

# Response to Reviewers

## To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, **“Patterns and Correlates of Educational Infrastructure Destruction in Gaza (2023–2025): A Mixed-Methods Analysis”**. We are grateful for the reviewers’ detailed and constructive feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening the methodological rigor, clarity, and scholarly contribution of our work.

In response to the reviewers’ comments, we have undertaken a comprehensive revision. The key changes are:

- **Reframed the study’s focus and language:** We have changed the title and reframed the manuscript throughout to focus on documenting *patterns and correlates* of destruction, removing all language that implied causal intent (e.g., “targeting,” “systematic erasure”). The analysis now presents correlations as observed statistical associations, explicitly acknowledging the study’s limitations in establishing causality.
- **Enhanced methodological transparency and rigor:** We have added full statistical reporting (p-values, 95% confidence intervals), conducted robustness checks (Spearman correlations), and included a detailed reproducibility statement with a link to analysis code. We have also expanded the limitations section to candidly address critical issues like the lack of baseline comparison data and potential confounding variables.
- **Strengthened theoretical and contextual grounding:** We have clarified the use of theoretical frameworks like epistemic injustice as interpretive lenses for the qualitative analysis, not as premises for the quantitative findings. The discussion now more carefully distinguishes between documented patterns and their potential interpretations.
- **Improved clarity and tone:** We have revised the abstract, introduction, and conclusion to ensure claims are aligned with the evidence. Inflammatory or advocacy-oriented language has been replaced with neutral, scientific terminology throughout the manuscript.

We believe these revisions have significantly improved the manuscript, transforming it into a more balanced, rigorous, and transparent scholarly contribution. Our detailed point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ comments are provided below.

## Response to Reviewers

### Reviewer 1

*Comment 1: Causal Overreach: Revise language to avoid implying intent (e.g., replace “targeting” with “disproportionate impact”). Acknowledge alternative explanations (e.g., urban warfare density).* **Response:** We agree completely. This was the most critical revision. We have changed the title from “ERASING THE FUTURE...” to “Patterns and Correlates of Educational Infrastructure Destruction in Gaza...”. Throughout the manuscript, we have replaced terms like “targeting,” “systematic erasure,” and “intent” with neutral language such as “patterns,” “correlates,” “disproportionate impact,” and “statistical associations.” We now explicitly state that the study design precludes causal attribution and that the observed correlations are consistent with multiple explanations, including the dynamics of urban warfare. See the revised Abstract (lines 8-10), Introduction (Section 1), and most critically, the new text in the Discussion (Section 6, page 15, lines 320-327) and Limitations (Section 6, page 16, lines 365-372).

*Comment 2: Theoretical Grounding: Justify the novel term "epistemic genocide" with robust legal/philosophical references. Differentiate it from "cultural genocide" or "educide."* **Response:** We acknowledge that the original framing using "epistemic genocide" was an overstatement not sufficiently supported by our data or design. Rather than attempting to justify this highly charged term, we have removed it from the manuscript's title, abstract, and analytical framework. The paper now uses the more established and appropriate concepts of "epistemic injustice" and "epistemic harm" as theoretical lenses through which to interpret the *qualitative narratives* of loss and disruption. We cite Fricker (2007) and Vasquez (2023) accordingly. The focus of the paper is now squarely on the empirical documentation of damage patterns. See the new title, Abstract, and revised theoretical framing in Sections 1 and 2.

*Comment 3: Methodological Transparency: Provide full statistical outputs (p-values, CI) and share analysis code. Clarify how "governorate density" was quantified.* **Response:** We have addressed all these points.

- All correlation coefficients in tables and text now include 95% confidence intervals and p-values (e.g., Tables 3, 4, 7; Section 4.1).
- We have added a new "Appendix A: Reproducibility Statement" (page 18) that states the R code and processed data are available in a public repository.
- We have clarified the operationalization of "governorate density" in the Methods, Section 4.3 (page 8, lines 175-177): "Governorate density was operationalized using pre-conflict population estimates per square kilometer for each governorate, as reported by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics."

*Comment 4: Language: Reduce jargon; define terms like "epistemic injustice" for interdisciplinary audiences.* **Response:** We have simplified language where possible. We now explicitly define "epistemic injustice" upon its first major use in the Introduction (Section 1, page 2, lines 40-42): "Epistemic injustice occurs when communities are systematically denied their status as knowers...". The revised Discussion (Section 6) uses this framework more carefully as an interpretive tool rather than a premise.

*Comment 5: Citations: Include key literature on Gaza's education system...* **Response:** We have expanded the literature review in Section 2 (Related Work) and Background (Section 3) to include relevant citations on education in Gaza and Palestine (e.g., Iriqat et al., 2025; Alburai, 2023) and on education in conflict more broadly (e.g., Mahgoub et al., 2024; Cinkara, 2024).

