

# UNEQUAL MODERNITIES, UNEQUAL MEASURES OF TRUST: MACRO-ASYMMETRIES AND CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONTEXT

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Paper under double-blind review

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how macro-structural asymmetries between Israel and Palestine shape credibility construction in conflict reporting and policy discourse through analysis of a panel dataset (2000–2021) comprising 16 development, health, and defense indicators. Employing a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design, we integrate quantitative analysis of macro-indicators with qualitative thematic coding of interpretive memos. Our findings reveal that credibility emerges through dueling warrants: statistical authority versus moral witnessing. Israel’s higher means on GDP, literacy, and IT output correlate with presumptions of technocratic credibility, while Palestine’s elevated fertility and mortality rates foreground human vulnerability, channeling empathy-driven credibility through testimony. These asymmetries correspond with distinct narrative burdens, where claims from the structurally disadvantaged often rely on experiential and moral testimony to offset deficits in statistical authority. The analysis demonstrates that indicator coherence (GDP-IT-literacy cluster) and narrative coherence (vulnerability-risk cluster) independently foster trust while appealing to different audience logics—technocratic versus humanitarian. Institutional practices, including editorial norms and expert citation patterns, valorize quantification, potentially marginalizing experiential accounts absent deliberate contextualization. Epistemic justice thus necessitates the inclusion of testimony alongside contextualized indicators to mitigate credibility deficits arising from power asymmetries. This research contributes to understanding how measurable disparities influence perceptions of authority and empathy in conflict communication, with implications for media ethics and policy discourse.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are narrated through metrics that circulate in media, diplomacy, and expert communities (?). These metrics anchor credibility in ways that reflect and reinforce structural power asymmetries. The Israel-Palestine context features measurable disparities across development, health, and defense indicators, which entangle moral claims with statistical authority in public discourse. This study examines how these macro-structural asymmetries shape credibility construction in conflict reporting and policy analysis.

The Palestinian issue represents a protracted conflict where narratives compete for international recognition and legitimacy. The relevance of this context lies in its demonstration of how quantitative indicators and qualitative experiences interact to produce or undermine trust across different audiences. When news segments juxtapose GDP figures and defense inventories with testimonies about health system strain, viewers encounter competing warrants of truth: technocratic metrics versus lived experiences (?). This junction between measurement and witnessing situates our inquiry within media ethics and digital witnessing literature.

The complexity of credibility construction in this context arises from multiple factors. Historical grievances, institutional constraints, and geopolitical frameworks create an environment where information is always already politicized (?). Social trauma and competing narratives further complicate

how messages are received and trusted. International frameworks often privilege certain types of evidence while discounting others, creating epistemic hierarchies that can silence marginalized perspectives (?). These dynamics make trust calibration particularly challenging for audiences navigating polarized information environments.

This research employs a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design to bridge quantitative analysis of macro-indicators with qualitative interpretation of credibility dynamics. We analyze a panel dataset (2000–2021) of 16 development, health, and defense indicators for Israel and Palestine, integrating descriptive statistics and correlation analysis with thematic coding of interpretive memos. The study addresses three research questions: First, how do macro-structural asymmetries enable distinct credibility warrants? Second, which factors foster trust across asymmetric parties? Third, how do institutional practices shape message reception and moral attention?

The qualitative component provides crucial insight into Palestinian lived experiences and structural realities that numbers alone cannot capture. Through thematic analysis of interpretive memos, we examine how macro-disparities translate into communicative strategies and audience perceptions (?). This approach helps interpret experiences, communication patterns, and institutional narratives within their proper context, revealing the human dimensions behind statistical disparities. Analytic credibility is ensured through methodological triangulation, where quantitative and qualitative findings inform and contextualize each other (?).

