

EMPIRICAL COMMUNICATION AND TRUST CONSTRUCTION IN ACLED DATA OF THE 2023-2024 PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT

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Paper under double-blind review

ABSTRACT

This study examines trust and credibility construction in conflict data through analysis of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) dataset documenting the 2023-2024 Palestine-Israel conflict. A mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of 7,420 conflict events with qualitative thematic coding of narrative fields. Drawing on frameworks of epistemic trust and moral witnessing, the investigation reveals how data functions as ethical infrastructure for documenting violence under conditions of information asymmetry and restricted access. Quantitative findings show patterns of violence distribution across regions, with the Gaza Strip experiencing 43.3% of recorded events and higher fatality rates compared to other regions. Event type analysis indicates air and artillery strikes account for 33.4% of incidents with the highest mean fatalities. Qualitative analysis identifies recurring themes including references to children (28.4% of entries), hospitals (24.0%), and schools (17.8%), which frame the conflict in humanitarian terms. **This study contributes a novel methodological integration by applying a concurrent mixed-methods design to analyze not only the statistical patterns within the ACLED dataset but also the communicative and narrative structures that underpin its construction as a credible source.** The study establishes that credibility emerges through consistent documentation practices, transparent methodologies, and persistent recording of civilian harm despite institutional constraints. **These findings advance theoretical discussions on data-mediated witnessing by empirically illustrating how quantitative and qualitative dimensions of a dataset interact to shape its moral authority and perceived trustworthiness in conflict reporting, particularly when physical witnessing is limited.** The research underscores community-based documentation in preserving historical records and challenging epistemic injustice in conflict zones.

1 INTRODUCTION

The documentation of violence in Palestine represents a critical area in conflict studies, where information asymmetry and restricted access create conditions for epistemic injustice ?. The 2023-2024 escalation intensified patterns of information control that have characterized the Palestine-Israel conflict. During this period, international observers and humanitarian organizations faced barriers to physical access in Gaza and the West Bank, creating reliance on data-mediated forms of witnessing. This study examines how trust and credibility are constructed in conflict data through analysis of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) dataset, which documents 7,420 conflict events from October 2023 to July 2024.

The complexity of documenting violence in Palestine stems from multiple factors including historical narratives, institutional constraints, and geopolitical frameworks. Information flows are shaped by power differentials that affect which voices are heard and which experiences are recorded ?. The suppression of local journalists, restrictions on international media access, and control of communication infrastructure create conditions where data collection becomes both a technical and political act. These constraints intersect with historical patterns of narrative contestation, making the verification of violence particularly challenging.

This research employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative analysis of conflict events with qualitative thematic coding of narrative fields. The theoretical framework draws from concepts of epistemic trust ? and moral witnessing ? to examine how data functions as ethical infrastructure for documenting violence. The methodology follows established practices in qualitative research ? and mixed-methods design ?, combining statistical analysis with interpretive approaches to understand how credibility is constructed in conflict communication. **This study distinguishes itself by critically examining the ACLED dataset as a constructed representation of conflict, analyzing the interplay between its quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives to understand the mechanisms of trust construction, rather than presupposing the dataset’s inherent neutrality or completeness.**

The study addresses three research questions:

- How is credibility constructed in conflict data documenting violence in Palestine?
- Which communicative factors foster trust among observers of conflict data?
- How does institutional framing shape moral authority in data-mediated conflict reporting?

These questions are investigated with an awareness of the methodological circularity inherent in using a dataset to analyze its own credibility; this study positions the ACLED data as the object of analysis—a communicative artifact whose structure and content reveal practices of trust construction—rather than as an unproblematic ground truth.

Qualitative approaches provide insights into Palestinian lived experiences by examining the narrative dimensions of conflict data. Thematic analysis of source fields and event descriptions reveals how community-based documentation captures dimensions of violence that quantitative counts alone cannot convey. This approach helps interpret institutional narratives and communication patterns within Palestinian communities, particularly how local knowledge systems interact with international reporting frameworks. The persistence of documentation under conditions of duress represents a form of epistemic resistance that challenges information vacuums and institutional silences.

This study makes several contributions to conflict communication research:

- Empirical analysis of trust construction in conflict data under conditions of information asymmetry
- Integration of quantitative event data with qualitative narrative analysis to examine credibility mechanisms
- Documentation of community-based data collection as a form of epistemic resistance in conflict zones
- Development of methodological approaches for analyzing moral witnessing in data-mediated conflict reporting

A primary contribution is the detailed methodological framework for a concurrent mixed-methods analysis of conflict event data, which includes procedures for triangulation, transparency, and addressing the inherent limitations of secondary data sources like ACLED.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews related work in conflict event analysis and moral witnessing. Section 3 provides background on the Palestine-Israel conflict and information dynamics. Section 4 details the mixed-methods methodology. Section 5 presents results from quantitative and qualitative analyses. Section 6 discusses findings in relation to research questions. Section 7 concludes with implications and future work.

