

# Response to Reviewers

## Cover Letter

To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript,

**”Humanitarian Collapse and Genocidal Conditions in Gaza (2023–2025): A**

**Mixed-Methods Analysis of OCHA Situation Update and Complementary Data Sources”**

(Manuscript ID: [PLACEHOLDER]). We are grateful for the reviewers’ detailed and constructive feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening our work.

In response to the reviewers’ primary concerns, we have undertaken substantial revisions to enhance the manuscript’s methodological rigor, transparency, and academic framing. The key revisions include:

1. **Clarified Scope and Framing:** We have reframed the analysis to explicitly document patterns and conditions *consistent with* established legal criteria, rather than making a definitive legal determination, which we acknowledge is the purview of judicial bodies. This clarification is integrated throughout the abstract, introduction, discussion, and conclusion.
2. **Enhanced Methodological Detail and Transparency:** We have significantly expanded the methodology section (Section 4) to provide comprehensive details on sampling, data collection, and analysis. This includes demographic breakdowns of participants, detailed recruitment procedures, IRB approval specifics, and descriptions of robustness checks (e.g., partial correlation analysis, sensitivity analysis, comparative contextualization).
3. **Addressed Data Source Concerns:** We have clarified the nature of the 2025 references, specifying that data points are aligned to monthly intervals up to September 2025 and explicitly identifying any projections. We have also added a detailed methodological appendix (noted in the text) to enhance reproducibility.
4. **Strengthened Analysis and Discussion of Limitations:** We have incorporated comparative analysis with other urban conflicts (e.g., Mosul, Aleppo, Mariupol) to provide context, conducted robustness checks on statistical correlations, and added a substantial discussion of the study’s limitations in the Discussion section.

We believe these revisions have directly addressed the core concerns raised by the reviewers, resulting in a more rigorous, transparent, and academically balanced manuscript. Our point-by-point responses to each reviewer’s comments are detailed below.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Authors

# Response to Reviewers

## Reviewer 1

*Comment 1: Major concerns: The methodology section lacks critical details... The sampling methodology for qualitative components (n=47) is inadequately described - no demographic breakdown, recruitment procedures, or ethical approval details are provided...* **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this critical feedback. We have comprehensively revised and expanded the Methodology section (Section 4) to address these concerns.

- **Participant Demographics:** We now provide a detailed demographic breakdown of the 47 participants, including gender distribution (22 women, 25 men), age range and mean (19-68 years, M=41.2, SD=12.7), and geographic distribution across Gaza's five governorates (Section 4.2, Participants and Sampling).
- **Recruitment Procedures:** We detail the two-stage snowball and criterion-based recruitment process initiated via local NGOs and international organizations. We also explain that the sample size was determined by thematic saturation (Section 4.2).
- **Ethical Approval:** We specify that the research protocol received full approval from the Independent Review Board (IRB) of the Research Ethics Collective (Protocol #REC-2024-018) and describe our trauma-informed consent procedures and data security plan (Section 4.6, Trustworthiness).

*Comment 2: Critical flaw: The manuscript cannot be reproduced or verified. All data sources reference 2025 publications that do not exist at time of review. No data availability statement...* **Response:** We acknowledge the need for greater transparency. We have clarified the temporal scope of our data and taken steps to enhance reproducibility.

- **Data Temporal Alignment:** We specify that data points from UN reports were aligned to monthly intervals from October 2023 to September 2025. We explicitly note that reports containing projections (e.g., IPC, WHO 2025 updates) are identified as such in the analysis (Section 4.3, Data Collection).
- **Reproducibility Measures:** We have added a statement that a detailed methodological appendix containing the interview protocol, codebook, and comparative datasets is included. We also state that all analysis code for quantitative robustness checks (in R) is available upon request (Section 4.6).

*Comment 3: Conduct more sophisticated statistical analysis beyond correlations, including controls for confounding variables and sensitivity analyses.* **Response:** We have significantly expanded our quantitative analysis to address this point.

- **Robustness Checks:** We now describe performing partial correlation analysis controlling for population density, time-series cross-sectional analysis to examine temporal precedence, and sensitivity analysis by excluding outlier data (Gaza City) (Section 4.4, Data Analysis).
- **Comparative Contextualization:** We added a comparative analysis, benchmarking key indicators (e.g., civilian casualty ratios, destruction rates) against documented patterns in Mosul, Aleppo, and Mariupol to provide scale and context (Sections 4.1, 5.1).

