

Response to Reviewers

Anonymous Authors

December 11, 2025

Cover Letter

To the Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, **“OBSTRUCTION AS INTENT: STARVATION, HUMANITARIAN DENIAL, AND THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE IN GAZA (2023–2025)”** (Manuscript ID: [PLACEHOLDER]). We are grateful to the reviewers for their thoughtful, detailed, and constructive feedback. Their critiques have been invaluable in strengthening the methodological rigor, analytical clarity, and ethical framing of our work. In this revision, we have undertaken substantial changes to address the core concerns raised by both reviewers. The primary revisions include:

- **Methodological Clarification and Strengthening:** We have significantly expanded the Method section (Section 4) to provide detailed analytical procedures, explicitly acknowledge the limitations of correlational analysis for establishing causation, and incorporate new robustness checks (including sensitivity analysis and comparative benchmarking). A new Table 10 documents these procedures.
- **Moderation of Causal and Legal Claims:** Throughout the manuscript, particularly in the Abstract, Introduction, and Discussion, we have moderated our language to better align the strength of our conclusions with the evidentiary support provided by our observational, mixed-methods design. We now frame our findings as demonstrating *strong associations* and *patterns consistent with* potential genocidal intent, rather than as definitive proof.
- **Enhanced Transparency and Ethical Reflection:** We have added detailed descriptions of data collection protocols, coding procedures, and limitations. We have also included a more explicit discussion of the ethical considerations and positionality inherent in this research within the Method section.
- **Engagement with Confounding Factors and Alternative Explanations:** The revised Discussion now explicitly acknowledges potential confounding variables (e.g., active hostilities, pre-existing vulnerabilities) and the challenge they pose to causal inference. We have also added comparative analysis to contextualize the scale of obstruction in Gaza relative to other conflict zones.

We believe these revisions have substantially improved the manuscript, addressing the major methodological and presentational concerns while preserving its core contribution: the innovative integration of quantitative humanitarian data with qualitative and legal analysis to examine systematic aid obstruction. Below, we provide a point-by-point response to each reviewer’s comments, detailing the specific changes made.

Thank you again for your consideration.
Sincerely,
The Authors

Reviewer-by-Reviewer Detailed Responses

Reviewer 1

Comment: *“Significant methodological concerns include: Causality vs. Correlation: While strong correlations are presented... the study design cannot establish causal relationships. The analysis does not adequately control for confounding variables such as active hostilities, infrastructure damage from direct military action, or broader geopolitical constraints.”*

Response: We thank the reviewer for this crucial point. We agree that our observational design cannot establish definitive causation. In response, we have made the following revisions: 1. Throughout the manuscript, we have moderated our language regarding causal claims. For instance, in the Abstract, we now state we demonstrate “strong statistical *associations*” and that patterns “provide a coherent framework for understanding administrative starvation as a *potentially* prosecutable act.” The Introduction (Section 1) explicitly states: “The study design explicitly acknowledges the limitations of establishing causal relationships through observational data in conflict settings. Rather than claiming definitive causation, the analysis focuses on demonstrating consistent associations... while acknowledging potential confounding factors.” 2. We have expanded the Discussion (Section 6) to directly address confounding variables. We now write: “However, we acknowledge that correlational analysis cannot establish definitive causation, and the observed relationships may be influenced by unmeasured confounding variables including direct military operations and broader geopolitical constraints. The strength and consistency of associations across multiple indicators nevertheless suggest meaningful relationships warranting serious consideration.” 3. We have added a comparative element to contextualize the scale of obstruction. In the Background (Section 3), we note: “Comparative analysis reveals that Gaza’s aid obstruction patterns exceed typical conflict-related humanitarian access challenges. While most active conflict zones experience periodic aid denials averaging 10-15% of missions, Gaza’s consistent 25%+ denial rate represents a significant outlier.”

Comment: *“Data Limitations: Reliance on aggregated organizational data may introduce reporting biases. The paper does not address potential inconsistencies in data collection methodologies across different UN agencies and humanitarian organizations.”*

Response: We have added explicit discussion of these data limitations and our steps to mitigate them. In the Method section (Section 4.2, “Data Sources and Sampling”), we now state: “All quantitative datasets utilized standardized humanitarian measurement frameworks to ensure cross-temporal and cross-regional comparability... Qualitative analysis incorporated rigorous source triangulation by comparing accounts across different organizational affiliations and geographic locations. Methodological transparency was maintained through detailed coding protocols... Potential institutional biases were addressed by examining consistency of narratives across organizations with different mandates and reporting requirements.” Furthermore, in the Trustworthiness subsection (4.7), we note that triangulation across sources was used to address potential biases in individual datasets.

Comment: *“Enhance Methodological Transparency: Provide detailed protocols for data collection, coding procedures, and statistical analysis in supplementary materials.”*

Response: We have significantly expanded the Method section to provide this detail within the main text, enhancing transparency for all readers. Specifically: - Section 4.2 (“Data Sources and Sampling”) now details data extraction protocols and qualitative sampling procedures. - Section 4.3 (“Quantitative

Data Collection and Measures”) explicitly defines how each variable was operationalized. - Section 4.5 (“Data Analysis Procedures”) details the specific statistical methods (e.g., use of Pearson correlation, reference to established mortality estimation methods) and qualitative coding process. - A new **Table 10: “Robustness Checks and Sensitivity Analysis”** has been added (page 8, following Table 2) to document procedures like alternative correlation measures (Spearman’s rank), bootstrap resampling, multicollinearity assessment, and inter-coder reliability checks. This table is highlighted in red in the revised LaTeX.

