

Response to Reviewers

Cover Letter

To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise our manuscript, “Numbers Don’t Speak, People Do”: Trustworthiness in Humanitarian Casualty Reporting during the Gaza War (2024–2025). We are grateful for the constructive and detailed feedback provided by the reviewers, which has been instrumental in strengthening our work.

In this revision, we have undertaken substantial revisions to address the methodological and presentational concerns raised. Key improvements include:

- **Enhanced Methodological Rigor:** We have conducted and reported new robustness checks, including sensitivity analyses on demographic data, statistical validation of sex distribution patterns, and the calculation of confidence intervals for key proportions. These additions directly address concerns about the quantitative analysis being purely descriptive.
- **Strengthened Qualitative Methodology:** We have expanded the description of our qualitative procedures, detailing our codebook development process, inter-coder reliability, reflexivity practices, and steps taken to mitigate potential selection bias. The core interview protocol is now provided in the Appendix.
- **Clarified Conceptual Framework and Limitations:** We have streamlined key terms, provided a more explicit rationale for our sampling strategy, and significantly expanded the discussion of study limitations, including the implications of the dataset’s lack of temporal and geographic data.
- **Improved Presentation:** We have corrected the title formatting, consolidated tables, and reduced repetitive phrasing throughout the manuscript.

We believe these revisions have significantly improved the manuscript’s scientific rigor, clarity, and balance. Our detailed, point-by-point responses to each reviewer’s comments are provided below.

Response to Reviewers

Reviewer 1

Comment 1: Major Flaw - Temporal Analysis Gap: The absence of event dates in the dataset fundamentally limits analysis of reporting dynamics over time. The authors should either obtain dated records or explicitly justify this limitation’s impact on conclusions. **Response:** We agree that the lack of temporal data is a significant limitation. As obtaining a dated version of this specific public dataset was not feasible, we have substantially expanded our discussion of this limitation and its implications. We now explicitly state that this prevents analysis of how reporting dynamics and casualty demographics may have shifted across conflict phases. This point is emphasized in the Method (Section 4.8, Limitations)

and Discussion (Section 6) sections. For example, in the Discussion (page 18, lines 450-455), we note: “The lack of temporal data prevents analysis of how reporting dynamics and casualty demographics may have shifted across different phases of the conflict, which is a significant constraint.”

Comment 2: Major Flaw - Conceptual Overlap: Key terms (e.g., “procedural visibility,” “two-path corroboration”) are redundantly defined and applied. Streamline and operationalize these constructs.

Response: We have streamlined the use of these key terms throughout the manuscript. Definitions are now presented more concisely upon first use, and repetitive phrasing has been reduced. For instance, the concept of “procedural visibility” is introduced in the Results (Section 5.2, page 14, lines 320-325) with a clear, operational description from a participant quote, and its application is tightened in the Discussion.

Comment 3: Major Flaw - Sampling Justification: Provide stronger rationale for the participant distribution (6 verification leads, 5 clinicians, etc.) and address potential selection bias from “established humanitarian networks.”

Response: We have strengthened the justification for our purposive sampling strategy in the Method section (Section 4.2, page 8, lines 185-200). We clarify that the distribution was designed to capture key perspectives within the reporting ecosystem (verification, medical, media, community) to achieve theoretical saturation on our core themes. We also explicitly address potential selection bias by describing our use of snowball sampling to identify participants beyond initial contacts and our active recruitment of participants with critical views (page 8, lines 195-200).

Comment 4: Minor Flaw - Title Formatting: Correct the title’s spacing and punctuation. **Response:** Thank you. The title has been corrected to: “Numbers Don’t Speak, People Do”: Trustworthiness in Humanitarian Casualty Reporting during the Gaza War (2024–2025). This is reflected in the revised manuscript’s title block.

Comment 5: Minor Flaw - Repetitive Phrasing: Reduce redundant descriptions of findings (e.g., “credibility emerges from procedural visibility” appears 10+ times). **Response:** We have carefully reviewed the manuscript and significantly reduced repetitive phrasing. Descriptions of core findings are now more varied and concise.

Comment 6: Minor Flaw - Table Optimization: Consolidate Tables 1–5 into a single demographic overview with highlighted trends. **Response:** We have consolidated the demographic presentation into a single, clear table (Table 1: Summary Statistics for the Casualty Dataset) in the Results section (Section 5.1, page 13). This table highlights the key patterns of child casualties and male majority.

Comment 7: Additional Analyses - Conduct sensitivity analyses... Explore statistical tests... Triangulate with external datasets... **Response:** We have conducted and reported the suggested analyses in the revised Method (Section 4.5) and Results (Section 5.1) sections.

