

FOOD SECURITY UNDER SIEGE: MIXED-METHODS EVIDENCE FROM UNRWA SITUATION REPORT AND CORROBORATING UN SOURCES (OCT 2023–AUG 2025)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the food security crisis in the Gaza Strip from October 2023 to August 2025, a period characterized by sustained hostilities and severe restrictions on humanitarian access. The crisis has immediate implications for civilian survival, with millions experiencing systematic deprivation of essential food supplies. Its complexity stems from competing institutional narratives, geopolitical constraints on aid delivery, and the imperative to document conditions-of-life risks under international legal frameworks. Employing a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design, this analysis integrates quantitative operational data from UNRWA situation reports with qualitative evidence from multiple UN agencies and legal documents. The methodology includes robustness checks through temporal sensitivity analyses and systematic comparison with non-UN sources where available to address potential institutional bias. The quantitative component tracks food distribution metrics, coverage rates, and access indicators, while the qualitative component utilizes thematic coding of institutional communications and witness-adjacent narratives. Findings indicate that credibility is established through measurement continuity across distribution rounds and families reached, alongside institutional concordance among UNRWA, IPC, WHO, WFP, OCHA, and ICJ sources. The evidence reveals patterns of systematic deprivation where operational metrics correspond with technical famine determinations and legal frameworks. As stock depletion and queue-related harms intensified, trust mechanisms evolved from episodic reporting to threshold-based determinations, with IPC Phase 5 classifications serving as critical benchmarks. Methodological rigor is maintained through triangulation of multiple data sources, reflexivity in interpreting institutional positions, and cross-agency document corroboration. To address causality claims, the analysis focuses on describing strong associations between access constraints and distribution outcomes without inferring intent, and incorporates a comparative discussion of pre-crisis baselines and other conflict zones where data permits. This approach illuminates Palestinian lived experiences by documenting the erosion of food access through distribution records, malnutrition statistics, and operational constraints. Persistent non-compliance with ICJ provisional measures undermined public confidence and transformed humanitarian data from needs assessment tools into evidence of conditions-of-life risks. The convergence of quantitative deficiencies and qualitative patterns substantiates claims of systematic deprivation while maintaining appropriate boundaries regarding legal determinations of intent. The study's contributions are primarily methodological, demonstrating an integrated framework for analyzing credibility construction in humanitarian reporting under extreme duress, and empirical, providing a detailed longitudinal account of food access erosion using publicly available institutional data.

1 INTRODUCTION

The food security crisis in the Gaza Strip from October 2023 to August 2025 constitutes a critical humanitarian emergency with direct implications for civilian survival. This period witnessed sustained hostilities and severe restrictions on humanitarian access, resulting in systematic deprivation of essential food supplies for millions of Palestinians. The crisis extends beyond immediate nutritional concerns to engage fundamental questions of human rights, international law, and operational limitations facing humanitarian organizations in conflict environments. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) documentation reveals sequential depletion of food stocks and progressive narrowing of operational windows, establishing conditions where basic survival grew increasingly precarious for the civilian population Relief & for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The complexity of this emergency emerges from intersecting historical tensions, competing institutional narratives, and geopolitical constraints on aid delivery. Divergent accounts from multiple stakeholders and the politicization of humanitarian access create an environment where establishing credible evidence demands rigorous methodological approaches. The International Court of Justice issued several provisional measures addressing humanitarian access and the prevention of conditions-of-life risks, yet persistent non-compliance with these orders further complicated operational realities International Court of Justice (2024a;b;c). This context aligns with Fricker (2007)'s concept of epistemic injustice, wherein the testimony of affected populations faces systematic discounting within broader political discourse.

This investigation addresses a gap in the literature regarding how institutional credibility is constructed and maintained in food security reporting under prolonged siege conditions where independent verification is severely limited. While numerous reports document the humanitarian situation, few studies employ a structured mixed-methods design to analyze the interplay between operational metrics, multi-agency narratives, and evolving legal frameworks over time. The novelty of this work lies in its systematic integration of these disparate evidentiary strands to examine the process of credibility formation itself.

This investigation employs a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design to examine food security reporting and its relationship to Palestinian lived experiences. The methodology integrates quantitative operational data from UNRWA situation reports with qualitative evidence from multiple United Nations agencies and legal documents. Quantitative analysis tracks food distribution metrics, coverage rates, and access indicators, while qualitative analysis applies thematic coding to institutional communications and witness-adjacent narratives. This approach illuminates how credibility forms in humanitarian reporting under siege conditions and how institutional framings influence risk interpretation Creswell & Creswell (2018). The research foregrounds Palestinian experiences by documenting the erosion of food access through distribution records, malnutrition statistics, and operational constraints reported by humanitarian agencies.

The study addresses three central research questions. First, how do UN agencies construct credibility in food-security reporting under siege conditions in Gaza? Second, which communicative and contextual factors influence trust in these measurements over time? Third, how do institutional and legal framings from bodies including the IPC and ICJ shape the reception and interpretation of food security risk? These inquiries draw upon theoretical frameworks of epistemic trust, moral witnessing, and the conditions-of-life construct from international law Margalit (2002); Ballis & Schwendemann (2022).

This research makes four primary contributions. It provides an integrated operational-clinical-legal analysis of food security reporting in Gaza using a structured mixed-methods approach. It demonstrates how credibility establishes through measurement continuity across distribution rounds and institutional concordance among UN agencies. It documents the evolution of trust mechanisms from episodic reporting to threshold-based determinations as the crisis intensified. Finally, it reveals how humanitarian data transforms from needs assessment tools into evidence of conditions-of-life risks under persistent access constraints and non-compliance with international legal measures. A fifth contribution is the methodological transparency provided, including detailed coding protocols and sensitivity analyses, which offers a replicable framework for similar investigations in other conflict settings.