The study makes several contributions to understanding credibility construction in asymmetric conflicts:

- It demonstrates a mixed-methods bridge between macro-structural asymmetries and trust/witness dynamics
- It reveals how indicator coherence and narrative coherence foster trust through different audience logics
- It identifies institutional practices that valorize quantification while potentially marginalizing testimony
- It provides empirical grounding for epistemic justice approaches in conflict communication

The paper proceeds as follows: Section ?? reviews related work on epistemic trust, moral witnessing, and indicator-based analysis. Section ?? establishes the context of communication practices in asymmetric conflicts. Section ?? details our mixed-methods approach, including data sources and analytical procedures. Section ?? presents quantitative findings and qualitative insights. Section ?? interprets these findings in relation to our research questions. Section ?? outlines implications and future research directions.

The research has implications for education, humanitarian policy, and cross-cultural understanding. For media literacy education, it suggests the need to teach audiences to recognize how power asymmetries shape credibility assessments. Humanitarian organizations might benefit from presenting paired panels that combine metrics with human impact narratives. Policy discourse could be improved through deliberate contextualization of indicators and inclusion of testimony. These approaches support epistemic justice by countering credibility deficits that arise from structural power imbalances (?).

## 2 RELATED WORK

This study builds upon scholarship in epistemic trust, moral witnessing, and indicator-based analysis in conflict communication. Research on epistemic injustice examines how power structures can silence or distort marginalized voices (?). Recent scholarship has extended this framework to analyze how media institutions and practices can perpetuate epistemic injustice through representation patterns and credibility assignments, particularly in conflict reporting where local journalists face identity-prejudicial credibility deficits (?).

Work on moral witnessing explores how testimony and lived experiences function as evidence in contexts of suffering and conflict (??). This literature examines the ethical dimensions of representing distant suffering and the role of empathy in audience engagement with conflict narratives. ? analyzes

how media representations of suffering can produce ironic spectatorship, where audiences become detached from the human realities of conflict.

Indicator-based analysis in conflict studies has traditionally focused on quantitative measures of development, health, and security (?). These approaches provide important insights into structural asymmetries but often overlook the communicative dimensions of how these indicators shape credibility and trust. Our research bridges this gap by integrating quantitative analysis of macro-indicators with qualitative examination of credibility construction.

Media witnessing theory provides a crucial framework for understanding how conflict is represented and consumed across different audiences (?). This literature examines the role of journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens in bearing witness to conflict and the institutional practices that shape which testimonies are amplified or silenced. ? explores how news images of impending death move publics and shape moral responses to conflict.

Trust and credibility scholarship examines the cognitive and affective processes through which audiences evaluate information in high-stakes contexts (??). This work highlights how institutional authority, statistical evidence, and personal testimony function as distinct warrants of trust. Our study extends this literature by examining how macro-structural asymmetries shape these credibility assessments in asymmetric conflict settings.

Mixed-methods approaches in communication research provide methodological foundations for integrating quantitative and qualitative insights (??). These approaches enable triangulation of findings and provide more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena. Our study employs concurrent triangulation to examine both the measurable disparities in conflict indicators and their implications for credibility construction.

### 3 BACKGROUND

The Israel-Palestine conflict represents a protracted asymmetric struggle where power differentials extend beyond military capacity to encompass economic development, institutional resources, and international standing. These structural disparities condition how narratives are constructed, circulated, and received across global media landscapes. The production of credibility in such contexts requires examination of the material foundations that shape communicative practices and audience perceptions.

Palestinian studies draw upon decolonial frameworks that challenge dominant epistemologies and center marginalized perspectives. These approaches recognize that knowledge production occurs within power structures that may silence or distort subaltern voices (?). Oral history and narrative inquiry provide methodological tools for documenting lived experiences that official records may overlook. These frameworks emphasize testimony as both historical document and moral claim, particularly where institutional archives reflect dominant power structures.

The societal setting for this research encompasses media environments, policy discourse, and academic analysis where Palestinian experiences are interpreted and represented. Institutional practices in journalism, humanitarian reporting, and diplomatic communication often rely on quantitative indicators that may reinforce existing power asymmetries. The privileging of statistical data over experiential accounts can create epistemic hierarchies where certain forms of evidence receive greater credibility (?). This dynamic is particularly salient in conflict zones where access to data collection varies between parties.

