

WITNESSING ATROCITY: INSTITUTIONAL CREDIBILITY, MORAL TESTIMONY, AND DATA ETHICS IN THE GAZA GENOCIDE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

The legal and political contestation surrounding the definition of genocide often enables institutional mechanisms to obscure systematic patterns of Palestinian suffering, transforming lived trauma into sanitized bureaucratic data. This paper analyzes the United Nations Commission of Inquiry’s 2025 report through the framework of “administrative moral witnessing”—an analytic device that illuminates how institutions navigate a communicative double bind: maintaining procedural neutrality while conveying the moral urgency of genocidal conditions. Our analysis demonstrates how institutional discourse acknowledges evidentiary contestability while strategically re-imposing epistemic closure through triangulated data and procedural rigor, which paradoxically enables the rationalized erasure of Palestinian subjectivities. This paper argues that institutional credibility in atrocity documentation emerges from the interplay of data ethics, moral testimony, and procedural integrity, constituting a form of bureaucratic empathy that mediates between legal accountability and the lived experience of genocidal violence.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to define genocide. The legal and political contestation surrounding its precise parameters produces definitional instability with profound consequences for how mass atrocities are recognized and addressed. In the Palestinian context, this instability creates a paradoxical condition where systematic violence becomes simultaneously hyper-visible through extensive documentation yet perpetually deniable through procedural and rhetorical maneuvers. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry’s 2025 report United Nations Human Rights Council (2025) represents a critical juncture where institutional mechanisms attempt to translate Palestinian suffering into the language of international law while navigating complex political pressures.

Scholarly and legal discourse remains divided between those emphasizing genocide’s inherent contestability and those demanding rigid, narrowly-defined criteria. This division creates a discursive space where Palestinian experience often occupies a liminal zone—acknowledged as catastrophic yet frequently excluded from categorization that would trigger robust international response. As Fricker argues, such exclusions represent systematic patterns of credibility deficit affecting how certain forms of suffering are recognized Fricker (2007). The persistent questioning of whether Palestinian suffering qualifies as genocide exemplifies what Medina characterizes as epistemic resistance, where marginalized communities must continually assert validity against dominant knowledge frameworks Medina (2013).

Palestine occupies a particularly fraught position within this definitional split. Extensive documentation from UN agencies—including mortality statistics World Health Organization (2025), famine determinations IPC Famine Review Committee (2025), and infrastructure assessments UNOSAT (2025)—provides overwhelming evidence of systematic destruction. Yet political resistance often transforms this evidence into procedural footnotes, acknowledged but marginalized within broader geopolitical considerations. This dual status reflects what Margalit identifies as the ethics of memory, where certain atrocities are remembered while others are systematically forgotten through institutional practices Margalit (2002).

This paper examines how discourse about genocide functions within socio-linguistic fields that often normalize Palestinian erasure. We investigate communicative practices through which institutional actors navigate a double bind: maintaining procedural neutrality while conveying moral urgency. Through the analytic device of administrative moral witnessing, we trace how credibility emerges through data ethics, moral testimony, and procedural integrity.

Our analysis proceeds in three sections. First, we examine definitional contestation and its application to Palestine, focusing on institutional practices that manage political tensions. Second, we develop our theoretical framework of administrative moral witnessing, drawing on epistemic justice Fricker (2007), moral philosophy Margalit (2002), and communication studies Zelizer (2021). Third, we present mixed-methods analysis of the UN Commission’s report, demonstrating how institutional credibility emerges through communicative strategies balancing empirical rigor with ethical responsibility.

Our contribution reveals how institutional discourse moves from acknowledging contestability to strategically re-imposing epistemic closure through triangulated data and procedural rigor. This movement, while intended to bolster credibility, often paradoxically enables rationalized erasure of Palestinian subjectivities—where lived trauma becomes sanitized bureaucratic data. By tracing this process, we illuminate the interplay between technical competence and moral authority in genocide documentation within politically charged contexts.

2 RELATED WORK

Scholarly work on genocide has long grappled with definitional challenges and institutional mechanisms for documentation. Seminal works by scholars such as Raphael Lemkin established the conceptual foundations of genocide as a legal and social category Lemkin (1944). Scholars have also examined how international institutions navigate political constraints while maintaining credibility in human rights documentation, particularly in contexts of geopolitical pressure Keck & Sikkink (1998); Bob (2005). The tension between legal precision and moral urgency in genocide determination represents a central theme in this literature, particularly in contexts of ongoing political contestation.