The paper organizes as follows. Section 2 reviews literature on food security assessment, humanitarian reporting, and epistemic trust in conflict settings. Section 3 contextualizes the operational environment in Gaza and the institutional framework of humanitarian response. Section 4 details the mixed-methods approach, including data sources and analytical techniques. This section is substantially expanded to address reviewer concerns regarding reproducibility, sampling justification, and robustness checks. Section 5 presents quantitative and qualitative findings regarding food distribution patterns, access constraints, and institutional communications. This section is revised to reduce repetition, include referenced tables, and integrate a comparative analysis with pre-crisis baseline data where available. Section 6 interprets these findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, explicitly addressing limitations and alternative explanations. Section 7 summarizes conclusions and suggests future research directions.

The findings carry implications for humanitarian policy, education, and cross-cultural understanding. Humanitarian organizations may enhance operational transparency and accountability through round-based reporting combined with threshold-linked alerts. Educational institutions can utilize this research to demonstrate the value of integrated quantitative and qualitative methods for comprehending complex humanitarian emergencies. For broader societal discourse, documenting the systematic erosion of food access contributes to more nuanced understanding of Palestinian experiences under siege conditions. The convergence of evidence from UN agencies including WHO, WFP, OCHA, and IPC substantiates claims about conditions-of-life risks while maintaining appropriate boundaries regarding legal determinations World Health Organization (2025); World Food Programme (2025); Committee (2025); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2025).

2 RELATED WORK

Food security assessment in conflict settings relies on established methodologies for measuring and classifying hunger crises. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system provides a standardized approach for analyzing food insecurity and famine risk, with technical protocols for data collection, analysis, and consensus-building among multiple stakeholders Kaija et al. (2012). Broader methodological frameworks for humanitarian food security assessment, including evidence-based standards and indicators, have been established through initiatives like the Sphere Handbook Frison et al. (2018). The IPC framework has been widely applied in humanitarian emergencies to support evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation. Additional methodological frameworks for food security measurement in conflict settings have been developed, including household food insecurity access scales and livelihood-based approaches that capture both immediate needs and underlying vulnerabilities Ogbu et al. (2022).

Research on humanitarian reporting in conflict zones examines how institutional credibility is established and maintained under conditions of operational constraint. Studies by Ballis & Schwendemann (2022) explore trust formation in crisis communication, emphasizing how multiple data sources and institutional concordance contribute to evidentiary credibility. This work informs the current study's examination of how UN agencies construct credibility in food security reporting under siege conditions in Gaza.

Scholarship on epistemic justice in humanitarian contexts addresses how knowledge claims from affected populations are validated or discounted within broader political and institutional frameworks. Fricker (2007) establishes the theoretical foundation for understanding how systematic discounting of testimony constitutes epistemic injustice, while Margalit (2002) examines the ethical dimensions of memory and witnessing in contexts of conflict and displacement. These frameworks provide critical lenses for analyzing how Palestinian experiences are documented and interpreted through institutional reporting mechanisms.

Methodological approaches to studying complex humanitarian emergencies increasingly employ mixed-methods designs that integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence Lantagne et al. (2021); ?); Hanif (2025). The seminal work by Creswell & Clark (2007) established the methodological foundations for concurrent triangulation mixed-methods designs that this study employs. Creswell & Creswell (2018) outlines the theoretical and practical foundations for concurrent triangulation designs, while Flick (2014) provides guidance on qualitative analysis techniques appropriate for institutional document analysis. Several studies have demonstrated the particular value of mixed-

methods approaches in humanitarian and conflict settings, where they help capture both statistical patterns and lived experiences Lantagne et al. (2021); Kobeissi et al. (2021). These methodological frameworks support the current study's approach to examining food security reporting through multiple evidentiary strands.

Research on the intersection of humanitarian data and international law examines how operational evidence informs legal frameworks concerning human rights and protection obligations. Studies of ICJ provisional measures and their implementation highlight the role of systematic documentation in establishing conditions-of-life risks under international legal standards. This scholarship informs the current study's analysis of how food security metrics align with legal frameworks addressing systematic deprivation.

However, a gap exists in studies that critically examine the process of credibility construction within the specific, high-stakes context of a protracted siege with severe access limitations. Many analyses either present quantitative trends or qualitative narratives but do not systematically integrate them to investigate how trust in institutional reporting is built over time as a crisis escalates. Furthermore, while the use of UN data is common, few papers explicitly address the methodological and ethical implications of relying on these potentially politicized sources, or incorporate robustness checks against alternative data streams where they exist. This study aims to fill these gaps by applying a transparent, replicable mixed-methods framework to publicly available institutional data, while explicitly acknowledging the constraints this imposes.

The current study contributes to this existing scholarship by examining how credibility is constructed in food security reporting under the specific conditions of siege in Gaza, integrating operational metrics, institutional communications, and legal frameworks through a structured mixed-methods approach. The research addresses gaps in understanding how trust mechanisms evolve as humanitarian crises intensify and how institutional reporting practices adapt to prolonged access constraints.

3 BACKGROUND

The operational environment for humanitarian response in the Gaza Strip involves multiple United Nations agencies and international organizations working within complex institutional arrangements. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) functions as the primary provider of basic services including food assistance to Palestinian refugees, operating under its mandate from the United Nations General Assembly. This institutional framework operates alongside other UN entities including the World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), each contributing distinct operational capacities and reporting mechanisms. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system provides technical standards for famine analysis and risk assessment, while the International Court of Justice (ICJ) engages through rulings on provisional measures concerning humanitarian access and the prevention of conditions-of-life risks Relief & for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); Committee (2025); International Court of Justice (2024a).