The construction of credibility in asymmetric conflicts involves competing warrants of truth that reflect different epistemological traditions. Statistical authority derives from quantitative measurement and institutional validation, while moral witnessing draws upon personal testimony and ethical appeal (?). These forms of evidence appeal to distinct audience logics—technocratic rationality versus humanitarian empathy. The tension between these approaches shapes how claims are evaluated and which narratives gain traction in public discourse.

Institutional practices in news production and policy analysis valorize certain forms of evidence through editorial norms, expert citation patterns, and data visualization conventions. These practices can marginalize qualitative accounts unless deliberately contextualized within recognized frameworks (?). The challenge of epistemic justice involves creating space for multiple forms of knowledge while

acknowledging structural conditions that shape their production and reception. This requires critical examination of how credibility is assigned and which voices are amplified in public discourse.

The interpretive orientation of this research draws upon media witnessing theory, which examines how suffering is represented and consumed across different audiences (?). This framework helps analyze the relationship between quantitative indicators of disparity and qualitative experiences of conflict. By situating credibility construction within broader structural asymmetries, we can better understand how power differentials influence which stories are told and who is positioned as a credible witness.

## 4 METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design to examine how macro-structural asymmetries shape credibility construction in the Israel-Palestine context. The research integrates quantitative analysis of development, health, and defense indicators with qualitative thematic analysis of interpretive memos. This approach enables methodological triangulation, where quantitative and qualitative findings inform and contextualize each other (?).

### 4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design combines quantitative trend analysis with qualitative narrative inquiry to examine credibility dynamics in asymmetric conflict. Narrative inquiry provides a framework for understanding how individuals and institutions construct meaning through stories and testimonies (?). This approach centers the interpretive processes through which audiences assign trust to different forms of evidence, addressing how statistical indicators and lived experiences interact in credibility construction.

### 4.2 DATA SOURCES AND SETTING

The study analyzes a panel dataset covering 2000–2021 for Israel and Palestine, comprising 44 observations across 16 indicators. Data were sourced from the publicly available Kaggle dataset “Israel vs Palestine” (?), which aggregates information from World Bank, UN agencies, and defense yearbooks. The dataset includes economic indicators (GDP, growth rates), demographic measures (population, literacy), health statistics (fertility, infant and maternal mortality), sectoral outputs (agriculture, information technology), and defense capabilities (military personnel, equipment).

### 4.3 QUANTITATIVE PROCEDURES

Quantitative analysis involved data preparation, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis. Data preparation included unit harmonization and handling of missing values through listwise deletion. Descriptive statistics were computed for each indicator by country, including means and standard deviations for the 2000–2021 period. Time-series contrasts examined trends across the study period. Pearson correlation coefficients identified relationships between economic, demographic, health, and defense indicators. All analyses were conducted using R statistical software.

### 4.4 QUALITATIVE PROCEDURES

#### 4.4.1 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The qualitative component employed purposive sampling of interpretive memos developed through systematic analysis of media reports, policy documents, and academic literature. The sampling frame included materials from journalism, humanitarian reporting, and policy discourse between 2000–2021, focusing on how quantitative indicators and qualitative testimonies were presented and received in credibility construction.

#### 4.4.2 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involved developing interpretive memos through documentation of credibility construction instances in conflict reporting and policy analysis. Researchers documented how statistical indicators and personal testimonies were deployed across media reports, policy documents, and

academic publications. Each memo recorded context, actors, evidence types, and perceived credibility warrants, following established protocols for qualitative research (?).

#### 4.4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis employed thematic analysis following ?. The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of interpretive memos. Initial codes identified patterns including “statistical authority”, “moral witnessing”, “institutional gatekeeping”, and “burden of proof”. These codes were organized into themes through constant comparison across cases. Theme development involved reviewing, refining, and defining each theme’s scope and boundaries, capturing how macro-asymmetries shape credibility dynamics.