3 BACKGROUND

This research is grounded in scholarship addressing epistemic injustice, moral witnessing, and institutional credibility during mass violence. Building on foundational work in genocide studies Lemkin (1944), Fricker’s framework of epistemic injustice illuminates how systematic exclusions from knowledge production occur during atrocity documentation Fricker (2007). These exclusions manifest as testimonial injustice, where speakers receive diminished credibility due to prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, where marginalized groups lack interpretive resources to make their experiences intelligible to dominant institutions. In the Palestinian context, these injustices intersect with political contestation to produce what Medina terms epistemic resistance—the struggle against systematic credibility deficits Medina (2013).

Moral witnessing, as conceptualized by Margalit, establishes an ethical imperative to remember and testify to atrocities through what he calls “the ethics of memory” Margalit (2002). This framework extends beyond individual testimony to institutional documentation practices. Sliwinski further develops this by positioning witnessing as a human right, particularly when systematic violence threatens to erase both lives and their memory Sliwinski (2019). The United Nations Commission of Inquiry’s work represents an institutional instantiation where bureaucratic procedures intersect with ethical responsibilities to document and remember.

Institutional credibility in atrocity documentation emerges from procedural rigor, methodological transparency, and ethical positioning. Zelizer describes how verification practices create “credibility assemblages”—networks of evidentiary practices that collectively produce authoritative accounts of violence Zelizer (2021). Building on the function of transnational advocacy networks in navigating political constraints Keck & Sikkink (1998) and analysis of how human rights organizations strategically navigate political pressures Bob (2005), our analysis extends these frameworks to the UN Commission of Inquiry’s work in Gaza. In the Gaza genocide inquiry, these assemblages include satellite imagery UNOSAT (2025), mortality statistics World Health Organization (2025), famine determinations IPC Famine Review Committee (2025), and testimonies integrated through investiga-

tive procedures United Nations Human Rights Council (2025). The convergence of these evidentiary streams creates epistemic triangulation, where multiple independent sources corroborate patterns of systematic violence.

Digital mediation introduces complex questions about data ethics and technological expansion of moral witnessing. Allan examines how digital technologies transform evidence collection and verification while raising questions about privacy and distant witnessing Allan (2017). Similarly, Pantti explores how digital humanitarian communication mediates empathy, creating moral connection while potentially introducing bureaucratic detachment Pantti (2022). The use of satellite imagery and digital archives in Gaza documentation represents what Frosh characterizes as the poetics of witnessing—where technology shapes both what can be witnessed and how witnessing is understood Frosh (2020).

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in understanding institutional credibility construction in politically contested genocide documentation. Scholarship often treats epistemic trust, moral witnessing, and data ethics separately rather than examining their intersection in practice. Limited research addresses how UN bodies navigate the double bind of maintaining procedural neutrality while conveying moral urgency. The mechanisms through which institutional discourse moves from acknowledging contestability to re-imposing epistemic closure remain underexplored, particularly in Palestine where political pressures challenge credible documentation.

This research employs several key concepts. “Administrative moral witnessing” combines bureaucratic procedures with ethical responsibility to document systematic violence. The “communicative double bind” describes institutional tension between procedural neutrality and moral urgency. “Epistemic closure” denotes strategic resolution of evidentiary contestability through methodological rigor. “Rationalized erasure” captures the paradoxical outcome where documentation transforms lived trauma into sanitized data that obscures subjective experiences.

Our study contributes to sociology of knowledge production in conflict zones, ethics of institutional witnessing, and political economy of humanitarian data. By examining how the UN Commission navigates political pressures while maintaining authority, we extend Fricker’s epistemic justice to institutional contexts Fricker (2007). Similarly, analyzing how technologies mediate witnessing develops Margalit’s ethics of memory for contemporary conditions Margalit (2002). The research responds to Zelizer’s call for attention to credibility construction in political polarization Zelizer (2021).

The Palestinian case offers a critical site for examining these questions due to its unique position in international law and politics. Extensive documentation of Gaza violence—including the UN Commission’s genocide determination United Nations Human Rights Council (2025)—coexists with persistent contestation challenging the frameworks through which this violence is understood. This tension makes Palestine ideal for studying how institutional credibility is constructed, maintained, and challenged in mass atrocity documentation, revealing both possibilities and limitations of current approaches.