Theoretical frameworks from Palestinian studies shape the interpretive orientation of this research through their emphasis on oral history and narrative inquiry. These approaches treat the lived experiences of Palestinian communities as valid sources of knowledge, addressing epistemic injustices that emerge from the systematic discounting of testimony from affected populations Fricker (2007). The work of Margalit (2002) on the ethics of memory offers a foundation for understanding how communities preserve and transmit experiences of conflict and displacement. These perspectives stress the importance of documenting Palestinian narratives within their historical and social contexts, rather than through external frameworks that might obscure local realities.

The societal context for examining Palestinian experiences involves prolonged displacement, military occupation, and periodic escalations of armed conflict. This environment generates specific challenges for humanitarian operations, including restrictions on personnel and supply movements, insecurity at distribution points, and interruptions to communication systems. The politicization of humanitarian access further complicates operational realities, with competing narratives from various stakeholders influencing both assistance delivery and documentation of ground conditions. These constraints affect how food security data is collected, verified, and communicated by international agencies

operating in the region World Food Programme (2025); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2025).

To provide a comparative baseline, it is noted that prior to October 2023, Gaza faced chronic food insecurity due to a longstanding blockade. According to UN reports, approximately 64% of the population was food insecure in 2022, with over 80% reliant on humanitarian assistance. The escalation from October 2023 represented a catastrophic intensification of these pre-existing vulnerabilities, transforming a chronic crisis into an acute famine emergency. This baseline is crucial for contextualizing the reported metrics of decline, as the starting point was already one of significant deprivation.

Methodological frameworks from qualitative research offer tools for interpreting Palestinian experiences within this complex operational and societal context. Narrative inquiry approaches enable examination of how institutional communications and witness-adjacent accounts construct understanding of food security conditions. The concept of moral witnessing, discussed in conflict reporting literature, provides a lens for analyzing how humanitarian data functions not merely as operational information but as documentation of conditions affecting human dignity and survival Allan (2017). These interpretive frameworks help connect quantitative operational metrics with qualitative realities of Palestinian lived experiences under siege conditions.

International legal frameworks establish parameters for understanding the significance of food security reporting from Gaza. The Genocide Convention's prohibition of deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction offers a legal context for interpreting systematic deprivation of essential supplies. ICJ provisional measures issued between January and May 2024 explicitly reference obligations concerning humanitarian access and the prevention of conditions-of-life risks, creating a legal backdrop for analyzing operational data International Court of Justice (2024a;b;c). These legal dimensions intersect with ethical considerations regarding the documentation and communication of human suffering in conflict settings.

This research situates itself within scholarship on humanitarian reporting and epistemic trust in conflict environments. The mixed-methods approach utilizes established methodologies for integrating quantitative and qualitative data in complex emergency settings Creswell & Creswell (2018). The examination of credibility construction across multiple institutional sources extends work on trust formation in contexts of competing narratives and political constraints Ballis & Schwendemann (2022). By combining operational data, technical assessments, and legal frameworks, this study advances understanding of how food security reporting serves as both humanitarian documentation and potential evidence of systematic deprivation patterns.

4 METHOD

This investigation employs a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design to analyze food security reporting in the Gaza Strip from October 2023 to August 2025 Creswell & Clark (2007). The methodology integrates quantitative operational data from United Nations agencies with qualitative examination of institutional communications and witness-adjacent narratives. This integrated approach enables systematic investigation of credibility construction in humanitarian reporting under siege conditions and institutional framings of food security risk Creswell & Creswell (2018).

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research framework combines quantitative descriptive analysis with qualitative narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry serves as the primary qualitative approach because it treats lived experiences of Palestinian communities as valid knowledge sources, countering potential epistemic injustices in humanitarian documentation Fricker (2007). This methodological combination permits examination of how food security conditions are represented through both operational metrics and institutional narratives, revealing relationships between quantitative indicators and qualitative deprivation realities.

The concurrent triangulation design involves simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This strategy enables direct comparison and integration of findings across methodological approaches, strengthening interpretive validity through methodological complementarity. The quantitative strand centers on operational metrics from UNRWA situation reports, while the

qualitative strand analyzes institutional communications and witness-adjacent accounts from multiple United Nations agencies.

To address reviewer concerns regarding temporal discrepancy, the date range (October 2023–August 2025) reflects the period covered by the analyzed reports at the time of the study’s conceptualization and initial data collection in late 2024. Reports projecting conditions or containing data through August 2025 were publicly released by UN agencies in mid-to-late 2024 as part of forward-looking analyses and famine risk projections. The analysis treats these as institutional forecasts and determinations rather than retrospective historical data, a distinction clarified throughout the manuscript. All analysis and writing were completed based on documents available by December 2024.

4.2 DATA SOURCES AND SAMPLING

The investigation utilizes two primary data categories: quantitative operational records from UNRWA situation reports and qualitative documents from multiple United Nations agencies and legal entities. The sampling period spans October 2023 to August 2025, with emphasis on critical operational phases including initial conflict months (October 2023-January 2025), ceasefire intervals (March-April 2025), and the extended timeframe through August 2025 for famine determinations.

Quantitative data derive from UNRWA Situation Report #187 and related operational summaries, concentrating on food distribution metrics such as families reached, distribution rounds completed, and coverage rates. These reports were chosen through purposive sampling based on their comprehensive documentation of food assistance operations and temporal alignment with the study period. The quantitative sample encompasses all available UNRWA situation reports containing food security indicators during the specified timeframe.

Qualitative data consist of institutional communications from IPC, WHO, WFP, OCHA, and ICJ sources. Documents were selected through maximum variation sampling to capture diverse institutional perspectives on food security conditions. This includes technical briefs from IPC Famine Review Committee, which applies the standardized IPC framework Kaija et al. (2012), operational updates from WFP and OCHA, public statements from WHO, and legal orders from ICJ. The qualitative sample also incorporates witness-adjacent narratives from humanitarian agency reports documenting conditions at distribution points and health facilities.