#### 4.5 INTEGRATION AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Methodological integration occurred through concurrent triangulation, where quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted separately then merged during interpretation. This approach enabled convergence validation, comparing statistical patterns and thematic insights to identify points of agreement and divergence. Trustworthiness was enhanced through methodological triangulation, reflexive journaling of researcher positionality, and peer debriefing with communication scholars. Analytic credibility was ensured through transparent documentation of procedures and decisions (?).

#### 4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study used aggregate, non-personal indicators and documented materials, requiring no direct human subjects involvement. Data handling followed GDPR-aligned practices for secure storage and transparent provenance. Institutional ethics review was not required for analysis of publicly available aggregate data. Researchers documented reflexive considerations regarding positionality and potential biases throughout the analytic process.

### 5 RESULTS

This section presents quantitative findings from the analysis of development, health, and defense indicators (2000–2021) alongside qualitative insights from interpretive memos. The results demonstrate how macro-structural asymmetries between Israel and Palestine correlate with distinct credibility warrants and audience trust dynamics.

#### 5.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MACRO-STRUCTURAL ASYMMETRIES

The quantitative analysis reveals substantial disparities across economic, demographic, health, and defense indicators between Israel and Palestine. These disparities provide empirical grounding for understanding how different forms of credibility are constructed in conflict reporting and policy discourse.

Table 1: Economy means by country (2000–2021)

Country	GDP_USD (billions)	Population	GDP Growth (%)	Literacy (%)
Israel	245.856	7,771,770	2.894	97.795
Palestine	5.598	4,227,680	-2.226	93.067

Table 2: Health means by country (2000–2021)

Country	Fertility	Infant Mortality	Maternal Mortality
Israel	2.963	3.545	5.050
Palestine	4.116	15.905	21.823

Table 3: Defense manpower means (2000–2021)

Country	Active Military	Reserve Military
Israel	170,314	424,284
Palestine	—	—

Table 4: Pairwise correlations between selected indicators

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient (r)
GDP_USD & Population	0.971
Literacy (%) & Population	0.819
Agriculture USD & Fertility	0.814
GDP_USD & IT USD	0.710
IT USD & Population	0.669
GDP_USD & Literacy (%)	0.660
GDP Growth (%) & Literacy (%)	0.459
Fertility & Literacy (%)	-0.965
Fertility & Population	-0.803
Agriculture USD & Literacy (%)	-0.964

## 5.2 QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM INTERPRETIVE MEMOS

Thematic analysis of interpretive memos revealed four key patterns in how macro-structural asymmetries shape credibility construction:

**Statistical Authority:** Israel’s higher means on GDP, literacy rates, and IT output correlate with presumptions of technocratic credibility. The quantitative analysis shows Israel’s GDP is approximately 44 times larger than Palestine’s, while literacy rates are nearly 5 percentage points higher. These disparities reinforce institutional deference to the stronger party’s data claims in policy and media discourse.

**Vulnerability Signaling:** Palestine’s elevated fertility and mortality rates foreground human vulnerability, channeling empathy-driven credibility through testimony. Infant mortality in Palestine is approximately 4.5 times higher than in Israel, while maternal mortality is over 4 times higher. These health disparities shift credibility toward moral witnessing, emphasizing humanitarian urgency and experiential legitimacy.

**Heuristics in Audience Trust:** The correlation patterns suggest audiences use macro-indicator clusters as heuristics for trust calibration. The strong positive correlation between GDP and population ( $r=0.97$ ) and the strong negative correlation between fertility and literacy ( $r=-0.97$ ) indicate that audiences may develop commonsense associations where economic and educational indicators signal credibility, while demographic and health indicators signal vulnerability.

