

Response to Reviewers

Cover Letter

To the Editor,
Journal Name

Dear Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, “**From Witness to World: How Global Protest Solidarity Constructs Credibility in the Israel-Palestine War**” (Manuscript ID: [Please Insert]). We are grateful for the reviewers’ constructive, detailed, and challenging feedback, which has prompted a significant and thoughtful revision of our work.

The reviewers raised fundamental concerns regarding the sample size, methodological transparency, statistical analysis, and the framing of the study’s contributions. In response, we have undertaken a comprehensive revision. The core changes are: 1. **Reframing the Study:** We have explicitly reframed the manuscript from a hypothesis-testing study to an **exploratory, mixed-methods analysis**. The title, abstract, introduction, method, results, and discussion sections now consistently present the work as a detailed, qualitative-rich investigation of credibility construction mechanisms within a specific dataset, explicitly acknowledging its limitations regarding statistical generalization. 2. **Enhancing Methodological Transparency:** We have added a detailed appendix (Appendix A) containing the full stance coding codebook with examples. We have thoroughly revised the Methods section to provide a transparent, step-by-step account of our procedures, explicitly labeling the stance coding as a heuristic, interpretative tool for this exploratory analysis. 3. **Revising Quantitative Analysis and Presentation:** We have removed all overreaching inferential claims. The primary measure of central tendency for protest size is now the median. The correlation matrix (Table 5) remains but is accompanied by prominent, explicit caveats about its instability and descriptive-only purpose. All quantitative findings are now presented as patterns within the sample, not as generalizable truths. 4. **Strengthening the Limitations and Discussion:** We have significantly expanded the discussion of limitations, directly addressing dataset bias, sample size constraints, and the interpretative nature of our coding. The discussion now carefully qualifies all conclusions, framing them as insights generated from this specific analysis that can inform future, larger-scale research.

We believe these revisions have substantially strengthened the manuscript’s rigor, clarity, and intellectual honesty. While the fundamental data source remains the same, our reinterpretation and reframing address the core concerns about overstatement and methodological opacity. Below, we provide a point-by-point response to each reviewer’s comments.

Reviewer-by-Reviewer Detailed Responses

Reviewer 1

Comment: Major Concern - Sample Size: $n=26$ events over 7 years is insufficient for robust statistical analysis, especially given the global scope claimed. **Response:** We agree completely. The manuscript has been fundamentally reframed. We no longer claim to provide a statistically robust analysis of global patterns. Instead, we present an **exploratory mixed-methods analysis** that uses a modest sample to conduct a deep, qualitative examination of credibility construction mechanisms. The global scope is now contextualized as the origin of the dataset, not a claim about representativeness. This reframing is established in the Abstract (lines 4-6), Introduction (Section 1, lines 10-13, 30-33), and explicitly stated in the Method section (Section 4.1, lines 5-9). The Results section now prefaces all quantitative findings with the caveat that they are descriptive of the sample (Section 5, first paragraph).

Comment: Major Concern - Sampling Bias: Reliance on the Global Protest Tracker dataset without discussion of its completeness, verification procedures, or media bias corrections raises serious validity concerns. **Response:** We have added a detailed discussion of the dataset’s limitations. In the Method section (Section 4.2, lines 10-18), we now explicitly acknowledge it as a “single, non-peer-reviewed compilation” that may reflect media selection biases, under-reporting, and reliance on varying source verification. We state that the sample is treated as “a purposive collection of cases that provide rich material for analyzing credibility construction processes, not as a statistically representative sample.”

Comment: Major Concern - Stance Coding: The rule-based classification... appears overly simplistic and potentially biased. No inter-coder reliability measures are reported. **Response:** We have significantly increased transparency. We now explicitly describe the stance coding as a “heuristic” and “interpretative” tool for this exploratory study (Method, Section 4.3, lines 5-7, 16-17). We have created **Appendix A**, which provides the full codebook with coding rules and illustrative examples of coded events. We acknowledge the single-coder design and state that “future large-scale work would necessitate” inter-coder reliability tests (Method, Section 4.3, lines 18-19). The purpose is to make our interpretive process completely transparent.

Comment: Major Concern - Statistical Limitations: Correlation analysis with such a small sample... produces unstable results. **Response:** We have addressed this directly. The correlation matrix (Table 5) is now prefaced with a strong warning in the Method section (Section 4.3, lines 27-31) and again in the Results (Section 5.5, lines 1-3). We state that the correlations “should be interpreted with extreme caution,” are “unstable,” and are “presented primarily for descriptive completeness, and no causal or strong associational claims are based upon them.” The primary quantitative findings now rely on descriptive comparisons of medians and counts.

Comment: Critical Deficiency - No data/code availability statement. Insufficient detail on text analysis procedures. **Response:** We now provide a direct link to the publicly available Kaggle dataset in the bibliography (KaggleGibin2024). The detailed stance coding procedures are fully documented in the revised Method section (Section 4.3, lines 5-20) and in **Appendix A**. We clarify the specific filtering steps used to create the sample (Method, Section 4.2, lines 19-21).

Comment: The abstract overstates findings given methodological limitations. **Response:** The abstract has been entirely rewritten. It now begins by describing the study as an “**exploratory mixed-methods analysis**” and explicitly acknowledges the “sample limitations of the analysis.” It concludes by stating the research offers “a methodological template and conceptual framework for larger-scale studies,” accurately reflecting the revised paper’s scope.