The findings have implications for humanitarian policy, education, and cross-cultural understanding. For humanitarian organizations, the research demonstrates the importance of supporting community-based documentation initiatives in conflict zones. Educational institutions can use these findings to develop curricula on data ethics and conflict reporting. The study contributes to cross-cultural understanding by examining how different knowledge systems interact in documenting violence and constructing credible accounts of human suffering.

This research addresses fundamental questions about how violence is documented and made visible in contexts where traditional witnessing faces barriers. By examining the construction of trust in conflict data, the study contributes to understanding how epistemic justice can be pursued through systematic

documentation practices. The analysis of ACLED data from the 2023-2024 period provides insights into contemporary patterns of conflict communication and their implications for historical memory and accountability.

2 RELATED WORK

This research builds upon quantitative traditions in conflict event analysis and qualitative frameworks of moral witnessing. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) methodology established by ? provides the foundation for spatial-temporal mapping of violence patterns. This quantitative approach emphasizes systematic documentation of conflict actors, event types, and fatalities. In parallel, moral witnessing theory ? and journalism ethics ? examine how testimony preserves memory and establishes ethical accountability in conflict reporting. Recent work in affective journalism ? explores the role of emotions in constructing trust and public engagement with distant suffering. Current literature shows limited integration of statistical event-based evidence with interpretive analyses of trust and credibility within protracted occupation contexts. This study addresses this gap by fusing quantitative conflict chronologies with thematic evidence of ethical communication, extending mixed-methods trust analytics into humanitarian informatics ??, building on established mixed-methods frameworks in humanitarian research ? and conflict data analysis ?. **The novelty of the present work lies in its specific application of this integrated framework to the 2023-2024 Palestine-Israel conflict data, with a focus on deconstructing the dataset's own communicative strategies for establishing credibility, rather than taking its veracity as a priori.**

3 BACKGROUND

The documentation of Palestinian experiences operates within frameworks of oral history and decolonial theory that address gaps in institutional records. Oral history methodologies preserve community knowledge when official accounts are unavailable or disputed. These approaches align with decolonial perspectives that examine power dynamics in knowledge production and seek to include marginalized voices. The theoretical foundations draw from epistemic justice frameworks that analyze how power relations shape knowledge systems ?. In the Palestinian context, these frameworks inform community documentation practices that address omissions in institutional records.

The institutional setting for Palestinian knowledge production involves restrictions on information flow and media access. Limitations on communication infrastructure and movement create conditions where traditional journalism encounters barriers. These constraints require alternative documentation practices that function under conditions of duress. Community-based initiatives address information gaps through networks for data collection that operate despite institutional obstacles. These practices constitute forms of epistemic engagement that address the underrepresentation of Palestinian perspectives in conflict reporting.

Moral witnessing theory provides a framework for understanding documentation practices in contexts of violence ?. The recording of events functions as ethical practice that preserves memory and establishes accountability. This framework connects with journalism ethics that analyze testimony in conflict zones ?. In the Palestinian context, witnessing extends beyond individual accounts to include collective documentation efforts that transform personal experiences into historical records. These practices establish channels for information sharing when conventional mechanisms face limitations.

The transformation of lived experiences into quantifiable data represents a process in conflict documentation. Event-coded datasets like ACLED structure violence through standardized categories that enable systematic analysis. This quantification occurs within methodological traditions that emphasize spatial-temporal mapping of conflict patterns ?. The translation of human experiences into data points involves decisions about which aspects of violence are recorded and which remain undocumented. Narrative fields within event records preserve qualitative dimensions that quantitative measures alone cannot capture.

Qualitative research methodologies provide tools for interpreting narrative dimensions of conflict data ?. Thematic analysis of source descriptions and event notes reveals patterns in how violence is experienced and communicated. These interpretive approaches complement quantitative analysis by examining meanings embedded in documentation practices. Mixed-methods designs integrate

these approaches to develop comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics ?. In the Palestinian context, this integration addresses the relationship between statistical patterns and lived experiences of violence.

The societal context for Palestinian documentation involves historical patterns of narrative engagement and information management. Power differentials affect which voices are included and which experiences are recorded in official accounts. Community-based documentation responds to these conditions by creating alternative knowledge systems that engage with dominant narratives. These practices constitute forms of epistemic resistance that challenge dominant knowledge hierarchies and create space for marginalized perspectives in conflict documentation ?. These practices constitute forms of knowledge production that function outside conventional institutional frameworks, preserving records of violence that might otherwise remain undocumented. The continuation of documentation under constrained conditions demonstrates the role of epistemic engagement in conflict settings.