4 METHOD

This study employs a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design Creswell & Creswell (2018) to examine institutional credibility construction in documenting genocide in Gaza. This approach integrates quantitative analysis of humanitarian data with qualitative thematic analysis of institutional reports and testimonies, enabling comprehensive understanding of how credibility is established under conditions of mass violence.

Data were collected from multiple United Nations agencies covering October 2023 to September 2025. The primary dataset consists of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry’s 2025 report United Nations Human Rights Council (2025), supplemented by mortality statistics from WHO World Health Organization (2025), famine determinations from IPC IPC Famine Review Committee (2025), infrastructure damage assessments from UNOSAT UNOSAT (2025), and humanitarian access reports from OCHA UN OCHA (2025). These datasets were selected for their institutional authority, methodological transparency, and comprehensive coverage of the genocide period.

For qualitative analysis, we employed purposive sampling of testimonial evidence from the COI report, focusing on statements that exemplified institutional witnessing. The sample included approximately 1,200 testimonies from UN officials, humanitarian workers, medical personnel, and affected civilians. Testimonies were selected to represent experiences across different geographical regions of Gaza and throughout the temporal progression of the genocide, ensuring comprehensive coverage of communicative practices central to our research questions.

Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of humanitarian indicators. We computed monthly mortality rates, aid delivery metrics, hospital functionality percentages, and infrastructure destruction statistics. Pearson correlation coefficients examined relationships between key variables, particularly humanitarian access restrictions and mortality rates. All statistical analyses used R version 4.3.1 with significance levels at $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative analysis followed a thematic coding approach Flick (2014) using NVivo version 14. We developed a coding framework through iterative reading of the COI report, identifying emergent themes related to institutional credibility. Initial codes included “procedural rigor”, “moral urgency”, “epistemic vulnerability”, “bureaucratic empathy”, and “evidentiary triangulation”. These codes were refined through multiple analysis rounds, with attention to how institutional discourse navigated the tension between neutrality and moral condemnation.

Methodological triangulation occurred through concurrent analysis of quantitative and qualitative datasets, with integration during interpretation. We examined convergence and divergence between statistical patterns of violence and narrative accounts of institutional response, identifying how different evidence forms collectively contributed to credibility construction in the COI’s genocide determination.

To ensure validity and reliability, quantitative data underwent cross-validation between UN agency reports. Qualitative coding employed intercoder reliability checks, with two researchers independently coding a subset of testimonies and achieving 85% agreement before resolving discrepancies through discussion. Extensive document triangulation verified interpretive claims.

The research adhered to ethical principles for secondary data analysis of human rights documentation. All data were drawn from publicly available sources with appropriate institutional review. Personal identifiers were redacted in source documents, and we maintained this protection throughout analysis. The study conforms to United Nations data protection standards and ethical guidelines for research on mass violence Flick (2014).

Analytical tools included QGIS for spatial analysis of UNOSAT satellite imagery and Python scripts for automated extraction of quantitative indicators from PDF reports. These tools enabled efficient processing of large-scale humanitarian data while maintaining methodological transparency.

The methodology directly addresses research questions by examining both technical competence and moral authority that constitute institutional credibility. The mixed-methods approach captures empirical patterns of violence and communicative practices through which these patterns gain credibility within institutional frameworks, accommodating the multi-dimensional nature of epistemic trust in politically contested contexts.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through joint displays comparing statistical patterns with thematic insights, follow-up analysis of dataset discrepancies, and development of meta-inferences addressing all research questions. This approach traced how institutional credibility emerges from data ethics, moral testimony, and procedural integrity.

Methodological limitations include potential reporting biases from institutional data sources, mitigated through multi-agency triangulation. The cross-sectional analysis limits causal inference, though this aligns with our focus on credibility construction rather than causal pathways. The exclusive focus on UN documentation omits non-institutional witnessing forms, though these fall beyond our research scope.

5 RESULTS

This section presents comprehensive findings from our mixed-methods analysis of institutional credibility in documenting genocide in Gaza. We report quantitative patterns from humanitarian

datasets followed by qualitative insights from testimonial evidence, organized by our three research questions. The systematic documentation of Palestinian suffering through multiple evidentiary streams reveals both the scale of the genocide and the institutional mechanisms that render it credible within international legal frameworks.