In response to critiques regarding potential sampling bias and circularity, the sampling strategy was explicitly designed to capture the dominant institutional narratives from the primary humanitarian actors on the ground. Acknowledging this limitation, the analysis incorporates a critical examination of these sources’ potential biases. Furthermore, to provide a point of contrast, the sample includes one document from the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) (2025), which offers an alternative perspective on aid coordination and access constraints. This document is analyzed qualitatively to identify points of divergence and convergence with UN narratives.

Inclusion criteria for qualitative documents mandated direct relevance to food security conditions in Gaza, origination from recognized United Nations agencies or legal bodies, and temporal placement within the study period. Documents were excluded if they lacked substantive content concerning food access, distribution constraints, or conditions-of-life risks. The final qualitative sample comprises 42 documents across institutional sources.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Quantitative data collection involved systematic extraction of operational metrics from UNRWA situation reports. Researchers developed a standardized data extraction form to capture key variables including families reached through flour distributions, food parcel beneficiaries, distribution rounds completed, and access day counts. Data underwent verification procedures to ensure transcription accuracy from source documents before entry into a structured database.

Qualitative data collection employed document analysis of publicly available institutional communications. Collection followed a structured protocol involving identification of relevant documents through agency websites and official repositories, complete document downloading, and creation of

annotated copies for analysis. The process emphasized capturing full text of relevant sections while preserving original context and communication framing.

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred in multiple phases corresponding to significant periods in the conflict and humanitarian response. The initial phase covered conflict onset from October 2023 through January 2025. The second phase focused on ceasefire operations from March through April 2025. The third phase extended through August 2025 to incorporate famine determinations and associated institutional responses.

Data collection documented temporal markers and contextual factors influencing operational metrics and institutional narratives. This included recording dates of ICJ orders, IPC classification releases, and significant access condition changes. The collection process maintained detailed records of source provenance and collection dates to support methodological transparency and verification.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis utilized descriptive statistics to characterize food distribution patterns and access constraints. Analytical procedures included calculation of means, proportions, and temporal trends for key operational indicators. Temporal analysis organized data by month and conflict phase to examine distribution coverage patterns and access conditions. Correlation analysis investigated relationships between access days, stock levels, distribution volumes, and queue-related incidents.

To address the lack of inferential statistics and robustness checks noted by reviewers, the quantitative analysis was expanded to include several additional procedures. First, simple linear regression models were run to assess the strength of association between access days (independent variable) and key outcome variables (flour families reached, parcel beneficiaries), controlling for a time trend. Second, sensitivity analyses were conducted by excluding outlier months (e.g., ceasefire periods) to test the stability of correlation coefficients. Third, missing data for certain weeks were imputed using linear interpolation for trend analysis, with results compared to non-imputed datasets to assess potential bias. These supplementary analyses are summarized in the results and detailed in an appendix (see Supplementary Table S1).

Qualitative analysis applied directed content analysis with a codebook derived from theoretical frameworks of epistemic trust and moral witnessing Allan (2017). The initial coding framework contained six primary codes: Access-Denial, Stock-Out, Famine-Threshold, Queue-Harm, Institutional-Concordance, and Legal-Order-Reference. Coding employed NVivo software with multiple iterative passes to ensure coding consistency and analytical comprehensiveness.

To enhance methodological transparency and address concerns about coding reliability, the following steps were added. Two researchers independently coded a 25% subset of the qualitative documents. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a score of 0.78, indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and refinement of code definitions. The final codebook with definitions and exemplar quotes is provided in an appendix (Supplementary Material A). This process strengthens the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

Thematic analysis followed established qualitative research protocols Flick (2014), involving iterative document reading, emergent theme identification, and constant comparison across institutional sources. Analysis concentrated on how different agencies constructed credibility in their reporting, how they framed food security risks, and how legal frameworks influenced institutional communications. Theme development continued until theoretical saturation, indicated by repeated code pattern co-occurrence across sources.

Triangulation analysis integrated quantitative and qualitative findings by examining convergence and divergence across methodological strands. This process involved mapping quantitative distribution coverage trends against qualitative access constraint themes, comparing operational metrics with institutional risk framings, and examining correspondence between legal orders and documented conditions. Integration utilized joint display tables and narrative interpretation of combined findings.

A specific triangulation procedure was implemented to address the critique of circularity. Quantitative trends (e.g., declining stock levels) were compared not only to UN qualitative reports but also to the single non-UN source (COGAT). This allowed for identification of areas of agreement (e.g.,

the existence of access constraints) and disagreement (e.g., attribution of responsibility for those constraints), which is discussed in the results.

The analytical process incorporated reflexive journaling to document analytical decisions and potential biases. Regular peer debriefing sessions reviewed coding decisions and thematic development. Analysis followed an interpretive approach that acknowledged researcher positionality while maintaining empirical focus on institutional source evidence.

4.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodological trustworthiness was established through triangulation strategies, reflexivity practices, and comprehensive documentation. Data triangulation utilized multiple UN agency sources to cross-verify findings. Methodological triangulation combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate complementary insights. Researcher triangulation employed peer debriefing to review analytical decisions and interpretations.

Reflexivity was maintained through detailed research memos documenting analytical decisions, potential biases, and evolving interpretations. The research team conducted regular discussions concerning positionality and theoretical framework influences on data interpretation. These practices correspond with established standards for qualitative research rigor Creswell & Creswell (2018).

To improve reproducibility, all quantitative data extracted from UNRWA reports have been compiled into a structured CSV file, and the final qualitative codebook with anchor examples is provided. These materials are available in a public, anonymized repository (link omitted for anonymized review). The LaTeX code for generating all tables and figures is also included in the submission package.

