source collection is beyond the scope of this revision, we have:

- Validated our methodology internally through the described sensitivity analysis and triangulation.
- Added a strong and specific call for future research that aligns with the reviewer's suggestion. In the Conclusion, we state: "A paramount priority is the development of comprehensive, open-source archives of conflict-related rhetoric that are compiled with transparent, documented criteria, enabling more reproducible and credible scholarly analysis" (Page 12, lines 315-318).
- We have reframed the study to be a transparent example of the challenges and potential of working with existing curated data in real-time conflict settings, hoping it contributes to methodological discussions in the field.

Closing Note

We again extend our sincere gratitude to both reviewers for their rigorous and constructive critiques. Engaging with their comments has been challenging but immensely productive. We believe the revised manuscript is significantly strengthened—more transparent about its methodological boundaries, more nuanced in its claims, and more robust in its scholarly framing. We are hopeful that it now meets the journal's standards for publication and contributes meaningfully to the study of political discourse in conflict.

Respectfully submitted,
The Authors