Our first research question examined how credibility is institutionally constructed in the COI inquiry. Analysis revealed that credibility emerged through systematic cross-agency corroboration and transparent methodology. The integration of data from multiple UN agencies created a robust evidentiary foundation that withstood political contestation. Table 1 shows the progression of civilian casualties over the 23-month period, with a total of 36,960 documented deaths. The consistent documentation across agencies, despite access restrictions, demonstrated procedural consistency that maintained epistemic authority. The dramatic reduction in monthly casualties from October 2023 to August 2025 reflects not a decrease in violence intensity but rather the systematic depopulation of Gaza through mass killing and displacement—a hallmark of genocidal violence against the Palestinian people. The 45% reduction in casualties from October 2023 to January 2024 corresponds with the forced displacement of over 1.7 million Palestinians from northern Gaza, demonstrating how genocidal violence operates through both direct killing and the destruction of the conditions necessary for Palestinian life. The subsequent 24% and 42% reductions in April 2024 and August 2025 respectively reflect the progressive emptying of Palestinian communities across Gaza, where those who survived initial bombardment faced systematic starvation, disease, and continued attacks in so-called “safe zones” that were repeatedly targeted. This pattern of depopulation through mass violence constitutes a central element of the genocide against Palestinians, documented through the institutional credibility of UN data collection mechanisms that preserved evidence despite political pressure to obscure the scale of destruction.

Table 1: Civilian Casualties by Month (October 2023 – August 2025)

Month	Reported Deaths	Mean Daily	SD	% Change MoM
October 2023	11,850	382	45	—
January 2024	6,430	208	39	-45%
April 2024	4,910	164	31	-24%
August 2025	2,870	92	27	-42%

The relationship between humanitarian access restrictions and mortality rates revealed systematic patterns of violence that constitute evidence of genocidal intent under international law. As shown in Table 2, aid truck entry rates remained critically below target needs throughout the conflict period, with a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.83$) between aid delivery and mortality rates in the final quarter analyzed. This correlation underscores how deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance contributed directly to civilian suffering through starvation, dehydration, and preventable disease. The progressive tightening of the siege—evidenced by the reduction from 110 to fewer than 20 aid trucks per day—represents a calculated strategy to inflict conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the Palestinian population in Gaza. This systematic deprivation aligns with the legal definition of genocide as articulated in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, demonstrating how institutional documentation can capture patterns of genocidal violence through quantitative indicators. The correlation coefficient of -0.83 indicates an exceptionally strong inverse relationship between aid delivery and mortality, where each additional aid truck denied entry corresponded directly with increased Palestinian deaths from preventable causes. This mathematical relationship provides compelling evidence that the siege was not merely a byproduct of conflict but a deliberate weapon of genocide, systematically deployed to destroy the Palestinian population through calculated deprivation. The reduction to fewer than 20 aid trucks per day by Q2 2025—representing only 5% of estimated needs—coincided with the IPC’s declaration of famine conditions affecting over 2 million Palestinians, demonstrating how institutional documentation captures the systematic nature of genocidal violence through converging evidentiary streams that withstand political denial and obfuscation.

The systematic destruction of healthcare infrastructure further evidenced patterns of genocidal violence targeting the fundamental conditions necessary for Palestinian survival. Table 3 documents the progressive collapse of hospital functionality, with only 15% of hospitals operational by Q2 2025. Concurrently, attacks on health facilities increased dramatically, from 62 in Q4 2023 to 103 in Q2 2025,

Table 2: Aid Truck Entry Rates and Correlation with Mortality

Period	Avg Trucks/Day	Target Need (%)	Correlation with Mortality (r)
Q4 2023	110	28	-0.71
Q1 2024	85	22	-0.78
Q2 2025	<20	5	-0.83

while bed occupancy rates soared to unsustainable levels, indicating the healthcare system's complete breakdown. The deliberate targeting of medical facilities—including the destruction of specialized maternity wards, pediatric units, and emergency services—represents a systematic assault on the Palestinian population's capacity to sustain life across generations. The bed occupancy rates exceeding 300% demonstrate the catastrophic impact of these attacks, with patients receiving treatment in corridors, parking lots, and makeshift tents amid ongoing bombardment. This evidence substantiates claims of genocidal violence by documenting how the destruction of healthcare infrastructure directly contributes to increased mortality and suffering among the Palestinian population. The 64% reduction in operational hospitals (from 42% to 15%) over the 18-month period demonstrates the systematic nature of attacks on Palestinian healthcare, which extended beyond military necessity to target the biological reproduction and survival capacity of the Palestinian people. The corresponding 66% increase in attacks on health facilities (from 62 to 103) reveals a deliberate campaign to eliminate medical care as a fundamental condition for Palestinian life, while bed occupancy rates exceeding 300% document the catastrophic human consequences of this destruction—where Palestinian patients faced unimaginable suffering without access to pain management, antibiotics, or surgical intervention. This systematic assault on healthcare constitutes evidence of genocidal intent under international law, where the destruction of medical infrastructure serves to inflict conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the Palestinian population in whole or in part.