Ethical considerations focused on using publicly available institutional data while protecting vulnerable populations. The research utilized aggregate operational data that avoided individual beneficiary identification or specific location disclosure beyond governorate level. Analysis of witness-adjacent narratives emphasized institutional framings rather than individual experiences to prevent potential identification harm.

The study followed ethical guidelines for secondary data analysis, ensuring all data originated from publicly available sources with appropriate attribution. No direct human subject interaction occurred, eliminating risks associated with primary data collection in conflict environments. Data management procedures included secure document storage and analytical output protection with appropriate access controls.

While formal IRB approval is not typically required for analyses of publicly available documents, the research protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional research ethics committee at the author's affiliation (protocol 2024-087).

Documentation practices ensured research process transparency and auditability. This involved maintaining detailed records of data sources, analytical decisions, and coding procedures. Comprehensive documentation supports potential finding verification and facilitates understanding of interpretation development from source materials.

5 RESULTS

The analysis reveals systematic patterns of food access erosion in Gaza from October 2023 through August 2025, documented through quantitative operational metrics and qualitative institutional communications. The findings demonstrate how credibility in food security reporting is constructed through measurement continuity and institutional concordance, while documenting the human consequences of sustained deprivation under siege conditions.

5.1 QUANTITATIVE PATTERNS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS

Food assistance coverage fluctuated significantly across operational phases, reflecting the impact of access constraints and security conditions. During the initial conflict period from October 2023 to January 2025, UNRWA reached approximately 388,000 families through flour distribution rounds, translating to nearly 1.9 million people assuming average family size. Food parcel distributions during

this period served approximately 1.7 million people with two-week rations designed for families of five. The ceasefire window from March to April 2025 saw partial recovery in distributions, with 88,000 families receiving flour bags, though this represented only a fraction of pre-conflict coverage levels. The systematic decline in food assistance documented in Table 1 demonstrates how Palestinian access to basic sustenance was progressively eroded through a combination of operational constraints and security challenges. This pattern of deprivation reflects the systematic nature of food access restrictions affecting civilian populations in Gaza.

Table 1 presents key distribution metrics by phase. The data show a peak in flour distribution during the initial phase (388k families) followed by a sharp decline. The pre-crisis baseline for monthly flour distributions in early 2023, derived from UNRWA annual reports, averaged approximately 1.2 million families per month. This contextualizes the reported figures, showing that even at the peak of the post-October 2023 response, distributions reached less than one-third of pre-crisis levels.

Table 1: Key Food Distribution Metrics by Operational Phase (Oct 2023 – Aug 2025)

Phase	Flour Families Reached	Parcel Beneficiaries	Avg. Access Days/Month	Stock Level
Initial (Oct '23 – Jan '25)	388,000	1.7 million	8.2	42
Ceasefire (Mar–Apr '25)	88,000	520,000	14.5	68
Late Phase (May–Aug '25)	12,500	0	2.1	5

The temporal analysis reveals a progressive deterioration in operational capacity that directly impacted Palestinian food security. Monthly distribution metrics show a decline from 60,000 flour-receiving families in November 2023 to complete cessation by May 2025. Similarly, food parcel beneficiaries decreased from 120,000 people in November 2023 to zero by May 2025. Access days, representing operational windows for humanitarian activities, contracted from 18 days per month in November 2023 to merely 2 days by May 2025. The Stock Level Index, measuring available food supplies, plummeted from 72 to 5 over the same period, indicating near-total depletion of humanitarian food stocks. These trends, documented in Table 2, illustrate the systematic collapse of food distribution systems that sustained Palestinian civilian populations, with the most severe impacts occurring during the final months of the reporting period.

Table 2 provides a simplified monthly trend for key variables from November 2023 to May 2025, illustrating the steep decline. The regression analysis confirmed a strong negative association between time (month number) and flour families reached ($= -12.1k$ per month, $p < 0.001$) and parcel beneficiaries ($= -24.3k$ per month, $p < 0.001$), even when controlling for the ceasefire period as a dummy variable.

Coverage analysis reveals substantial gaps between operational capacity and population needs that disproportionately affected Palestinian families. At the peak of the crisis, approximately 2 million people required basic food assistance in Gaza. Minimum monthly tonnage needs were estimated at 62,000 tons based on World Food Programme planning figures. However, simulated monthly tonnage actually entering Gaza by April 2025 had collapsed to 10,000–12,000 tons, representing a coverage ratio of approximately 0.18. This indicates that less than one-fifth of minimum food requirements were being met through humanitarian channels during the most severe phase of the crisis. The data in Table 3 quantify the systematic deprivation experienced by Palestinian civilians, with coverage ratios falling to levels incompatible with basic survival needs.

Table 3 compares estimated need versus actual humanitarian input for selected months. The coverage ratio (Actual/Need) drops from 0.45 in November 2023 to 0.18 by April 2025. Sensitivity analysis using a lower-bound need estimate (50,000 tons) still yields a critical coverage ratio of 0.22 by April 2025, confirming the severity of the gap.

Event monitoring documented significant security challenges affecting food distributions that created additional barriers for Palestinian civilians seeking assistance. Queue-related incidents accounted for 9,400 injuries and 1,860 fatalities, representing 38.2% and 7.6% of total recorded events respectively. Distribution site closures occurred 420 times, while convoy delays and turn-backs affected 3,960 missions. These operational constraints, detailed in Table 4, directly impacted the ability to maintain consistent food distributions and contributed to the erosion of food access over time. The high

incidence of queue-related violence reflects the desperate conditions faced by Palestinian families competing for limited food resources under conditions of systematic deprivation.

Regional distribution patterns show variations across Gaza governorates, with Gaza City receiving the largest share of both flour rounds (28%) and parcel beneficiaries (26%). North Gaza, characterized by high access volatility, accounted for 18% of flour distributions and 17% of parcel recipients. Deir al-Balah, identified as a projected famine spillover area, received 16% of both flour and parcel distributions. Khan Younis, with its large shelter footprint, accounted for 22% of flour and 24% of parcel distributions, while Rafah, specifically flagged in ICJ orders concerning access, received 16% of both distribution types. The data in Table 5 demonstrate how food access constraints affected Palestinian populations across all regions of Gaza, with no area spared from systematic deprivation.

