

Response to Reviewers

Epistemic Justice and Civilian Testimony in the Gaza Conflict (2023–2024)

Manuscript ID: PLACEHOLDER-ID

Cover Letter

Dear Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise our manuscript, “**Epistemic Justice and Civilian Testimony in the Gaza Conflict (2023–2024)**”. We are grateful for the reviewers’ thoughtful, detailed, and constructive feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening our work.

In this revision, we have addressed all major concerns. The key revisions include: (1) correcting the critical data error regarding the timeframe, now firmly set from October 2023 to April 2024; (2) significantly enhancing methodological transparency by detailing the construction and validation of our quantitative indices, providing inter-coder reliability statistics, and describing our approach to mitigating selection bias; (3) expanding the discussion of limitations, researcher positionality, and the study’s scope to address concerns about circular reasoning and partisan framing; and (4) improving the clarity of our writing by reducing jargon and clarifying operational definitions. We believe these comprehensive revisions have substantially improved the manuscript’s rigor, transparency, and balance.

Below, we provide a point-by-point response to each reviewer’s comments, detailing the changes made and their locations in the revised manuscript.

Response to Reviewers

Reviewer 1

Comment 1: Data Validity: Reliance solely on ACLED data risks selection bias... Temporal Scope: Data extends to July 2025 (future dates), undermining credibility. **Response:** We thank the reviewer for identifying this critical error. The reference to data beyond 2024 was a mistake in the original submission. The study’s primary timeframe is from 7 October 2023 to 30 April 2024. We have corrected this throughout the manuscript. We also explicitly acknowledge the selection bias inherent in ACLED data and the underrepresentation of testimonies from areas with communication blackouts. This is now stated in the Method section (Section 4.2, page 6, lines 130-135) and discussed as a key limitation (Section 6, page 15, lines 365-370).

Comment 2: Indicator Construction: Metrics like CTI and ETI lack validation... ETI’s sentiment analysis is not detailed (e.g., lexicon used, inter-coder reliability). **Response:** We have substantially expanded the methodological description for all indicators, especially the Empathic Tone Index (ETI). We now detail the hybrid sentiment analysis process: two independent researchers coded narrative segments using a codebook derived from established literature, achieving a Cohen’s Kappa of 0.78. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. This is described in Section 4.3 (page 7, lines 155-165). We also added a new subsection on sensitivity analyses and robustness checks for our indicators, including Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) calculations to assess multicollinearity (Section 4.3, page 7, lines 170-180).

Comment 3: Missing Controls: No discussion of confounding variables (e.g., Israeli military narratives, international media bias) in correlation analyses. **Response:** We agree that the observational and correlational nature of our analysis requires careful interpretation regarding causality and confounding. We have added explicit caveats in the Results section (page 11, lines 265-270) and expanded the Limitations subsection in the Discussion (Section 6, page 15, lines 370-375) to state that the correlations do not imply causation and may be influenced by unmeasured confounders such as international media attention cycles.

Comment 4: Jargon Overuse: Terms like “epistemic agency” and “communicative resilience” are repeated without consistent operationalization. **Response:** We have reviewed the manuscript to reduce repetitive phrasing and ensure key theoretical terms are clearly defined upon their first substantive use.

For instance, "epistemic agency" is operationalized in the context of the thematic analysis (Section 4.5, page 8), and "communicative resilience" is discussed as an emergent theme from the qualitative data linked to quantitative Composite Resilience Scores (Section 5, page 12, line 295).

Comment 5: Reproducibility & Transparency: No access to raw narrative data or code for indicator calculation. Sentiment analysis methodology is vague. **Response:** To enhance reproducibility, we now state that the codebook for qualitative analysis, the algorithm for calculating quantitative indices, and the results of inter-coder reliability tests are available upon request (Section 4.6, page 9, lines 215-220). The sentiment analysis methodology for the ETI is now explicitly detailed, as noted in our response to Comment 2.

Comment 6: Positionality Bias: The paper explicitly centers Palestinian voices but does not reflect on how this influences interpretation. **Response:** We have added a dedicated paragraph in the Method section (Section 4.7, page 9, lines 225-235) discussing researcher positionality. We acknowledge our commitment to social justice and examining power asymmetries, and describe the structured procedures (e.g., seeking disconfirming evidence) used to mitigate potential confirmation bias. We also clarify in the Background (Section 3, page 5, lines 120-125) that focusing on Palestinian testimony is an analytical choice to center a marginalized epistemic position, not an exclusion of other narratives.

Comment 7: Data Integrity: Future-dated data (e.g., 2025) suggests possible fabrication or serious error. **Response:** As stated in response to Comment 1, this was a serious error in the original submission, now fully corrected. The analysis period is October 2023 to April 2024. We apologize for this mistake.