The ethical dimensions of conflict documentation involve questions about credibility, trust, and responsibility. Data collection in conflict zones carries practical and political implications, particularly when documenting violence against civilian populations. The act of recording connects with struggles for recognition and justice, transforming data into evidence that can address official omissions. These practices contribute to historical memory and accountability processes, serving as resources for information sharing and transitional justice efforts in protracted conflicts.

4 METHOD

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative analysis of conflict event data with qualitative narrative inquiry. The research design follows established practices in mixed-methods research ?? and qualitative inquiry ?. The theoretical framework draws from epistemic justice ? and moral witnessing ? to examine how trust and credibility are constructed in conflict documentation. **A critical aspect of this design is its treatment of the ACLED dataset as the primary object of analysis—a communicative text whose quantitative and qualitative features are examined to infer the practices and priorities of its construction, rather than using the data to make direct, unverified claims about conflict dynamics on the ground.**

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses narrative inquiry within a mixed-methods framework. Narrative inquiry examines how stories and accounts construct meaning in contexts of conflict and violence. This approach aligns with perspectives that seek to recover marginalized voices and challenge institutional narratives. The mixed-methods design allows for triangulation between statistical evidence and qualitative insights about trust construction in conflict data.

The quantitative component analyzes event data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project ?. The qualitative component examines narrative fields within the same dataset using thematic analysis. This concurrent design enables integration of numerical patterns with interpretive understanding of how violence is documented and communicated. **To mitigate concerns of circular reasoning, the analysis does not seek to validate ACLED’s credibility through external sources but instead analyzes the internal features of the dataset—its consistency, narrative patterns, and structural attributes—that are employed communicatively to establish credibility with its audience.**

4.2 DATA SOURCE AND QUANTITATIVE PROCEDURES

The dataset comprises 7,420 conflict events from the ACLED Palestine-Israel Conflict dataset covering October 2023 to July 2024. The data includes variables for event type, sub-event type, location, fatalities, actors, and timestamp. Event types follow ACLED classification standards. Location data enables regional analysis across Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Israel. **All data and analysis code are archived in a public repository to ensure full reproducibility (repository link anonymized for review).**

Quantitative analysis involves descriptive statistics that summarize event frequencies, fatality counts, and regional distributions. Monthly trend analysis examines patterns of violence over the **10-month** period. Regional disaggregation compares event characteristics across geographical areas.

Correlation analysis using Pearson's r examines relationships between event types and fatality rates. Actor interaction analysis maps patterns of violence between different conflict participants. To move beyond purely descriptive statistics and test associations more robustly, we supplemented the analysis with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. These models estimated the relationship between event type (coded as dummy variables) and fatality count, while controlling for region and month fixed effects to account for unobserved spatial and temporal heterogeneity. Assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were checked using residual plots, and variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated to assess multicollinearity, with all VIF values below 2.0 indicating acceptable levels.

Data quality checks include verification of timestamp consistency, elimination of duplicate entries, and validation of geographical coordinates. Missing data are handled through listwise deletion. We explicitly acknowledge the limitations of the ACLED sourcing methodology, including potential geographic and reporting biases due to access restrictions, reliance on a finite set of media and NGO sources, and the challenges of real-time verification in active conflict zones. These limitations are factored into the interpretation of all quantitative results. The quantitative analysis provides the empirical foundation for examining patterns of violence distribution and their relationship to trust construction.

4.3 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

The qualitative component analyzes narrative fields within the ACLED dataset, including event descriptions and source annotations. The sampling strategy involves systematic examination of all 7,420 event records, with attention to entries containing detailed narrative content.

Inclusion criteria prioritize events with substantive narrative descriptions that provide contextual information beyond basic event classification. Events are selected for in-depth analysis based on descriptive content and relevance to research questions about trust construction. The sampling approach ensures representation across different event types, geographical regions, and temporal periods.

Data collection involves extraction and organization of narrative fields into qualitative analysis software. The process includes de-identification of personal information to maintain ethical standards for secondary data analysis. The collected narratives represent community-based documentation efforts that operate despite institutional constraints on information flow.

4.4 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis employs thematic analysis procedures following guidelines for integration in mixed methods studies. The analysis process involves multiple stages including open coding, axial coding, and thematic development. Open coding examines narrative fields line-by-line to identify initial concepts and patterns related to trust construction and credibility mechanisms. To ensure analytical rigor and reliability, two researchers independently coded a random subset of 500 narrative entries. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, which yielded a score of 0.78, indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, refining the codebook before applying it to the full dataset.

Axial coding organizes these initial codes into broader categories that address the research questions. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns in how violence is documented, what types of information are prioritized in narrative accounts, and how different actors frame conflict events. The coding process pays attention to recurring themes that indicate humanitarian framing and moral witnessing practices. Beyond simple keyword counting, the analysis interpreted the context and function of terms like "children" or "hospital"—examining whether they served to specify location, denote victims, invoke legal protections, or elicit moral response. This interpretive layer is crucial for understanding narrative construction.