- **Sensitivity Analysis:** We performed sensitivity analysis on age outlier exclusion thresholds, confirming the stability of the proportion of child casualties (approx. $32.8\% \pm 0.2\%$) (page 9, lines 225-228).
- **Statistical Tests:** We applied a chi-square test of independence, finding a significant association between age group and sex ($\chi^2(7) = 85.4$, $p < 0.001$), and calculated Wilson score confidence intervals for key proportions (page 9, lines 228-235; page 13, lines 305-310).
- **External Triangulation:** While a direct statistical triangulation with another full dataset was not possible, we now contextualize our demographic finding by comparing the proportion of child casualties (32.8%) to the pre-war demographic baseline (approx. 47% under 18) in the Discussion (page 16, lines 380-385). This provides a critical reference point for interpretation, as suggested.

Reviewer 2

Comment 1: Overall Concern - Political Framing Objectivity: The framing appears politically charged... dataset title "Genocide of the Palestinian People" suggests predetermined conclusions... **Response:** We acknowledge the sensitivity of the dataset's title. Our analysis, however, is focused strictly on the demographic variables (age, sex) and the *processes* of reporting and verification. We have made our neutral, methodological stance more explicit. In the Introduction (page 3, lines 70-75), we state: "We explicitly recognize the dataset's provenance and title as a potential source of framing bias, and our analysis focuses solely on the demographic variables provided, treating the data as a record of *reported* casualties rather than making legal or historical claims about the conflict." This analytical boundary is reiterated in the Discussion regarding researcher positionality (page 18, lines 435-440).

Comment 2: Major Flaw - Methodological Soundness: Quantitative analysis is purely descriptive... Dataset lacks temporal data... Qualitative sampling (N=22) is small and potentially unrepresentative. **Response:** We have substantially enhanced the methodological rigor in response to this and similar points from Reviewer 1.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** We have moved beyond purely descriptive statistics by adding inferential tests (chi-square) and confidence intervals, as detailed in our response to Reviewer 1, Comment 7 (Method, Section 4.5; Results, Section 5.1).
- **Temporal Data:** We have explicitly acknowledged this as a major limitation, as noted in our response to Reviewer 1, Comment 1.
- **Qualitative Sampling:** We have provided a stronger rationale for the sample size and purposive strategy, aimed at theoretical saturation on processes rather than population representativeness. We also detail steps to mitigate bias (snowball sampling, seeking divergent views) (Method, Section 4.2).

Comment 3: Major Flaw - Results Evidence: Quantitative findings... are presented without proper context or comparison to population demographics. No statistical testing... **Response:** Addressed. We now provide crucial context by comparing the child casualty proportion to the pre-war population structure (Discussion, page 16, lines 380-385). We have also added the statistical testing and confidence intervals as described above.

Comment 4: Major Flaw - Ethical Transparency Standards: IRB approval mentioned but details lacking... No discussion of researcher positionality biases. **Response:** We have expanded the ethical considerations in the Method (Section 4.8, page 11, lines 275-285), detailing our expedited review process, verbal consent procedures, and well-being protocols for participants. A discussion of researcher positionality and reflexivity practices has been added to the Discussion (page 18, lines 435-445).

Comment 5: Required for Resubmission - Replace politically charged dataset... Conduct proper epidemiological analysis... Substantially expand qualitative component... Remove predetermined political framing... **Response:** We respectfully address these points as follows:

- **Dataset:** The dataset is a publicly available source of reported casualty demographics. Replacing it was not the goal of this study, which analyzes reporting practices using available data. We have, however, intensified our neutral framing and explicit treatment of its limitations.
- **Epidemiological Analysis:** We have enhanced our demographic analysis with statistical tests and population comparison, as noted. A full epidemiological analysis (e.g., cause-of-death, geography) is impossible with the available variables, which we now explicitly state as a limitation (Method, Section 4.8).

- **Qualitative Component:** While expanding the sample size in this specific conflict context post-hoc is not feasible, we have significantly strengthened the *description* of our qualitative methodology, adding details on codebook development, inter-coder reliability, and audit trails to enhance rigor and transparency (Method, Sections 4.4 & 4.7).
- **Political Framing:** As stated in response to Comment 1, we have clarified our focus on reporting processes and maintained a neutral, analytical stance throughout.

Comment 6: Required for Resubmission - Include temporal analysis through alternative data sources. Provide detailed methodological protocols. Response:

- **Temporal Analysis:** Please see our response to Reviewer 1, Comment 1. We acknowledge this gap as a key limitation.
- **Methodological Protocols:** We have provided the core semi-structured interview protocol in the Appendix (page 21). Data cleaning and analysis scripts for the quantitative component are preserved and available upon request, as noted in the Data Statement (page 20).

Closing Note

We thank the reviewers again for their time and insightful critiques. The revision process has been thorough, and we believe the manuscript is now significantly stronger, with enhanced methodological transparency, statistical rigor, and conceptual clarity. We are hopeful that the revised paper makes a valuable contribution to the literature on humanitarian data and communication in conflict zones.