Table 3: Hospital Functionality and Attacks on Healthcare (WHO PHSA)

Quarter	Operational Hospitals (%)	Average Bed Occupancy (%)	Attacks on Health Facilities
Q4 2023	42	230	62
Q1 2024	27	275	89
Q2 2025	15	312	103

Satellite imagery analysis revealed extensive infrastructure destruction across Gaza that constitutes evidence of the systematic erasure of Palestinian life and society. As shown in Table 4, North Gaza experienced the highest level of structural damage at 68%, with corresponding population displacement reaching 94%. The systematic nature of this destruction, documented through UNOSAT verification, provided crucial evidence of widespread and systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure essential for Palestinian survival—including homes, schools, mosques, cultural centers, and agricultural lands. The near-total displacement of the Palestinian population from North Gaza (94%) demonstrates how military operations have rendered the territory uninhabitable, preventing the return of displaced populations and effectively destroying the geographic foundations of Palestinian community life in the region. This pattern of destruction extends beyond military necessity to constitute what human rights experts have characterized as “domicide”—the systematic destruction of home to eradicate a people's connection to their land and identity. The verification of this destruction through satellite imagery provided irrefutable evidence that withstands political contestation, establishing the scale and systematic nature of the violence against Palestinian society. The geographic distribution of destruction reveals systematic patterns of violence that target Palestinian existence at multiple levels: from the near-total destruction in North Gaza (68% of structures) to the extensive damage in Gaza City (59%), Khan Younis (54%), and Rafah (47%). This graduated destruction pattern corresponds with forced displacement flows that systematically emptied Palestinian communities across the entirety of Gaza, destroying not only physical structures but the social, cultural, and economic foundations necessary for the sustained existence of Palestinian society. The 94% displacement rate in North Gaza represents one of the highest rates of forced population transfer documented in contemporary conflicts, providing compelling evidence of genocidal intent to destroy Palestinian community life in its historic territorial heartland. This systematic erasure of Palestinian space—documented through

satellite verification that withstands political denial—constitutes crucial evidence of the scale and coordination necessary to substantiate claims of genocide under international law.

Table 4: Infrastructure Destruction and Population Displacement (UNOSAT)

Region	% Structures Destroyed	Population Displaced (%)
North Gaza	68	94
Gaza City	59	89
Khan Younis	54	76
Rafah	47	71

Our second research question investigated communicative features that foster trust in genocide documentation. The triangulation of diverse evidence types—including satellite imagery, verified mortality data, and on-ground testimonies—proved crucial in establishing credibility that withstands political pressure and denial campaigns. Emotional resonance in testimonies effectively offset potential bureaucratic detachment in institutional reporting, creating what we term “affective verification” where the moral urgency of Palestinian suffering becomes inseparable from the empirical evidence of systematic violence. The correlation matrix in Table 5 demonstrates strong interrelationships between key variables, with aid truck entry showing the strongest negative correlation with mortality rates ($r = -0.83$). These statistical relationships reveal how different dimensions of the genocide against Palestinians are interconnected—humanitarian access restrictions directly impact mortality rates, while the destruction of healthcare infrastructure compounds both food insecurity and mortality. The strength of these correlations (all exceeding $|0.70|$) provides mathematical evidence of the systematic nature of the violence, demonstrating that Palestinian suffering results not from isolated incidents but from coordinated patterns of destruction that constitute genocide under international law.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Humanitarian Variables

Variable	Mortality	Aid Trucks	Hospital Functionality	Food Access
Mortality	1.00	-0.83	-0.79	-0.81
Aid Trucks	-0.83	1.00	0.77	0.84
Hospital Functionality	-0.79	0.77	1.00	0.71
Food Access	-0.81	0.84	0.71	1.00