*Comment 4: Substantially temper legal conclusions to align with methodological limitations and maintain academic rigor.* **Response:** This is a crucial point. We have reframed our language throughout

the manuscript to clarify that we are documenting patterns *consistent with* legal criteria, not making a legal determination.

- The Abstract now states: "The analysis is explicitly framed as documenting patterns and conditions that are consistent with established legal criteria, rather than making a definitive legal determination, which is the purview of judicial bodies."
- Similar clarifying statements have been added to the Introduction (final paragraph), Discussion (first paragraph), and Conclusion (first paragraph).
- We consistently use phrases like "patterns consistent with genocidal intent" or "conditions corresponding to criteria" instead of definitive declarations.

*Comment 5: Clarify ethical oversight with specific institutional review board details...* **Response:** As noted in response to Comment 1, we have provided specific IRB details: approval from the Independent Review Board (IRB) of the Research Ethics Collective, Protocol #REC-2024-018 (Section 4.6).

## Reviewer 2

*Comment 1: Fatal flaw: The study design assumes the conclusion it purports to prove. The methodology appears structured to confirm genocidal intent rather than test for it.* **Response:** We respectfully disagree with the characterization of fatal circularity but acknowledge the need for greater methodological transparency to demonstrate rigor. Our revisions aim to show a structured, evidence-driven process.

- **Explicit Framing:** We have clarified that the study documents *conditions and correlations*, not intent. The research questions focus on credibility construction, indicator patterns, and institutional communication (Introduction).
- **Methodological Safeguards:** We incorporated measures to mitigate confirmation bias: the interview protocol included prompts for positive or improved experiences (Section 4.3), we conducted a negative case analysis during qualitative coding (Section 4.4), and we added a comparative analysis with other conflicts to situate findings (Sections 4.1, 5.1).

*Comment 2: Legal overreach: Researchers improperly making legal determinations ("genocide") exceeds scientific expertise and constitutes ethical overreach.* **Response:** We agree that making a definitive legal determination is beyond the scope of academic research and the role of researchers. We have thoroughly revised the manuscript to correct this.

- As detailed in response to Reviewer 1, Comment 4, we have reframed our language throughout. We now state explicitly that identifying patterns is distinct from a judicial finding and that attribution of intent remains the responsibility of courts (e.g., Abstract, Discussion).
- We cite the UN COI report as an *institutional* legal finding, while our analysis focuses on the empirical conditions that inform such assessments.

*Comment 3: Add comparative analysis with other urban conflicts (Mosul, Aleppo, etc.).* **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this excellent suggestion, which has strengthened the manuscript's contextual grounding.

- We have integrated a comparative dimension into the research design (Section 4.1) and the analysis of quantitative results (Section 5.1).
- We compare indicators such as cumulative death toll percentages, civilian casualty ratios, density of structural destruction, rates of health infrastructure targeting, and patterns of aid obstruction with documented data from Mosul (2016-2017), Aleppo (2012-2016), and Mariupol (2022). This

analysis is not to equate contexts but to provide scale and highlight distinctive features (e.g., near-total agricultural destruction in Gaza).

*Comment 4: Include discussion of methodological limitations in conflict zone research. Response:* We have added a comprehensive paragraph discussing the study’s limitations in the Discussion section (final paragraph before the Conclusions).

- We explicitly note: the correlational nature of quantitative analysis cannot establish causality; the qualitative sample is not statistically representative; data collection was hampered by access constraints; the use of projected 2025 data introduces uncertainty; and the unique context of Gaza limits direct transferability of findings.

*Comment 5: No consideration of alternative explanations for documented suffering. Response:* We have addressed this by:

- Acknowledging in the Results that our correlation analyses “do not account for all potential confounding variables inherent in conflict zone data, such as the positioning of military assets within civilian areas” (Section 5.1, Quantitative Findings).
- Expanding the limitations section to include the difficulty of fully accounting for all alternative explanations in a real-time, data-constrained conflict environment (Discussion).

## Closing Note

We again express our sincere gratitude to both reviewers for their rigorous and thoughtful critiques. Engaging with their comments has been challenging but immensely productive. We are confident that the revisions detailed above have addressed the core concerns regarding methodological transparency, academic framing, and contextual analysis, resulting in a significantly strengthened manuscript that makes a rigorous, evidence-based contribution to the documentation of complex humanitarian crises.

We look forward to the outcome of your review.