*Comment 6: Additional Analyses: Conduct spatial regression to control for confounders... Include counter-narratives... Perform sensitivity analyses...* **Response:**

- We acknowledge that spatial regression with controls is the ideal approach but was not feasible with the available public dataset, which lacks geolocated data on confounders like proximity to military engagements. We now explicitly state this as a major limitation (Section 6, page 16, lines 365-369).
- We performed sensitivity analyses as suggested: "Robustness of correlations was checked by calculating Spearman's rank correlation coefficients as a non-parametric alternative; results were substantively unchanged." (Methods, Section 4.3, page 8, lines 182-184).
- Regarding counter-narratives, we note that our qualitative data is limited to UN institutional reports. We have added this as a limitation (Section 6, page 16, lines 370-371) and suggest incorporating diverse sources as a direction for future research.

## Reviewer 2

*Comment 1: The core methodological flaw is the treatment of correlation as causation. A correlation between school damage and population density is as consistent with indiscriminate bombardment in dense urban areas as it is with "targeting."* **Response:** We agree this was a fundamental flaw in the original manuscript. We have entirely reframed the paper to correct this. The analysis now presents correlations strictly as observed statistical associations. We explicitly state, "the study design precludes causal attribution" (Abstract, line 9) and dedicate a paragraph in the Discussion to this point: "The quantitative patterns... are consistent with multiple interpretations. The correlation between damage and population density is equally consistent with intense urban warfare in densely populated areas as with any specific pattern of targeting... Our study design... cannot adjudicate between these explanations." (Section 6, page 15, lines 320-327). The term "targeting" has been removed.

*Comment 2: There is no comparison to the destruction rates of other types of civilian infrastructure... This missing baseline is a critical omission.* **Response:** This is an excellent and critical point. We have added a frank acknowledgment of this limitation in the Methods (Section 4.7, page 9, lines 215-216): “A key limitation is the inability to compare school damage rates to baseline destruction rates of other civilian infrastructure categories due to data availability constraints.” We reiterate this as a major limitation in the Discussion (Section 6, page 16, lines 366-368) and recommend obtaining such comparative data for future research.

*Comment 3: Reframe the Study: Reposition the paper as a neutral analysis of “Patterns and Correlates of Educational Infrastructure Destruction in Gaza.”* **Response:** We have done exactly this. The new title is “**Patterns and Correlates of Educational Infrastructure Destruction in Gaza (2023–2025): A Mixed-Methods Analysis**”. The research questions, analysis, and discussion have been revised throughout to align with this neutral, descriptive framing.

*Comment 4: Revise the Theoretical Framework: Integrate literature on the challenges of IHL in urban warfare... Acknowledge the complexity of the operational environment as a potential confounding variable.* **Response:** We have integrated this perspective. The Background (Section 3) now includes citations and discussion on IHL and the challenges of urban warfare (e.g., ICRC, 2021; Zwanenburg, 2021). More importantly, the Discussion (Section 6, page 15, lines 324-325) and Limitations (page 16, lines 365-369) explicitly acknowledge urban warfare dynamics and the impossibility of controlling for such confounders as critical contextual factors that must be considered when interpreting the correlations.

*Comment 5: Tone and Language: Replace all advocacy language with neutral, scientific terminology.* **Response:** We have thoroughly revised the manuscript’s tone. Inflammatory phrases (e.g., “pulverized,” “mockery”) that appeared within *direct quotes* from qualitative sources have been retained to preserve the authenticity of witness testimony, but they are now clearly presented as sourced quotes, not the authors’ analytical language. Our own prose has been scrubbed of advocacy terms and replaced with neutral, descriptive language. The Abstract, Introduction, and Conclusion have been significantly rewritten to reflect this change.

*Comment 6: The reference list contains numerous placeholder citations... indicating it is incomplete or fabricated.* **Response:** We apologize for this oversight in the draft shared for review. The reference list in the revised manuscript (pages 19-21) is now complete, with all placeholders replaced by actual, formatted citations (e.g., Iriqat et al., 2025; Kharoua, 2023; Vernon & Galpin, 2024). All citations in the text now have corresponding complete entries in the bibliography.

## Closing Note

We sincerely thank both reviewers again for their rigorous and thoughtful critiques. Addressing their concerns has necessitated substantial revisions that we believe have fundamentally improved the manuscript’s scholarly rigor, balance, and transparency. We have transformed it from a polemical piece into a methodologically transparent, empirically focused study that documents a severe humanitarian situation while acknowledging the complexities of interpretation. We hope the revised manuscript now meets the journal’s standards for publication.