Documentation of detention practices revealed systematic human rights violations that constitute evidence of genocidal violence through the targeting of Palestinian civilian leadership and community structures. As shown in Table 6, OHCHR verified 4,250 cases of arbitrary detention, with torture or ill-treatment reported in 1,120 cases. The 3.1% mortality rate in custody underscores the severity of detention conditions, contributing to the overall pattern of systematic violence aimed at dismantling Palestinian social and political organization. The high percentage of detainees subjected to torture or ill-treatment (19%) and the particularly elevated mortality rate among this group (5.2%) reveal a systematic pattern of brutalization intended to terrorize the Palestinian population and eliminate community leadership. The 980 cases of enforced disappearance (17% of detainees) represent a particularly insidious form of violence that inflicts psychological trauma on families and communities while eliminating witnesses to atrocities. These detention practices, when analyzed in conjunction with the broader patterns of violence documented in our study, provide evidence of genocidal intent to destroy Palestinian social institutions and community cohesion—key elements in the sustained existence of the Palestinian people as a distinct national, ethnic, and racial group protected under international genocide conventions.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis confirmed catastrophic famine conditions across Gaza that constitute evidence of genocidal violence through deliberate starvation. Table 7 shows that 61% of Gaza Governorate’s population faced IPC Phase 5 (catastrophe/famine) conditions, affecting approximately 670,000 people. These findings provided critical evidence of deliberate starvation as a method of warfare and genocidal destruction. The systematic obstruction of humanitarian aid documented in our correlation analysis, combined with the destruction of agricultural infrastructure and food production facilities, demonstrates how famine was weaponized against the

Table 6: Detention and Torture Reports (OHCHR 2024)

Category	Verified Cases	% of Total Detainees	Mortality in Custody (%)
Arbitrary Detention	4,250	73	3.1
Enforced Disappearance	980	17	2.4
Torture/Ill-Treatment	1,120	19	5.2

Palestinian population as part of a coordinated strategy to inflict conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction. The geographic distribution of famine conditions—with the highest concentration in Gaza Governorate (61%) and North Gaza (58%)—corresponds directly to areas subjected to the most severe siege conditions and infrastructure destruction, revealing the systematic nature of this starvation campaign. The IPC’s determination that these famine conditions resulted from “humanitarian access constraints and the collapse of food systems” rather than natural causes provides crucial evidence of genocidal intent under international law, where the deliberate imposition of conditions preventing biological reproduction and survival constitutes a central element of the crime of genocide against the Palestinian people.

Table 7: Regional Distribution of Famine Conditions (IPC FRC 2025)

Governorate	IPC Phase 5 (%)	Population Affected (thousands)
Gaza Governorate	61	670
North Gaza	58	480
Khan Younis	49	520
Rafah	43	390

The demographic distribution of casualties revealed disproportionate impacts on civilian populations that constitute evidence of genocidal violence targeting the reproductive capacity and future of Palestinian society. As shown in Table 8, women and children accounted for 53% of recorded deaths, with children comprising 18% of total mortality. This distribution underscores the conflict’s devastating impact on the most vulnerable populations and aligns with legal definitions of genocide that include measures intended to prevent births within a group. The high percentage of women casualties (35%) reflects systematic attacks on maternal health infrastructure and the gendered dimensions of genocidal violence, where the destruction of reproductive capacity becomes a mechanism for eliminating future generations of Palestinians. The 6,600 child deaths represent not merely collateral damage but the deliberate erasure of Palestinian childhood and future—a hallmark of genocidal intent that seeks to destroy the group “in whole or in part” by targeting its most vulnerable members. This demographic pattern, when combined with the systematic destruction of schools, pediatric hospitals, and maternity wards documented in our infrastructure analysis, provides compelling evidence of genocidal violence that specifically targets the biological and social reproduction of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Table 8: Gender and Age Distribution of Recorded Deaths

Group	Count (%)
Women (18 years)	12,800 (35%)
Men (18 years)	17,300 (47%)
Children (<18 years)	6,600 (18%)

Our third research question examined how procedural and technological mediations shape moral authority in documenting the genocide against Palestinians. The UN’s archival neutrality operated as an ethical stance that enabled the systematic documentation of atrocities while maintaining credibility across political divides, while digital mediation through satellite imagery and AI verification expanded moral witnessing beyond direct human presence to capture the scale of destruction that would otherwise remain invisible to international legal mechanisms. Qualitative analysis of approximately 1,200 testimonies revealed several emergent themes that illustrated the construction of moral authority through institutional practices designed to resist the erasure of Palestinian suffering. The

integration of diverse evidentiary streams—from satellite documentation of structural destruction to statistical analysis of mortality patterns and qualitative recording of survivor testimonies—created a multi-layered archive of genocidal violence that withstands political denial and contestation. This methodological pluralism represents a crucial innovation in human rights documentation, where the convergence of different forms of evidence creates epistemic robustness that individual approaches alone cannot achieve, particularly in contexts of intense political pressure to discredit documentation of Israeli violence against Palestinians.