Comment: Improve table formatting and readability. **Response:** We have reformatted all tables using the **booktabs** package for clearer presentation. We have added more descriptive captions and ensured consistent formatting.

Comment: Provide operational definitions for key theoretical constructs. **Response:** We have added clearer definitions. For example, in the Discussion (Section 6, paragraph 3), we explicitly state how different credibility practices address different facets of trust: “statistical evidence appeals to empirical verification, witness testimony... appeals to authenticity and immediacy, and embodied practices appeal to moral sincerity.”

Comment: Strengthen the limitations section to more directly address methodological constraints. **Response:** The Limitations discussion has been greatly expanded (Section 6, paragraphs 8-9). We now explicitly list: “the event-catalog bias inherent in the dataset, the heuristic nature of stance coding,” and most importantly, “the small sample size (N=26) means the quantitative patterns are descriptive of this sample alone and cannot support inferential statistical claims.” We state the study is “best understood as an exploratory case-based analysis.”

Reviewer 2

Comment: Fatal Flaw - Unacceptable Sample Size: N=26 events... is statistically and substantively inadequate. It cannot support generalizations about “global protest solidarity.” **Response:** As detailed in response to Reviewer 1, we have reframed the entire manuscript. We no longer make generalizations about “global protest solidarity” in a statistical sense. The paper is now an exploratory analysis of credibility construction *within* a sample of globally-sourced protest events. This is clarified throughout, e.g., Introduction (Section 1, lines 30-33): “The analysis is framed as an exploratory investigation that prioritizes depth of qualitative insight and methodological development over broad statistical generalization.”

Comment: Fatal Flaw - Data Source & Sampling: The use of a single, non-peer-reviewed Kaggle dataset is a major weakness. **Response:** We acknowledge this weakness directly and transparently. In the Method section (Section 4.2, lines 10-18), we list the specific limitations: “media selection biases,

under-report certain regions or smaller events, and rely on varying levels of source verification.” We argue that the dataset’s value for this exploratory study lies in the ”detailed, event-level data it provides for qualitative analysis.”

Comment: Fatal Flaw - Stance Coding: The ”rule-based text analysis”... is a critical and entirely un-validated heuristic. The method is not described in sufficient detail... **Response:** We agree with the characterization ”heuristic.” We have embraced this term and now use it to describe our approach (Method, Section 4.3, line 5). The full validation for this exploratory study is **transparency**. We provide exhaustive detail in the Method (Section 4.3, lines 5-20) and the complete codebook in **Appendix A**. This allows readers to see and evaluate our interpretive logic.

Comment: Statistical Flaws: Presenting means for highly skewed protest size data... is misleading; medians should be the primary measure. The correlation matrix... is uninterpretable and meaningless. **Response:** We have corrected this. The median is now reported as the primary measure of central tendency for protest size throughout the Results (e.g., Tables 4, 6, 8). The mean is provided alongside for context. We have not removed the correlation matrix but have surrounded it with explicit caveats regarding its instability and descriptive-only purpose (Method, Section 4.3, lines 27-31; Results, Section 5.5, lines 1-3). We now describe it as containing ”suggestive descriptive patterns rather than stable statistical relationships.”

Comment: Lack of Novelty: The central finding... is a well-documented correlation... presented as a novel insight. **Response:** We have tempered our claims to novelty. The revised manuscript states its novelty lies in ”the integrated application of epistemic trust frameworks to the specific communicative practices of solidarity protests within this protracted conflict, using a mixed-methods lens” (Introduction, Section 1, lines 23-25). In the Discussion (Section 6, paragraph 4), we explicitly link the size-repression finding to the established literature ([?]) and note that ”this study’s design cannot determine the direction of causality.”

Comment: Failure to Address Confounding Variables: The analysis is simplistic and does not rule out alternative explanations. **Response:** We now explicitly acknowledge this limitation. In discussing the size-repression relationship (Results, Section 5.3, lines 10-13; Discussion, Section 6, paragraph 4), we state: ”This pattern is consistent with established literature... In this sample, this association does not imply causation; larger protests may occur in contexts where states are already predisposed to repression, or the size and repression may both be responses to a third factor...”

Comment: Major Transparency Failure: The code for data filtering, stance coding, and statistical analysis is not available. **Response:** While we are not providing raw analysis code, we have provided all information necessary to conceptually reproduce the study. The Kaggle dataset is publicly cited. The data filtering logic is described in the Method (Section 4.2, lines 19-21). The stance coding logic is fully detailed in the Method and Appendix A. The statistical operations (descriptive stats, correlations) are standard and clearly stated. We believe this meets the transparency standard for an exploratory, conceptually-oriented paper.

Comment: The qualitative analysis lacks depth and illustrative evidence (e.g., direct quotes from protest descriptions). **Response:** We have enriched the qualitative results section (Section 5.4). We now provide specific, paraphrased examples from the event descriptions to illustrate each credibility strategy: e.g., ”’mourning the deaths of over 30,000 Palestinians’” and ”’calling for an immediate end to the bombing of Gaza.’” We also added a description of a ”’die-in’ at a university” as an example of embodied practice.

Closing Note

We thank the reviewers again for their rigorous engagement with our work. Their critiques were essential in helping us reconceptualize the manuscript into a more modest, transparent, and methodologically honest exploratory study. We believe the revised paper makes a valuable contribution by providing a detailed, mixed-methods template for analyzing credibility construction in contentious politics and by offering concrete conceptual and methodological insights for future research. We are hopeful that the substantial revisions have addressed the core concerns and that the manuscript is now suitable for publication.