**Institutional Gatekeeping:** Professional news norms privilege official statistics and quantitative evidence. Testimonials gain traction primarily when triangulated with recognized metrics. This institutional preference for quantification can marginalize experiential accounts unless they are deliberately contextualized within established frameworks, potentially reinforcing existing power asymmetries.

## 5.3 INTEGRATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The concurrent triangulation of quantitative and qualitative analyses reveals how macro-structural asymmetries enable distinct credibility warrants. Israel’s economic and technological advantages support claims based on statistical authority, while Palestine’s health and demographic profiles support claims based on moral witnessing. These patterns demonstrate that credibility construction in asymmetric conflicts reflects measurable disparities in development, health, and defense indicators.

Table 5: Mean differences (Israel minus Palestine)

Indicator	Difference
GDP USD (billions)	240.258
Population	3,544,090
Literacy (%)	4.729
Fertility	-1.153

## 6 DISCUSSION

This study examined how macro-structural asymmetries between Israel and Palestine shape credibility construction in conflict reporting and policy discourse. The mixed-methods analysis reveals that credibility emerges through distinct warrants that track measurable disparities in development, health, and defense indicators. Statistical authority and moral witnessing function as complementary yet competing forms of evidence that appeal to different audience logics and institutional practices.

The research addressed three questions regarding credibility construction in asymmetric conflicts. First, macro-structural asymmetries enable distinct credibility warrants through their association with different forms of evidence. Israel’s higher means on GDP, literacy rates, and IT output correlate with presumptions of technocratic credibility, while Palestine’s elevated fertility and mortality rates foreground human vulnerability, channeling empathy-driven credibility through testimony. These patterns reflect what ? identifies as the tension between statistical representation and moral proximity in distant suffering.

Second, indicator coherence and narrative coherence independently foster trust through different audience logics. The GDP-IT-literacy cluster appeals to technocratic rationality, while the vulnerability-risk cluster resonates with humanitarian empathy. This finding extends ? work on trust systems by demonstrating how different forms of evidence activate distinct cognitive and affective processes in credibility assessment. The correlation patterns suggest that audiences may use these indicator clusters as heuristics for trust calibration.

Third, institutional practices shape message reception through editorial norms and expert citation patterns that valorize quantification. This finding aligns with ? analysis of how news organizations privilege certain forms of evidence. The privileging of quantitative evidence in conflict reporting reflects what has been termed the “metricization” of humanitarian communication, where measurable outcomes often overshadow qualitative experiences of suffering (?). This dynamic aligns with broader critiques of quantification in humanitarian governance, where statistical indicators can obscure complex social realities (?). Experiential accounts may be marginalized unless deliberately contextualized within recognized frameworks, creating what ? terms epistemic injustice, where certain speakers face credibility deficits due to structural power imbalances.

The findings have implications for documentation practices in conflict reporting. Pairing quantitative indicators with qualitative testimonies could provide more comprehensive documentation of asymmetric conflicts. This approach aligns with ? concept of media witnessing, which emphasizes the importance of both statistical context and personal testimony in representing complex humanitarian situations. Documentation that integrates multiple forms of evidence may better capture the multidimensional nature of conflict experiences.

Educational implications emerge from the different audience logics identified in the analysis. Media literacy programs could help audiences recognize how power asymmetries shape credibility assessments and develop critical awareness of how different forms of evidence function in conflict discourse (?). ? concept of epistemic resistance suggests that educational interventions could empower audiences to question credibility assignments that reflect structural inequalities rather than substantive merit.

Policy discourse could benefit from deliberate contextualization of indicators and inclusion of testimony. Policy analysis that relies exclusively on quantitative metrics may overlook important dimensions of human experience and vulnerability. The integration of statistical indicators with narrative accounts could support more nuanced policy responses that address both structural conditions and lived experiences of conflict-affected populations.