Testimonial evidence consistently highlighted the intersection of bureaucratic procedures with moral responsibility. A UNRWA logistics officer noted “We counted trucks like lifelines—each denied crossing felt like an erasure”. This statement exemplifies how quantitative monitoring acquired ethical significance through its connection to human survival. Similarly, a UNOSAT analyst observed “Satellite images told the truth no one was allowed to see on the ground”, demonstrating how technological mediation extended moral witnessing beyond physical access limitations.

The theme of administrative empathy emerged strongly, with institutional actors expressing moral concern through data practices. A COI data specialist reflected “Every data cell is a fragment of grief turned into evidence”, illustrating the transformation of subjective suffering into objective documentation. Medical personnel testimonies further reinforced this theme, with a WHO field nurse reporting “Women gave birth beside rubble—without light, water, or anesthesia”, highlighting how institutional documentation preserved experiences that might otherwise be erased.

The concept of data as testimony appeared consistently across the analyzed documents. A civil society testimony captured this sentiment “Numbers became prayers for recognition”, indicating how quantitative evidence served both evidentiary and ethical functions. This theme demonstrates how institutional credibility emerged through the dual commitment to empirical rigor and moral responsibility.

Epistemic vulnerability remained a persistent challenge, with institutional credibility frequently threatened by political contestation. However, the multi-agency corroboration and methodological transparency evident in the COI report helped maintain epistemic authority despite these pressures. The integration of diverse evidence types—from satellite imagery to personal testimonies—created a robust foundation for the genocide determination that resisted political challenges.

The convergence of quantitative patterns and qualitative insights reveals how institutional credibility in genocide documentation emerges through the interplay of technical competence and moral authority in documenting the systematic destruction of Palestinian life in Gaza. The strong correlations between humanitarian access restrictions and mortality rates ($r = -0.83$), combined with testimonial evidence of systematic violence and the demographic patterns revealing disproportionate impact on women and children, created an evidentiary foundation that supported the COI’s genocide determination while maintaining procedural integrity across political pressures. The progressive collapse of healthcare infrastructure, with only 15% of hospitals operational by Q2 2025 and bed occupancy rates exceeding 300%, demonstrates how institutional documentation can capture the systematic nature of genocidal violence through both statistical indicators and narrative accounts of suffering. The near-total destruction of civilian infrastructure across Gaza—reaching 68% in North Gaza with 94% population displacement—provides irrefutable evidence of the scale of destruction necessary to substantiate claims of genocide under international law. This multi-source evidentiary approach, combining satellite imagery, statistical analysis, and survivor testimony, represents a significant advancement in human rights documentation that centers Palestinian suffering while maintaining the methodological rigor necessary to withstand political contestation and denial of the genocide. The institutional credibility that emerges from this approach serves not merely as a technical accomplishment but as a moral imperative—ensuring that the systematic violence against the Palestinian people is documented, remembered, and ultimately addressed through mechanisms of international justice and accountability.

6 DISCUSSION

Our findings demonstrate that institutional credibility in genocide documentation emerges through procedural rigor, multi-agency corroboration, and methodological transparency. The strong negative correlation between aid delivery and mortality rates ($r = -0.83$), coupled with systematic infrastructure destruction patterns, provided the empirical foundation for the COI’s genocide determination. This

aligns with Zelizer’s concept of “credibility assemblages” Zelizer (2021), where diverse evidentiary practices collectively produce authoritative accounts of violence. The integration of satellite imagery from UNOSAT, mortality data from WHO, and famine determinations from IPC created a robust evidentiary network that withstood political contestation.

The quantitative patterns of systematic violence documented in our results reveal how institutional practices can counter epistemic injustice Fricker (2007) by providing marginalized voices with evidentiary support. The demographic distribution showing women and children comprising 53% of casualties, combined with testimonies describing births in rubble, illustrates how institutional documentation addresses hermeneutical injustice by making Palestinian suffering intelligible within international legal frameworks. This extends Medina’s work on epistemic resistance by demonstrating how institutional practices create spaces for marginalized testimonies to gain credibility against dominant political narratives Medina (2013).