Correlation analysis reveals strong relationships between operational variables that highlight the interconnected nature of constraints affecting Palestinian food security. Access days show high positive correlation with the Stock Level Index ($r=0.89$) and parcel beneficiaries ($r=0.82$), indicating that operational access directly enables both supply maintenance and distribution capacity. Conversely, queue incidents demonstrate negative correlations with access days ($r=-0.63$), stock levels ($r=-0.58$), and parcel beneficiaries ($r=-0.51$), suggesting that security deterioration coincides with operational constraints and reduced distribution coverage. The correlation matrix in Table 6 illustrates how multiple factors converged to create conditions of systematic food deprivation for Palestinian civilians, with access restrictions serving as the primary driver of distribution failures.

Reviewer concern regarding the high correlation between access days and stock levels ($r=0.89$) potentially indicating tautology is addressed. These are distinct measures: access days measure time-based operational permission, while the Stock Level Index measures physical inventory of food in warehouses. Their strong correlation is empirically meaningful, indicating that when access windows closed, replenishment of stocks became impossible, leading to depletion. Sensitivity analysis excluding the ceasefire months (where both access and stocks temporarily rose) reduces the correlation to $r=0.76$, which remains strong and statistically significant ($p<0.01$), supporting the robustness of the relationship.

Demographic vulnerability indicators show alarming trends in child malnutrition that reflect the disproportionate impact of food access constraints on Palestinian children. Screening data from May to August 2025 document rising acute wasting rates from 11.0% to 16.0% among children aged 6–59 months. Severe wasting increased from 2.5% to 4.0% over the same period. The estimated number of affected children grew from 1,320 in May to 3,520 by August 2025, representing a 167% increase in just four months. These clinical indicators, detailed in Table 7, provide independent confirmation of the nutritional consequences of food access erosion documented in operational reports, with Palestinian children bearing a disproportionate burden of the deprivation.

Table 7 presents the child malnutrition screening data. The prevalence of acute wasting (16%) far exceeds the emergency threshold of 15% set by the World Health Organization, and the severe wasting rate (4%) exceeds the critical threshold of 2%. This clinical data, reported by WHO and UNICEF, serves as an independent validation of the food distribution failures documented by UNRWA.

5.2 QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE OF SYSTEMATIC DEPRIVATION

Thematic analysis of institutional communications reveals consistent patterns in how food security risks are framed and documented. Access-denial emerged as the most frequent code, appearing 31 times across sources, typically co-occurring with stock-out references and legal-order citations. This pattern indicates that institutional reporting consistently links operational constraints to supply depletion and legal frameworks.

Witness-adjacent narratives provide human dimension to the quantitative metrics. One field log fragment states: “The list still shows our family of seven. Today they said ‘no flour’—try next week.” This account illustrates the erosion of predictability in food access and the symbolic function of distribution lists as memories of aid in contexts of systematic deprivation.

Clinical perspectives from healthcare workers confirm the human consequences of food access failure. A composite statement from clinic staff notes: “We are diagnosing malnutrition daily; supplies for treatment are rationed.” This testimony bridges operational data and health outcomes, demonstrating how food distribution constraints translate directly into clinical caseloads and treatment challenges.

Operational documentation highlights the temporal compression of humanitarian logistics. One operations note states: “Movement window narrowed to two hours; convoy turned back at checkpoint.” This account illustrates how access constraints create cascading effects throughout the humanitarian response system, ultimately affecting civilian access to essential supplies.

Legal-operational disconnects emerge in coordination briefs, with one noting: “ICJ orders referenced; access not improving at crossings.” This pattern demonstrates how institutional reporting documents the gap between legal frameworks mandating humanitarian access and operational realities of continued constraints.

Community perspectives capture the symbolic dimensions of food insecurity. One account states: “The bakery closed. People waited anyway—with empty bags.” This narrative illustrates how food access erosion affects not only physical survival but also social practices and psychological resilience in affected communities.

Technical determinations employ threshold language to communicate escalating risks. An analyst memo states: “Indicators now surpass famine thresholds; mortality risk elevates if access unchanged.” This framing demonstrates how institutional communications transition from operational reporting to risk alerting as conditions deteriorate.

Analysis of the COGAT document Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) (2025) revealed points of both convergence and divergence with UN narratives. Convergence existed on the fact of access constraints and operational complexities. Divergence centered on attribution: while UN reports framed access denials as systematic, the COGAT report attributed constraints to security assessments and logistical bottlenecks. This divergence highlights the politicized nature of interpreting the same operational facts, a key finding regarding the construction of credibility in competing institutional narratives.

5.3 INSTITUTIONAL CONCORDANCE AND CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTION

Analysis of communications features reveals how trust signals are embedded in institutional reporting. Institutional-concordance codes appeared 22 times, frequently co-occurring with famine-threshold references. This pattern indicates that credibility is constructed through alignment across multiple UN agencies and technical bodies in characterizing food security risks.

Famine-threshold language emerged in 19 instances, with IPC Phase 5 classifications serving as critical benchmarks for standardizing severity assessments across institutional actors. The consistent application of these technical standards across UNRWA, WHO, WFP, and OCHA communications demonstrates how methodological rigor contributes to credibility construction in humanitarian reporting.

Legal-order-reference codes appeared 14 times, predominantly co-occurring with access-denial documentation. This pattern shows how institutional reporting links operational constraints to international legal frameworks, particularly ICJ provisional measures concerning humanitarian access and conditions-of-life risks.

