

# Response to Reviewers

## Cover Letter

### To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, “**The Law Speaks for the Silenced: Trust, Moral Witnessing, and Communicative Authority in the South Africa v. Israel Genocide Proceedings (2023–2024)**” (Manuscript ID: [PLEASE INSERT]). We are grateful to the reviewers for their thoughtful, detailed, and constructive feedback. Their critiques have been invaluable in strengthening the methodological rigor, transparency, and scholarly objectivity of our work. In this revision, we have undertaken a comprehensive overhaul to address the core concerns raised.

The main revisions are as follows:

1. **Full Methodological Disclosure:** We have added extensive detail to the Methods section (Section 4), including operational definitions for all key variables (e.g., Empathetic Framing, Perceived Legitimacy, Bias Score), a description of the inter-coder reliability process, and justification for statistical methods. Supplementary codebooks and sampling details are provided in new appendices.
2. **Enhanced Transparency and Reproducibility:** We have provided a direct link to the open-source dataset on Kaggle and detailed the complete coding protocols. The limitations of our dataset and measures are now explicitly discussed.
3. **Reflexivity and Positionality:** We have added a robust positionality statement in the Background section (Section 3) and revised language throughout to adopt a more neutral, analytical tone, clearly separating descriptive analysis from normative advocacy.
4. **Strengthened Analysis and Interpretation:** We have expanded the Results and Discussion sections to ground claims more directly in the data, added sensitivity analyses, and provided a more critical reflection on the limitations and implications of our findings, particularly the central correlation coefficient.

We believe these substantial revisions have directly addressed the reviewers’ major concerns, resulting in a manuscript that is significantly more rigorous, transparent, and balanced. Our point-by-point responses to each comment are detailed below.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Authors

## Response to Reviewers

### Reviewer 1

*Critique: The methodology lacks critical details. For example: How were “empathy,” “bias,” and “legitimacy” operationalized and measured? The claim of a correlation ( $r = 0.63$ ) is unsupported—no explanation of how “perceived legitimacy” was quantified or validated.* **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this essential critique. We have completely rewritten the Method section (Section 4) to provide full operational definitions and measurement details.

- **Empathetic Framing** is now defined as a 5-point Likert scale (0-4) based on specific linguistic criteria. The full codebook is provided in Appendix A (page 21, Table A1).
- **Perceived Legitimacy** is operationalized through two indirect proxy measures: *endorsement frequency* and *procedural alignment*. A composite score was calculated from these proxies to avoid circular reasoning. This is explained in Section 4.3, page 8, lines 180-195.
- **Bias Score** is defined as a continuous variable (-1 to +1) derived from a calibrated dictionary-based sentiment analysis. The derivation process is detailed in Appendix B, page 22.
- The statistical analysis now justifies the use of Pearson’s r, reports confidence intervals, and mentions sensitivity analyses and control for confounding variables via regression (Section 4.4, page 9, lines 210-225).

*Critique: Sampling bias is likely, as the dataset relies on publicly available documents, potentially overlooking non-English or non-Western sources.* **Response:** We agree this is a critical limitation. We have expanded the Dataset and Sampling subsection (Section 4.2, page 7) to explicitly detail our efforts to include non-Western sources (e.g., Al Jazeera, TRT World, Xinhua) and address language diversity through professional translation. We also now include a new table (Appendix C, Table C1, page 23) breaking down the corpus by source type, language, and region. The limitations stemming from reliance on public, textual data are frankly discussed in Sections 4.5 (page 10, lines 240-250) and 6 (page 18, lines 415-425).

*Critique: The paper’s framing risks appearing advocacy-driven rather than analytically neutral.* **Response:** We have revised the manuscript’s language throughout to adopt a more neutral, scholarly tone. Most significantly, we have added an explicit positionality and reflexivity statement in the Background section (Section 3, page 6, lines 130-145). This statement acknowledges the polarized context, clarifies that our goal is to analyze discourse rather than adjudicate the case, and explains how our methodological design seeks to maximize objectivity.

*Critique: Provide access to the dataset and detailed coding protocols.* **Response:** We have added a direct link to the Kaggle repository in the Data Statement (page 20) and in Section 4.2 (page 7, line 155). The detailed coding protocols for Empathetic Framing and Bias Score are provided in Appendices A and B (pages 21-22).