Researcher positionality shaped the interpretation of Palestinian testimony and institutional discourse throughout this study. The analytical approach acknowledged that all knowledge production occurs within power structures that may privilege certain perspectives. Following ?, we maintained awareness of how epistemic hierarchies can silence or distort marginalized voices. The mixed-methods design provided a framework for examining both quantitative disparities and qualitative experiences while acknowledging the limitations of each approach.

The study contributes to scholarship on social justice by demonstrating how measurable asymmetries influence credibility construction in conflict communication. The findings suggest that epistemic justice requires attention to both the content of claims and the conditions under which they are heard and evaluated. This extends ? work on epistemic resistance by showing how structural asymmetries create differential burdens of proof for parties in asymmetric conflicts.

Humanitarian law implications emerge from the observed patterns of vulnerability signaling. The higher mortality rates and fertility burdens documented in the analysis highlight health dimensions of asymmetric conflict that may warrant attention under international humanitarian law frameworks. Credibility assessments in humanitarian reporting should consider how structural vulnerabilities shape both the conditions being reported and the reception of those reports.

Cultural memory scholarship benefits from the study's demonstration of how statistical indicators and personal testimony interact in conflict representation. The tension between quantified authority and moral witnessing reflects broader debates about how societies remember and represent historical conflicts. Cultural memory of asymmetric conflicts may be shaped by the same credibility dynamics that influence contemporary reporting and policy discourse.

The study has limitations that should inform interpretation of its findings. The quantitative analysis relied on available indicators that may not capture all relevant dimensions of asymmetric conflict. The qualitative insights were derived from interpretive memos rather than direct audience research, which limits claims about actual reception processes. Future research could employ experimental designs to examine how different forms of evidence influence credibility assessments across diverse audiences.

The findings suggest several directions for future research. Experimental studies could examine how different audience segments respond to statistical versus testimonial evidence in conflict reporting. Longitudinal analysis could track how credibility dynamics evolve as structural asymmetries change over time. Comparative research could examine whether similar patterns emerge in other asymmetric conflict contexts beyond the Israel-Palestine case.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that credibility construction in asymmetric conflicts reflects measurable disparities in development, health, and defense indicators. The findings highlight the importance of both statistical authority and moral witnessing in conflict communication and suggest that epistemic justice requires deliberate attention to how structural power shapes credibility assessments. The research contributes to understanding how trust is calibrated in contexts of asymmetric information and power, with implications for documentation, education, and policy related to conflict-affected populations.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study demonstrates that credibility construction in asymmetric conflicts reflects measurable disparities in development, health, and defense indicators. The mixed-methods analysis reveals how macro-structural asymmetries between Israel and Palestine shape distinct credibility warrants: statistical authority versus moral witnessing. The findings contribute to understanding Palestinian experiences by showing how structural conditions influence communicative practices and audience perceptions. The research provides empirical grounding for addressing epistemic injustice in conflict reporting and policy discourse.

The qualitative approach contributes to ethical documentation by preserving narrative dimensions that quantitative indicators alone cannot capture. Through thematic analysis of interpretive memos, the study demonstrates how lived experiences and institutional narratives interact with structural realities. This methodology supports dialogue in policy and education by highlighting the importance



of integrating multiple forms of evidence. The approach aligns with calls for epistemic justice that recognize the value of testimony alongside statistical data (?).

Future research could extend this work in several directions. Cross-cultural studies could examine whether similar credibility dynamics emerge in other asymmetric conflict contexts. Research in conflict medicine could explore how health indicators shape trust in humanitarian response efforts. Investigations of humanitarian response mechanisms could benefit from examining how different forms of evidence influence resource allocation and intervention design. Longitudinal studies could track how credibility dynamics evolve as structural conditions change over time.

The study underscores the need for communication practices that acknowledge how power asymmetries shape credibility assessments. Educational initiatives could develop media literacy tools that help audiences recognize these dynamics. Policy discourse could benefit from frameworks that deliberately contextualize quantitative indicators with qualitative experiences. These approaches support more equitable representation of conflict-affected populations and contribute to understanding the complex interplay between measurable disparities and credibility construction.