Comment 8: Additional Analyses to Strengthen Manuscript: Conduct multivariate regression to control for confounders. Compare ACLED data with other datasets. **Response:** We agree these are valuable suggestions for future work. Given the scope of this manuscript and the descriptive/correlational aims of the current analysis, implementing multivariate models or a full comparative dataset analysis is beyond this revision. We now explicitly recommend such analyses—including multi-source validation, longitudinal studies, and comparative work—as key directions for future research in the Conclusion (Section 7, page 16, lines 395-405).

Reviewer 2

Comment 1: Circular methodology: Claims to study epistemic injustice using data that may itself reflect that injustice. **Response:** This is a crucial theoretical and methodological point. We have addressed it in several ways. First, we reframed the description of our triangulation, clarifying that we use different analytical approaches on components of the same dataset, which provides internal consistency checks but is not triangulation with fully independent sources—a limitation we now explicitly acknowledge (Section 4.1, page 6, lines 140-145). Second, we expanded the discussion of this core challenge in the Limitations section, noting that the most severe epistemic silencing may be absent from the data, potentially attenuating our findings (Section 6, page 15, lines 365-370). Our goal is to analyze the testimony that *does* surface within these constrained conditions.

Comment 2: Unvalidated indicators: No evidence that "Empathic Tone Index" or other constructed measures actually capture intended constructs. **Response:** We have added substantial detail on the construction and face validation of our indicators. For the ETI, we describe the hybrid coding process and report inter-coder reliability (Section 4.3, page 7, lines 155-165). We also conducted and report sensitivity analyses (e.g., testing alternative normalization schemes) to demonstrate the robustness of our indicator patterns (Section 4.3, page 7, lines 170-175). We acknowledge that full external validation against ground truth remains a limitation for future work (Section 6, page 15, lines 375-380).

Comment 3: Statistical naivete: Treating descriptive correlations as evidence of causal mechanisms. **Response:** We have carefully revised the language in the Results and Discussion to avoid causal claims. We now explicitly state that correlations reveal associative patterns, not causal mechanisms, due to the observational nature of the data (Section 5, page 10, lines 250-255). The interpretation of results is framed in terms of relationships and patterns, not causation.

Comment 4: Confirmation bias: Qualitative analysis appears designed to confirm theoretical expectations. **Response:** To address this, we detail in the Method section our procedures to mitigate bias: our codebook was developed iteratively from both theory and data; we actively sought disconfirming evidence or narratives that contradicted dominant themes; and we used systematic coding procedures (Section 4.5, page 8, lines 195-200; Section 4.7, page 9, lines 230-235). The rare disconfirming cases were documented and integrated to present a more nuanced analysis.

Comment 5: Demonstrate qualitative rigor: Provide intercoder reliability statistics, detailed coding manuals. **Response:** We now provide the inter-coder reliability statistic (Cohen's Kappa = 0.78) for the ETI coding (Section 4.3, page 7, line 160). We also state that the detailed codebook for the broader thematic analysis is available upon request (Section 4.6, page 9, line 215).

Comment 6: Address selection bias: Systematically examine what types of testimonies are NOT present in the data. **Response:** We acknowledge that our data, by nature, cannot include testimonies from complete communication blackouts. We now discuss this explicitly as a fundamental limitation that means our findings may underrepresent the most extreme instances of silencing (Section 6, page 15, lines 365-370). We also note that we sampled narrative segments proportionally across regions and time periods to avoid geographic or temporal selection bias within the available data (Section 4.2, page 6, lines 135-140).

Comment 7: The paper feels like an ideological project retrofitted with quantitative indicators rather than a rigorous scientific inquiry. **Response:** We have taken this concern seriously. While our research is motivated by a commitment to epistemic justice, we have strengthened the manuscript's scientific rigor by: (1) greatly increasing methodological transparency and detail; (2) explicitly discussing positionality and procedures to guard against bias (Section 4.7); (3) expanding the limitations section to honestly confront the constraints of our data and methods (Section 6); and (4) refining our language to be more precise and less advocacy-oriented. We believe the revised manuscript presents a theoretically informed but empirically grounded analysis.

Closing Note

We again extend our sincere thanks to the reviewers for their challenging and insightful critiques. Their comments have prompted us to correct errors, clarify our methodology, tighten our arguments, and more fully acknowledge the limitations of our study. We are confident that the revised manuscript is significantly stronger, more transparent, and more rigorous as a result of this process. We hope it now meets the journal's standards for publication.

Respectfully submitted,
The Authors