*Critique: Include inter-coder reliability tests for qualitative themes.* **Response:** We have added details of the inter-coder reliability process. Two coders independently coded a 20% subset. We report Cohen’s Kappa for categorical variables (Tone:  $\kappa = 0.78$ ) and Intraclass Correlation Coefficients for continuous variables (e.g., Empathy: ICC = 0.82). This is now in Section 4.3, page 8, lines 200-205.

*Critique: Avoid overstatement (e.g., "substantially advance the field").* **Response:** We have moderated the language in the Abstract, Introduction, and Conclusion. Claims about contribution are now framed more precisely in terms of providing "a model," "extending understanding," and "offering a framework" rather than using hyperbolic terms.

## Reviewer 2

*Critique: The complete lack of operational definitions for primary variables ("empathetic framing," "perceived legitimacy," "bias score") renders the quantitative analysis uninterpretable and invalid.* **Response:** This was the most serious flaw identified. We have comprehensively addressed it.

- **Empathetic Framing:** Defined and measured as described above (Section 4.3, page 8; Appendix A, page 21).
- **Perceived Legitimacy:** Defined and measured via proxy variables to avoid author bias (Section 4.3, page 8, lines 180-195).
- **Bias Score:** Defined and its derivation fully explained (Section 4.3, page 8, lines 195-200; Appendix B, page 22).

The revised Methods section now provides the necessary foundation for interpreting all quantitative results.

*Critique: Unacknowledged Positionality and Bias. The paper adopts a clear perspective... This normative framing is not acknowledged or balanced, compromising scholarly objectivity.* **Response:** We agree that our initial submission lacked sufficient reflexivity. We have made the following key changes:

1. Added a dedicated positionality paragraph in Section 3 (page 6, lines 130-145), acknowledging the contested nature of the case and our scholarly stance.
2. Revised language across the manuscript to be more analytical and less advocacy-oriented. For instance, we refer to "the South African legal position" rather than "giving voice to the silenced," and describe "asymmetries in the data" rather than "epistemic marginalization" as an observed fact.
3. In the Discussion (Section 6, page 16, lines 365-375), we explicitly state that the observed correlation between empathy and legitimacy should not be interpreted causally or as an endorsement of one narrative, but as a feature of the specific discourse.

*Critique: Provide a complete codebook in supplementary materials... Inter-coder reliability statistics...*

**Response:** We have provided the requested materials.

- The codebook for the primary variable (Empathetic Framing) is in Appendix A (page 21, Table A1).
- The derivation of the Bias Score, which serves as its codebook, is in Appendix B (page 22).
- Inter-coder reliability statistics are reported in Section 4.3 (page 8, lines 200-205).

*Critique: The paper must include a critical discussion of the dataset's limitations, including its composition...* **Response:** We have significantly expanded the discussion of limitations. A new subsection on "Trustworthiness" in the Methods (Section 4.5, page 10) details safeguards like an audit trail and negative case analysis. The Discussion section (page 18, lines 415-435) now includes a dedicated paragraph listing key limitations: reliance on textual/public data, the indirect nature of the legitimacy measure, the snapshot nature of an ongoing case, and the need for comparative future work. The composition of the dataset is detailed in the new Appendix C, Table C1 (page 23).

*Critique: The conflation of "credibility," "trust," and "perceived legitimacy" throughout the text.* **Response:** We have reviewed the manuscript to ensure consistent and precise use of these terms. "Perceived Legitimacy" is now used strictly as our operationalized composite variable. "Credibility" and "trust" are used as broader theoretical constructs in the introduction and discussion, but their relationship to our measured variable is clarified.

*Critique: Vague phrases like "methodological triangulation" are used... without demonstrating how it was concretely achieved.* **Response:** We have replaced the vague term with a concrete description. In Section 4.4 (page 9, lines 215-220), we now specify: "The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through... where statistical patterns informed thematic interpretation and qualitative insights provided context for numerical relationships."

## Closing Note

We again extend our sincere gratitude to both reviewers for their rigorous and constructive engagement with our work. Their insights were challenging but immensely valuable. We are confident that the extensive revisions detailed above have addressed their major concerns, resulting in a manuscript that is methodologically robust, transparent, and academically balanced. We believe the paper is now significantly strengthened and suitable for publication.