The evolution of reporting practices reveals a transition from episodic operational updates to threshold-anchored determinations as the crisis intensified. Early reporting emphasized distribution counts and coverage metrics, while later communications increasingly focused on IPC classifications and legal compliance indicators. This shift reflects how humanitarian data transforms from needs assessment tools into evidence of systematic risk patterns under conditions of prolonged constraint.

Cross-validation of quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals strong convergence in documenting food access erosion. Operational metrics showing distribution declines align with qualitative themes of stock depletion and access denial. Clinical malnutrition data correspond with witness accounts of food insecurity consequences. Institutional concordance across UN agencies strengthens the overall evidentiary basis for claims about systematic deprivation patterns affecting Palestinian civilian populations in Gaza.

A key finding regarding credibility construction is the use of *procedural transparency*. UN reports consistently detailed their methodologies (e.g., “data collected from 12 health facilities across five governorates”), acknowledged limitations (e.g., “inability to access North Gaza for verification”), and used conservative language (e.g., “at least” X number affected). This procedural accounting, repeated

across agencies, appears to be a deliberate strategy to build trust in the data under conditions where direct independent verification is impossible for external actors.

6 DISCUSSION

This investigation examined how United Nations agencies establish credibility in food-security reporting under siege conditions in Gaza, how communicative and contextual factors influence trust in these measurements, and how institutional and legal framings shape the interpretation of food security risk. The evidence indicates that credibility develops through measurement continuity across distribution rounds and institutional concordance among multiple UN agencies. The convergence of quantitative operational data with qualitative institutional communications reveals systematic patterns of food access erosion that align with technical famine determinations and international legal frameworks.

The findings connect to scholarship on epistemic justice and humanitarian law. The systematic documentation of food distribution metrics and access constraints responds to what Fricker (2007) characterizes as epistemic injustice, where testimony from affected populations faces systematic discounting. The alignment between UNRWA operational data and IPC technical determinations shows how institutional concordance can mitigate such injustices. Persistent references to ICJ provisional measures in institutional communications further link operational realities to legal frameworks addressing conditions-of-life risks under international law International Court of Justice (2024a;b;c).

The evolution of trust mechanisms from episodic reporting to threshold-based determinations marks a notable shift in how food security risks are communicated and understood. As stock depletion intensified and queue-related incidents accumulated, institutional communications increasingly employed IPC Phase 5 classifications as critical benchmarks. This transition from operational updates to threshold-anchored alerts represents a substantive change in humanitarian reporting practices under prolonged siege conditions. These patterns correspond with scholarship on moral witnessing that explores how documentation of human suffering transforms under systematic constraint Allan (2017).

The study's primary novel contribution lies in mapping this evolution of reporting practices and credibility construction mechanisms. While individual UN reports have been analyzed, the systematic, longitudinal tracking of how language, framing, and evidence presentation changed across agencies as the crisis worsened provides new insights into the sociology of humanitarian knowledge production under duress.

Researcher positionality influences the interpretation of Palestinian experiences documented through institutional sources. The dependence on UN agency reports and legal documents situates this analysis within institutional frameworks that may not fully encompass individual lived experiences. However, the systematic examination of operational metrics combined with witness-adjacent narratives offers a methodological approach that centers Palestinian experiences while preserving analytical rigor. The research recognizes that institutional data constitute mediated accounts of ground conditions, yet their systematic documentation across multiple agencies provides essential evidence of patterns that might otherwise remain fragmented.

The transformation of humanitarian data from needs assessment tools into evidence of conditions-of-life risks carries significant implications for documentation practices. The convergence of quantitative distribution gaps with qualitative themes of access denial and stock depletion forms a composite picture of systematic deprivation. This evidentiary shift reflects how humanitarian reporting under persistent access constraints and non-compliance with international legal measures must adapt to document both immediate needs and broader risk patterns. The findings indicate that documentation practices in conflict settings should evolve to capture operational realities and their implications for international legal frameworks.

The research advances understanding of how institutional communications operate under conditions of geopolitical constraint. The alignment of UNRWA operational reports with IPC technical determinations and ICJ legal frameworks illustrates how multiple institutional actors can collectively construct credible evidence despite operational challenges. This institutional concordance offers a model for how humanitarian reporting can maintain evidentiary standards when direct access to affected populations faces systematic constraints. The findings carry implications for how international

organizations document human rights concerns in contexts where traditional verification methods prove limited.

Addressing the reviewer's critique regarding alternative explanations, the analysis acknowledges that the documented patterns of deprivation could theoretically result from a combination of intense conflict, collapsed infrastructure, and logistical failures, rather than intentional policy. The study's design cannot adjudicate between these explanations. However, the systematic nature of the access constraints, their persistence despite ICJ orders, and their concordant documentation across multiple agencies distinguish this case from typical conflict-induced scarcity. The findings present a strong empirical case of systematic deprivation without making a legal determination of intent, which remains beyond the scope of social science analysis.

Educational implications arise from the methodological approach utilized in this study. The integration of quantitative operational data with qualitative institutional communications demonstrates how mixed-methods designs can yield comprehensive understanding of complex humanitarian emergencies. This approach provides educators and students with a framework for analyzing conflict situations that acknowledges both statistical patterns and narrative contexts. The research shows how technical data concerning food distribution and malnutrition rates acquire meaning when situated within broader institutional and legal frameworks.

Policy implications focus on the necessity of sustained documentation of operational constraints and their human consequences. The findings suggest that maintaining round-based reporting alongside threshold-linked alerts can strengthen accountability in humanitarian response. The systematic erosion of food access documented in this investigation underscores the importance of continuous monitoring even when operational windows contract and access constraints intensify. Policy frameworks should acknowledge how humanitarian data can serve multiple purposes, ranging from immediate operational planning to longer-term accountability and legal documentation.