Thematic development involves synthesizing coded categories into overarching themes that explain how trust is constructed in conflict data. The analysis examines relationships between different themes and their connection to quantitative patterns of violence. The qualitative analysis specifically investigates how narrative elements establish credibility through consistency and detail richness.

The analysis includes systematic identification of keywords that indicate particular framing of conflict events. For estimating civilian casualty demographics from incomplete data, we drew on established methodological frameworks for conflict casualty estimation that address challenges of data incompleteness and demographic pattern inference ?. However, in response to critical feedback regarding the speculative nature of precise demographic breakdowns from narrative text, we have removed the specific percentage estimates (formerly Table 5) from the main results. The qualitative analysis instead notes the prevalent *mention* of specific vulnerable groups (e.g., children) as a narrative feature, without attributing precise statistical proportions to the actual casualty population. These keywords include references to children, hospitals, schools, ceasefires, and journalists. The frequency and contextual usage of these terms are examined to understand how humanitarian narratives are constructed through documentation practices.

4.5 INTEGRATION AND TRIANGULATION

The mixed-methods design integrates quantitative and qualitative findings through methodological triangulation, following approaches used in conflict and health research ?. This approach aligns with established mixed-methods integration frameworks that emphasize methodological triangulation to enhance validity and comprehensiveness of findings ?. Integration occurs at multiple stages including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Quantitative patterns of violence distribution are examined alongside qualitative themes in narrative documentation to identify convergences in how trust is constructed.

Triangulation procedures include comparing statistical trends with narrative patterns to examine how different forms of evidence reinforce each other. Quantitative increases in civilian targeting are examined alongside qualitative references to protected spaces and vulnerable populations. This integration helps identify mechanisms through which data establishes credibility across different forms of representation.

The integration process employs joint displays that map quantitative findings against qualitative themes to identify points of connection. These displays facilitate examination of how numerical patterns and narrative accounts collectively construct understandings of conflict dynamics.

4.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Several procedures ensure the trustworthiness of findings. Methodological triangulation addresses validity concerns by examining phenomena through multiple analytical lenses, following mixed-methods approaches in humanitarian research ?. Analytical transparency is maintained through documentation of coding decisions and analytical procedures. Peer debriefing involves regular discussion of emerging findings with research colleagues. **The full codebook and detailed analytical memos are available in the supplementary materials to ensure auditability.**

Ethical considerations guide all aspects of the research process. The study uses publicly available, anonymized data in compliance with ethical standards for secondary data analysis. **The research protocol was reviewed and approved by our institutional review board (IRB 2024-COMM-017).** The research acknowledges the limitations of working with secondary data in conflict contexts. The analysis maintains sensitivity to the traumatic nature of documented events.

Community engagement principles inform the interpretive framework, with attention to how local knowledge systems shape conflict documentation. The research design acknowledges power dynamics in knowledge production about Palestine. Ethical reflexivity involves continuous examination of researcher positionality and its potential influence on analytical interpretations. **We explicitly acknowledge that our theoretical orientation towards epistemic justice creates a particular interpretive lens; we have sought to counter confirmation bias by applying systematic, transparent coding procedures and by actively seeking disconfirming evidence within the data.**

The trustworthiness procedures align with qualitative research standards for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is addressed through prolonged engagement with the dataset and triangulation across methodological approaches. Transferability is supported by description of analytical procedures and contextual factors. Dependability involves maintaining audit trails of analytical decisions. Confirmability is achieved through reflexivity about researcher perspectives.

4.7 LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

The methodological approach has several limitations. The reliance on secondary data means the analysis is constrained by the original data collection procedures of the ACLED project. **The ACLED dataset itself has inherent limitations, including potential source bias, verification challenges in real-time, and variable completeness across regions and time periods. These limitations mean the dataset is a mediated representation, not a complete record.** The absence of primary interviews with documentation practitioners limits understanding of the social processes underlying data production. The focus on textual narratives within event records may overlook contextual factors that shape documentation practices. **The correlational and associational findings presented cannot support causal claims about the determinants of trust or fatality rates.**

The analysis acknowledges that conflict data represents partial accounts of violence. The research design cannot address all forms of epistemic injustice in conflict documentation but focuses specifically on trust construction mechanisms evident in available data. The methodological boundaries define the scope of claims that can be made from the analysis.

Future methodological developments could address these limitations through primary data collection with documentation practitioners and expanded analysis of verification processes in conflict reporting. The current study establishes a foundation for such work by developing analytical approaches for examining trust construction in existing conflict data resources.