Comment: *“Theoretical Overload: The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks (epistemic justice, moral witnessing, decolonial perspectives) sometimes overwhelms the empirical analysis.”*

Response: We have streamlined the theoretical integration to ensure it serves the empirical analysis rather than overwhelms it. We have reduced digressions in the Introduction and Background, focusing more sharply on how these frameworks inform our methodological choices and interpretation. For example, in the Method section (4.9, “Theoretical Framework Integration”), we clarify: “Theoretical frameworks guided rather than predetermined analytical outcomes, with emergent findings occasionally challenging initial theoretical expectations... Theoretical sensitivity balanced conceptual sophistication with empirical substantiation throughout the analytical process.”

Comment: *“Tone Moderation: Moderate language in abstract and conclusion to better align with evidentiary support (e.g., “potential” rather than “prosecutable”).”*

Response: We have carefully moderated the language throughout. Key changes: - Abstract: Changed “provides a coherent framework for understanding administrative starvation as a prosecutable act” to “as a **potentially** prosecutable act.” - Abstract/Conclusion: Consistently use phrases like “patterns consistent with,” “potentially indicative of,” and “associations that may satisfy the threshold” instead of definitive legal conclusions. - Discussion: Emphasize that findings “may be consistent with the legal threshold” and “suggest meaningful relationships warranting serious consideration.”

Reviewer 2

Comment: *“The framing appears predetermined, with evidence selectively marshaled to support a pre-existing legal conclusion rather than allowing findings to emerge from rigorous, impartial analysis.”*

Response: We understand the reviewer’s concern about perceived confirmation bias. To address this, we have: 1. Explicitly reframed the study’s aim as an *examination* of whether obstruction patterns are *consistent with* legal thresholds, not a proof of them. The Introduction now states we “investigate how the creation of conditions... *may* constitute” genocidal intent. 2. Strengthened the methodological rigor and transparency (as detailed in responses to Reviewer 1) to demonstrate that our findings emerge from systematic analysis. The new robustness checks and explicit acknowledgment of data limitations (Table 10, Section 4.7) are crucial here. 3. Added a direct discussion of the challenge of inferring intent from observational patterns in the Discussion, acknowledging the complexity of the issue.

Comment: *“Methodological overreach: Correlation analysis presented as evidence of legal intent without proper causal inference methods.”*

Response: We agree that presenting correlation as definitive evidence of legal intent was an overstatement. We have revised the manuscript to clearly separate three levels of analysis: (1) descriptive patterns of deterioration, (2) statistical associations between obstruction and deterioration, and (3) interpretive analysis of what these patterns *might* signify in a legal context, with appropriate caveats. The correlation matrix (Table 5) is now presented as evidence of “strong statistical associations” and “quantitative evidence for the pathways through which administrative obstruction *associates with* conditions...” (Results, Section 5.5). The Discussion explicitly states these are associations, not proof of causation.

Comment: *“Ethical boundary violation: Scholars acting as de facto legal prosecutors rather than objective researchers.”*

Response: This is a vital ethical point. We have reframed our role. We are not making legal

determinations but providing scholarly analysis that *could inform* legal processes. We now position our work as documenting patterns and integrating evidence in a way that is *relevant to* legal frameworks. The moderated language (using “potential,” “consistent with”) is key here. Furthermore, in the Method section (4.7, “Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations”), we added: “Ethical considerations extended to analytical interpretation, with careful attention to avoiding overstatement of evidentiary claims. Positionality reflection acknowledged the researchers’ epistemological stance while maintaining methodological rigor through transparency about analytical decisions.”

Comment: *“Omission of alternative explanations: No serious engagement with security rationales or operational challenges.”*

Response: We have incorporated this engagement. The Background (Section 3) now acknowledges that “security narratives often influence humanitarian access.” More importantly, the Discussion (Section 6) now includes the following: “The robustness checks conducted strengthen confidence in these associations... However, we acknowledge that correlational analysis cannot establish definitive causation, and the observed relationships may be influenced by unmeasured confounding variables including direct military operations and broader geopolitical constraints.” This directly addresses the possibility that alternative factors (like active combat operations) could explain the observed correlations.

Comment: *“Inadequate contextualization: Failure to compare with similar patterns in other conflict zones.”*

Response: We have added comparative contextualization. In the Background (Section 3), we now state: “Comparative analysis reveals that Gaza’s aid obstruction patterns exceed typical conflict-related humanitarian access challenges. While most active conflict zones experience periodic aid denials averaging 10-15% of missions, Gaza’s consistent 25%+ denial rate represents a significant outlier. Similarly, the systematic nature of infrastructure targeting... distinguishes this case from collateral damage patterns observed in other contemporary conflicts.” This benchmarking is also included in the new Table 10.

Comment: *“Add methodological limitations section acknowledging source biases and analytical constraints.”*

Response: We have integrated this discussion throughout the Method and Discussion sections rather than in a single standalone section, as we believe it is more rigorous to address limitations specific to each part of the process. Key additions: - Method 4.2: Discusses potential institutional biases in qualitative sources and steps for triangulation. - Method 4.7: Discusses limitations of using pre-aggregated public data. - Discussion: Contains an extended paragraph on study limitations, including: “Study limitations include reliance on organizational data that may reflect institutional priorities and reporting constraints... The use of correlation analysis rather than experimental designs means that causal relationships must be inferred with appropriate caution...”

Closing Note

We again extend our sincere gratitude to both reviewers for their challenging and insightful critiques. Engaging with their comments has been a rigorous and rewarding process that has fundamentally improved the scholarship of this manuscript. We have strengthened its methodological foundation, clarified its arguments, moderated its claims to align with evidence, and enhanced its ethical and scholarly rigor. We believe the revised manuscript presents a more nuanced, robust, and significant contribution to the interdisciplinary study of humanitarian crises, international law, and epistemic justice.