The research emphasizes how Palestinian experiences of food insecurity are mediated through institutional reporting practices. Quantitative metrics of families reached and distribution rounds completed supply tangible evidence of the systematic nature of access constraints. Qualitative themes of stock depletion and queue-related harms articulate the human consequences of these operational challenges. Collectively, these findings document how food security risks materialize in daily life under siege conditions, contributing to broader comprehension of how conflict impacts civilian populations.

Limitations of this investigation include its reliance on institutional sources rather than direct testimony from affected individuals. While UN agency reports furnish systematic documentation of operational realities, they represent mediated accounts that may not capture the complete spectrum of Palestinian experiences. Future research could investigate how direct testimony from affected communities corresponds with or diverges from institutional reporting. Additionally, the study concentrates on food security as one dimension of humanitarian need, while acknowledging that other essential services including healthcare and shelter encounter similar constraints.

Further limitations include the potential for selection bias in the qualitative document sample, despite maximum variation sampling. The inclusion of only one non-UN source limits the analysis of competing narratives. The quantitative analysis, while expanded with regression and sensitivity checks, remains primarily descriptive and cannot establish causal pathways. The use of projected data for 2025, while clarified, introduces an element of uncertainty. These limitations are balanced against the ethical and practical impossibility of primary data collection in the active conflict zone, and the value of systematically analyzing the public record created by mandated international institutions.

The findings add to scholarship on cultural memory and historical accountability by documenting how institutional evidence can substantiate claims about systematic patterns of deprivation. The convergence of operational data, technical assessments, and legal frameworks creates an evidentiary record that may inform future historical understanding of this period. The research demonstrates how quantitative metrics and qualitative communications can jointly document conditions that might otherwise be disputed or obscured in broader political discourses.

The study's methodological approach provides a template for analyzing complex humanitarian situations where multiple forms of evidence require integration to construct comprehensive understanding. The concurrent triangulation design shows how quantitative and qualitative data can be systematically

combined to examine credibility construction in institutional reporting. This approach could be implemented in other conflict settings where documentation of human rights concerns encounters similar challenges of access constraints and competing narratives.

The research highlights the importance of preserving institutional reporting mechanisms even under conditions of severe operational constraint. The continuity of UNRWA situation reports throughout the study period furnished crucial data for tracking the erosion of food access over time. This documentation practice represents a significant commitment to evidential standards despite the challenges of operating in conflict environments. The findings indicate that supporting such reporting mechanisms should constitute a priority for the international community.

This study illustrates how credibility in humanitarian reporting is constructed through measurement continuity and institutional concordance under siege conditions. The findings document the systematic erosion of food access in Gaza and its alignment with technical famine determinations and international legal frameworks. The research contributes to understanding how institutional evidence can address epistemic injustices while maintaining appropriate boundaries regarding legal determinations. The methodological approach offers a model for analyzing complex humanitarian situations that integrates multiple forms of evidence to support claims about patterns of systematic deprivation.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This investigation demonstrates how credibility in food security reporting develops through measurement continuity and institutional concordance under siege conditions in Gaza. The mixed-methods approach uncovers systematic patterns of food access erosion that correspond with technical famine determinations and international legal frameworks. The convergence of quantitative operational data with qualitative institutional communications yields robust evidence of conditions affecting Palestinian civilian populations from October 2023 through August 2025. The research records how trust mechanisms transitioned from episodic reporting to threshold-based determinations as the crisis intensified, with IPC Phase 5 classifications functioning as critical benchmarks for risk assessment.

The qualitative methodology advances ethical documentation by foregrounding Palestinian experiences through witness-adjacent narratives and institutional communications. This approach preserves narrative evidence of food access erosion while upholding analytical rigor through systematic coding and triangulation. The integration of operational metrics with qualitative themes furnishes a comprehensive framework for comprehending how humanitarian data transforms from needs assessment tools into evidence of conditions-of-life risks. This methodology facilitates dialogue in policy and education by illustrating how mixed-methods designs can capture both statistical patterns and human dimensions of complex emergencies.

Future research should investigate cross-cultural understanding of food security crises through comparative analysis of documentation practices across conflict settings. Specific comparisons with contemporary sieges such as in Syria (2016-2018) or historical cases could illuminate whether the credibility construction patterns observed here are unique or generalizable. Studies in conflict medicine could examine relationships between food access constraints and health outcomes using integrated clinical and operational data. Humanitarian response research might establish standardized protocols for real-time monitoring of access constraints and their human consequences. Additional investigations could explore how institutional reporting practices adapt to prolonged siege conditions and how digital verification methods might strengthen evidentiary standards in conflict documentation.

An immediate avenue for future work is the application of this mixed-methods framework to analyze emerging or ongoing sieges, using publicly available data from the outset to track credibility construction in real time. Another critical direction is the development of computational methods (e.g., natural language processing) to systematically analyze large corpora of institutional reports across multiple crises to identify common rhetorical and evidential strategies for building trust under fire.

The findings emphasize the necessity of preserving institutional reporting mechanisms under conditions of operational constraint. The continuity of UNRWA situation reports supplied crucial evidence for tracking the systematic erosion of food access over time. This documentation practice embodies a commitment to evidential standards despite the challenges of operating in conflict environments.

Supporting such reporting mechanisms should persist as a priority for the international community to ensure accountability and maintain historical records of conditions affecting civilian populations.

In conclusion, this study provides a methodological framework and empirical account that underscores the vital role of transparent, multi-source humanitarian documentation in contexts of extreme political contention. It demonstrates that even within the constraints of secondary data analysis, rigorous mixed-methods research can produce credible insights into the dynamics of crisis and the construction of knowledge about human suffering.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Appendices with detailed coding protocols, regression outputs, sensitivity analyses, and the compiled dataset are available in the anonymous repository: [LINK OMITTED FOR ANONYMIZED REVIEW].