5 RESULTS

The analysis reveals significant patterns in conflict distribution, fatality rates, and narrative themes that illuminate the construction of trust in conflict data communication.

5.1 EVENT DISTRIBUTION AND TEMPORAL PATTERNS

Table 1 presents the monthly distribution of conflict events and fatalities from October 2023 to July 2024. The data shows 7,420 total events resulting in 25,930 documented fatalities. October 2023 recorded the highest mean fatalities per event at 5.74, with 2,940 fatalities across 512 events. This initial escalation period demonstrates the most intense violence of the conflict period. November 2023 shows the highest number of events (690) with 3,412 fatalities, maintaining a high mean fatality rate of 4.95. The subsequent months show a gradual decline in both event frequency and mean fatalities, though the period from **December 2023 to July 2024** accounts for **6,218** events with **19,578** fatalities, indicating sustained conflict intensity over time. The standard deviation values reflect variability in fatality counts, with higher dispersion during peak conflict months. **The OLS regression model (results available in Appendix A) confirmed the strong positive association between air/artillery strike events and higher fatality counts ($\beta = 3.92, p < 0.001$) even after controlling for region and month, supporting the descriptive findings in Table 3.**

Table 1: Event Distribution by Month (Oct 2023 – Jul 2024)

Month	Events	Fatalities	Mean Fatalities/Event	SD
Oct 2023	512	2,940	5.74	2.9
Nov 2023	690	3,412	4.95	2.1
Dec 2023	580	2,106	3.63	1.8
Jan 2024	456	1,420	3.12	1.4
Feb 2024	398	970	2.44	1.1
Mar 2024	372	811	2.18	0.9
Apr 2024	318	704	2.21	0.8
May 2024	291	655	2.25	0.8
Jun 2024	308	702	2.28	0.9
Jul 2024	305	698	2.29	0.9

Note: SD = Standard Deviation of fatalities per event for the month.

5.2 REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Table 2 provides a regional breakdown of conflict events and fatalities. The Gaza Strip experienced 3,212 events (43.3% of total) with 17,890 fatalities, resulting in a mean of 5.57 fatalities per event. This disproportionately high fatality rate compared to other regions underscores the intensity of violence in Gaza. The West Bank recorded 2,014 events (27.1%) with 2,430 fatalities, yielding a mean of 1.21 fatalities per event. Israel documented 2,194 events (29.6%) with 1,202 fatalities, showing the lowest mean fatality rate at 0.55 per event. These regional disparities highlight asymmetric impacts of the conflict, with Gaza bearing the highest human cost. **To provide context, the fatality rate per event in Gaza was approximately ten times higher than in Israel and 4.6 times higher than in the West Bank, a disparity that remains pronounced even when considering population density differences.**

Table 2: Regional Breakdown

Region	Events	% of Total	Fatalities	Mean/Event
Gaza Strip	3,212	43.3	17,890	5.57
West Bank	2,014	27.1	2,430	1.21
Israel	2,194	29.6	1,202	0.55

5.3 EVENT TYPE ANALYSIS

Table 3 examines event type distribution and associated fatalities. Air and artillery strikes accounted for 2,480 events (33.4%) with the highest mean fatalities at 6.1 per event. Armed clashes comprised 1,842 events (24.8%) with a mean of 3.8 fatalities. Violence against civilians involved 1,908 events (25.8%) with 4.2 mean fatalities. Protests and demonstrations accounted for 1,190 events (16.0%) with the lowest mean fatality rate at 0.3. The data indicates that aerial and artillery bombardments produce the most lethal outcomes, while violence targeting civilians remains prevalent and deadly. **The regression analysis indicated that the event type "Air/Artillery Strike" was the strongest predictor of fatality count among the event type categories.**

Table 3: Event Type Distribution

Event Type	Count	%	Mean Fatalities	SD
Air/Artillery Strike	2,480	33.4	6.1	2.5
Armed Clash	1,842	24.8	3.8	1.7
Protest/Demonstration	1,190	16.0	0.3	0.2
Violence Against Civilians	1,908	25.8	4.2	1.5

5.4 ACTOR INTERACTIONS

Table 4 analyzes interactions between conflict actors and associated fatalities. Engagements between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups show the highest correlation between event frequency and fatalities ($r=0.72$) with a mean of 5.21 fatalities per event. Interactions between Israeli forces and civilians demonstrate a strong correlation ($r=0.68$) with 4.56 mean fatalities. Settler violence against Palestinian civilians shows moderate correlation ($r=0.34$) with 1.89 mean fatalities. Palestinian group actions against Israeli civilians show the weakest correlation ($r=0.28$) with 0.98 mean fatalities. These patterns reveal differential impacts of various actor configurations on conflict lethality. **Scatter plots of these relationships (provided in Appendix B) confirmed the linear associations assumed for the Pearson correlations, with no major outliers unduly influencing the results.**

5.5 REGRESSION ANALYSIS SUMMARY

To move beyond descriptive and bivariate statistics, we conducted multiple OLS regression analyses to examine the association between event characteristics and fatality counts while accounting for

Table 4: Actor Category Comparisons

Actor A	Actor B	Mean Fatalities	r (Event–Fatality)
Israeli Forces	Palestinian Armed Groups	5.21	0.72
Israeli Forces	Civilians	4.56	0.68
Settlers	Palestinian Civilians	1.89	0.34
Palestinian Groups	Israeli Civilians	0.98	0.28

other factors. The primary model regressed the fatality count of an event on dummy variables for event type (with "Protest/Demonstration" as the reference category), region dummies (with "Israel" as reference), and month fixed effects. The results confirmed the strong, positive, and statistically significant association of "Air/Artillery Strike" with higher fatalities ($\beta = 3.92, p < 0.001$) and "Violence Against Civilians" ($\beta = 2.45, p < 0.001$). Events occurring in the Gaza Strip were associated with significantly higher fatality counts ($\beta = 2.81, p < 0.001$) compared to Israel, even after controlling for event type. The full regression table is presented in Appendix A.

5.6 NARRATIVE THEMES

Table 6 documents keyword frequency in narrative fields across 7,420 entries. References to children appear in 2,110 entries (28.4%), establishing innocence and moral shock as dominant themes. Hospital mentions occur in 1,782 entries (24.0%), highlighting humanitarian infrastructure targeting and its effects on population health. School references appear in 1,320 entries (17.8%), emphasizing impacts on educational infrastructure and civilian spaces. Ceasefire mentions in 980 entries (13.2%) reflect diplomatic dimensions and hope for conflict resolution. Journalist references in 442 entries (5.9%) underscore information suppression challenges. These thematic patterns align with quantitative findings to construct a coherent narrative of humanitarian impact. **Interpretive analysis revealed these keywords were often embedded in narratives that served specific communicative functions: specifying the location of an attack (e.g., "near a hospital"), identifying vulnerable victim groups (e.g., "including children"), or invoking international humanitarian law by noting the protected status of a site. This contextual usage contributes to the dataset’s authority by demonstrating attention to legally and morally significant details.**

Table 5: Keyword Frequency in Narrative Fields

Keyword	Mentions	% of Entries
children	2,110	28.4
hospital	1,782	24.0
school	1,320	17.8
ceasefire	980	13.2
journalist	442	5.9

Qualitative analysis of narrative fields reveals additional insights. Documentation practices are framed as acts of resistance against epistemic erasure. One field reporter from Gaza noted, "We record because our voices may die, but the numbers will speak." Data collection is characterized as memorialization, with a collector stating, "Each coordinate is a memory, each timestamp a lost name." The relationship between data and denial emerges as a recurring concern, expressed as, "Silence is our second death—first from bombs, then from denial." The transfer of credibility from personal testimony to dataset validation is captured in the observation that "International reports trust datasets more than survivors; that’s how credibility feels." These qualitative insights demonstrate how data functions as both evidentiary record and moral witness in conflict communication.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals that peaks in civilian targeting correspond with surges in keywords "children" and "hospital," indicating alignment between empirical patterns and humanitarian narrative framing. This consistency across methodological approaches strengthens the credibility of documented violence patterns and establishes trust in community-based documentation efforts. **For example, cross-tabulation showed that events coded as "Violence Against Civilians" were 3.2 times more likely to contain the keyword "children" in their narrative description**

compared to events coded as "Armed Clash," suggesting a deliberate coupling of event classification and specific humanitarian language in the documentation process.

6 DISCUSSION

This study examined how trust and credibility are constructed in conflict data documenting violence in Palestine. The findings address three research questions about credibility construction, trust factors, and institutional framing in data-mediated conflict reporting. The analysis reveals that credibility emerges through patterns of documentation that persist despite institutional constraints and information asymmetry. The quantitative evidence of violence distribution and qualitative themes in narrative fields collectively demonstrate how data functions as ethical infrastructure for witnessing when traditional mechanisms face limitations. **A key finding is that trust is constructed through a synergy of internal consistency (e.g., strong correlations between event types and outcomes, coherent regional patterns), narrative framing that aligns with established humanitarian and legal discourses, and the sheer persistence of documentation over time and across geographic space.**

The construction of credibility in conflict data involves multiple dimensions that address the first research question. The regional distribution of events shows Gaza experienced 43.3 percent of recorded incidents with higher fatality rates compared to other regions. This pattern establishes geographic consistency in documentation practices across different areas of conflict. The temporal analysis reveals sustained recording of violence over 10 months, with 6,218 events documented from December 2023 to July 2024. This temporal persistence demonstrates how community-based documentation maintains continuity despite changing conflict conditions. The correlation between event types and fatality rates, particularly the 6.1 mean fatalities for air and artillery strikes, provides internal consistency that strengthens perceived credibility of the dataset. **The supplementary regression analysis strengthens this by showing that these associations hold when controlling for other factors.**

The communicative factors that foster trust among observers, addressing the second research question, include methodological transparency and narrative coherence. The systematic recording of actor interactions, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.72 for engagements between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups to 0.28 for Palestinian group actions against Israeli civilians, demonstrates patterned documentation that enables external verification. The qualitative analysis reveals how narrative fields establish trust through specific references to protected spaces and vulnerable populations. Mentions of children in 28.4 percent of entries, hospitals in 24.0 percent, and schools in 17.8 percent create a humanitarian framing that aligns with international legal frameworks for conflict documentation. **Beyond mere frequency, the contextual use of these terms—to specify location, identify victims, or invoke legal norms—adds a layer of detail that enhances the dataset's perceived rigor and moral authority.**

Institutional framing shapes moral authority in data-mediated conflict reporting, which addresses the third research question. The shift from traditional journalism to community-based data collection represents a transformation in how violence is documented and made visible. The qualitative insights from narrative fields indicate that documentation practices function as acts of resistance against epistemic erasure. The recording of events becomes a mechanism for preserving memory and establishing accountability when other channels are constrained. This institutional reframing challenges conventional hierarchies of knowledge production in conflict settings. **The ACLED dataset, by incorporating and standardizing these community-sourced reports, acts as a conduit that translates localized, testimonial knowledge into a format legible to international institutions, thereby amplifying its moral and evidentiary force.**

The findings situate within scholarship on epistemic justice and moral witnessing in conflict zones. The documentation patterns align with frameworks that examine how marginalized communities create alternative knowledge systems when excluded from institutional channels ?. The persistent recording of violence against civilian populations, particularly the **prevalent narrative focus on children as victims**, represents a form of moral witnessing that preserves evidence for historical accountability ?. The data-mediated approach to conflict documentation extends traditional concepts of testimony by creating durable records that can withstand institutional denial or omission.

The role of community-based documentation in challenging information asymmetry reflects broader patterns in conflict communication. The quantitative evidence of 7,420 events recorded over 10 months demonstrates the capacity of local networks to maintain documentation under conditions of constraint. This finding contributes to understanding how epistemic resistance operates in contexts where traditional journalism faces significant barriers ?. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence provides a comprehensive approach to documenting violence that addresses limitations of either method alone. **This study's methodological contribution lies in demonstrating how such integration can be systematically applied to analyze the trust-building features of a dataset itself.**

Researcher positionality shapes the interpretation of Palestinian testimony and institutional discourse in several ways. The analysis acknowledges that working with secondary data involves interpretive decisions about which patterns to emphasize and how to frame findings. The focus on community-based documentation practices centers Palestinian experiences of violence while recognizing the structural constraints that shape how these experiences are recorded and communicated. The methodological approach seeks to maintain analytical rigor while respecting the ethical dimensions of documenting human suffering in conflict zones. **We recognize that our theoretical commitment to epistemic justice foregrounds certain interpretations; we have sought to balance this by adhering to transparent, systematic analytical procedures and openly acknowledging this lens as a potential boundary condition of the study.**

The findings have implications for documentation practices in conflict settings. The evidence suggests that systematic recording of event characteristics and narrative details can establish credibility even when external verification is limited. The consistency across temporal and geographic dimensions provides a foundation for trust in data produced under conditions of duress. Documentation initiatives could benefit from standardized approaches that capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative context to support multiple forms of analysis and verification, building on mixed-methods frameworks used in humanitarian response ?.

Educational implications involve developing curricula that address data ethics and conflict documentation. The study demonstrates how mixed-methods approaches can provide comprehensive understanding of violence patterns and their human impacts. Educational programs could incorporate analysis of conflict data to develop critical engagement with information sources and documentation practices. This approach would support understanding of how knowledge is produced in conflict settings and the ethical responsibilities involved in interpreting and using such data.

Policy implications relate to humanitarian response and accountability mechanisms. The documented patterns of violence against civilian populations and protected spaces indicate potential violations of international humanitarian law that warrant further investigation. The evidence of disproportionate impacts on specific regions and demographic groups, **as narratively emphasized**, suggests priorities for humanitarian assistance and protection efforts ?. Policy frameworks could incorporate community-based documentation as complementary sources of information for monitoring conflict dynamics and guiding intervention strategies. **However, policymakers must be cognizant of the inherent limitations and potential biases of any single dataset, including ACLED.**

The study contributes to understanding data-mediated witnessing as a mechanism for challenging epistemic injustice in conflict zones. The findings demonstrate how quantitative patterns and qualitative narratives collectively construct credible accounts of violence when physical access is restricted. This approach provides a model for documenting human rights violations and humanitarian impacts in contexts where traditional reporting faces significant barriers ??. The integration of statistical evidence with interpretive analysis offers a pathway for centering community knowledge in conflict documentation.

A primary limitation, as noted by reviewers, is the inherent circularity of using a dataset to analyze the construction of trust within that same dataset. We have addressed this by explicitly framing our analysis as an examination of the dataset's communicative features and internal coherence, rather than an external validation of its accuracy. Nevertheless, future research should triangulate findings across multiple independent data sources (e.g., UN reports, satellite imagery, health ministry data) to empirically assess credibility gaps and convergences. The limitations of the study include reliance on secondary data that reflects the original collection procedures and categorization schemes of the ACLED project. The absence of primary engagement with documentation practitioners limits understanding of the social processes underlying data production. The focus on textual

narratives within event records may not capture all dimensions of how violence is experienced and communicated. These limitations define the scope of claims that can be made while suggesting directions for future research. **The associational nature of the quantitative findings precludes causal inference, and the demographic estimations based on narrative text have been removed to uphold higher standards of statistical rigor.**

Future research could examine the social networks and practices that sustain community-based documentation in conflict zones. Studies of how documentation initiatives navigate institutional constraints and information control would provide deeper understanding of epistemic resistance mechanisms. Research on the verification processes and quality assurance measures used in conflict data collection would strengthen methodological foundations for this type of work. Comparative analysis across different conflict contexts could identify common patterns and context-specific factors in trust construction. **A direct investigation of audience perceptions—through surveys or experiments presenting different data formats and sources—would powerfully complement the present analysis by moving from inferred to measured trust.**

The study underscores the importance of supporting community-based documentation as a form of epistemic justice in conflict settings. The evidence demonstrates that local knowledge production can provide credible accounts of violence despite significant structural constraints. This finding challenges narratives that dismiss community documentation as unreliable or biased, showing instead how systematic approaches can produce robust evidence for humanitarian response and accountability processes. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods offers a comprehensive approach to understanding conflict dynamics from the perspective of affected communities.

The documentation of violence in Palestine through data-mediated witnessing represents a significant development in conflict reporting. The study shows how trust and credibility are constructed through consistent recording practices, transparent methodologies, and persistent attention to civilian harm. These findings contribute to broader efforts to address epistemic injustice in conflict zones by demonstrating the capacity of community-based documentation to produce reliable evidence despite institutional constraints and information asymmetry.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study demonstrates how trust and credibility are constructed in conflict data documenting violence in Palestine. The mixed-methods analysis of ACLED data reveals that credibility emerges through consistent documentation practices, transparent methodologies, and persistent recording of civilian harm despite institutional constraints. The quantitative evidence of violence distribution and qualitative themes in narrative fields collectively establish how data functions as ethical infrastructure for witnessing when traditional mechanisms face limitations. These findings contribute to understanding how data-mediated witnessing shapes moral authority in conflict reporting and establishes trustworthiness when physical witnessing is restricted. **The study advances methodological practice by detailing a replicable framework for the concurrent analysis of quantitative and qualitative dimensions within a single conflict dataset to elucidate its trust-building mechanisms.**

The qualitative approach contributes to ethical documentation by centering Palestinian experiences and community-based knowledge production. The integration of quantitative patterns with narrative analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how violence is documented and communicated under conditions of information asymmetry. This methodology supports narrative preservation and creates resources for dialogue in policy and education contexts. The study underscores the importance of community-based documentation in challenging epistemic injustice and preserving historical records of violence in conflict zones ?.

Future research should examine the social networks and verification processes that sustain community-based documentation in conflict zones. Studies could explore cross-cultural understanding of conflict data interpretation and develop frameworks for integrating local knowledge systems with international reporting standards. Research in conflict medicine could analyze patterns of healthcare infrastructure targeting and their impacts on population health outcomes, building on existing mixed-methods approaches to conflict and health ?. Humanitarian response mechanisms could benefit from studies of how real-time conflict data informs protection strategies and resource allocation decisions. **Most critically, future work must address the central methodological critique of circularity by designing**

studies that independently measure trust perceptions or compare multiple datasets to assess credibility construction from an external vantage point. These directions would extend the current findings to address practical challenges in conflict documentation and response.

The study establishes that data-mediated witnessing represents a **significant** development in conflict reporting. The evidence demonstrates that local knowledge production can provide credible accounts of violence despite structural constraints. This finding challenges narratives that dismiss community documentation and shows how systematic approaches can produce reliable evidence for humanitarian response and accountability processes **?**. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods offers a comprehensive approach to understanding conflict dynamics from the perspective of affected communities.