Our second research question examined communicative features that foster trust in genocide documentation. The triangulation of diverse evidence types proved crucial, with emotional resonance in testimonies effectively offsetting potential bureaucratic detachment. The correlation matrix revealed strong interrelationships between key variables, particularly the connection between aid obstruction and mortality rates. This finding extends Pantti’s work on digital humanitarian communication by showing how quantitative data serves both evidentiary and ethical functions when integrated with personal testimony Pantti (2022). The theme of “data as testimony” demonstrates how institutional credibility depends on balancing empirical rigor with moral responsibility.

Regarding our third research question, procedural and technological mediations significantly shape moral authority in genocide documentation. The UN’s archival neutrality operated as an ethical stance, while digital mediation through satellite imagery expanded moral witnessing beyond direct human presence. This finding develops Margalit’s ethics of memory by showing how institutional practices preserve the memory of atrocities through technological means Margalit (2002). The concept of “administrative empathy” represents a novel contribution to understanding how bureaucratic procedures express moral concern while maintaining procedural integrity.

Our findings both confirm and extend previous research on institutional witnessing. The strong correlation between humanitarian access restrictions and mortality rates confirms Human Rights Watch’s documentation of deliberate deprivation as a method of warfare Human Rights Watch (2024). However, our mixed-methods approach reveals how institutional credibility emerges not merely from documenting violence but from the strategic integration of diverse evidence types. This extends Allan’s work on digital war reporting by showing how satellite imagery and verification technologies expand moral witnessing beyond physical access limitations Allan (2017).

The significance of our findings lies in demonstrating how institutional credibility in politically contested contexts depends on both technical competence and moral authority. The progressive collapse of hospital functionality (from 42% to 15% operational) and corresponding increase in attacks on healthcare facilities provide compelling evidence of systematic violence that aligns with legal definitions of genocide. These findings have important implications for international law, suggesting that institutional documentation practices can help overcome political barriers to genocide recognition by providing robust, multi-source evidence that withstands contestation.

An unexpected finding was the strength of the relationship between bureaucratic procedures and moral authority. The testimonial evidence revealed how institutional actors transformed quantitative monitoring into ethical practices, with statements like “counting trucks like lifelines” demonstrating how bureaucratic procedures acquired moral significance. This challenges conventional views of institutional neutrality as detached or amoral, suggesting instead that procedural rigor can serve as a foundation for moral authority in contexts of mass violence.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Our reliance on institutional data sources may introduce reporting biases, though we mitigated this through multi-agency triangulation. The cross-sectional nature of our analysis limits causal inference, though this aligns with our focus on credibility construction rather than causal pathways. Additionally, our exclusive focus on UN documentation excludes non-institutional forms of witnessing, which represent an important area for future research.

Theoretically, our study contributes to understanding how epistemic trust functions in institutional contexts of mass violence. By integrating Fricker’s framework of epistemic injustice with Zelizer’s

credibility assemblages, we demonstrate how institutional practices address systematic credibility deficits affecting marginalized communities Fricker (2007); Zelizer (2021). The concept of “administrative moral witnessing” provides a new theoretical lens for understanding how institutions navigate the double bind of maintaining procedural neutrality while conveying moral urgency.

Practically, our findings suggest that humanitarian organizations should prioritize multi-source evidence integration and methodological transparency to enhance institutional credibility. The strong correlations between different types of humanitarian data indicate that systematic documentation of multiple indicators—from aid delivery to healthcare functionality—creates compelling evidence patterns that support legal determinations of genocide. This aligns with the strategic navigation of political constraints through advocacy networks Keck & Sikkink (1998) and analysis of how human rights organizations strategically navigate political pressures Bob (2005). These findings have important implications for how international bodies document mass atrocities in politically contested contexts.

Future research should explore how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and blockchain verification might enhance or complicate institutional credibility in atrocity documentation. Comparative studies examining institutional witnessing across different conflict contexts could help identify best practices for maintaining epistemic authority under political pressure. Research on how affected communities perceive institutional documentation practices would also provide valuable insights for developing more ethically responsive approaches to moral witnessing.

Synthesizing our findings, we argue that institutional credibility in genocide documentation emerges through what we term the “triple helix” of data ethics, moral testimony, and procedural integrity. The convergence of quantitative patterns showing systematic violence with qualitative evidence of moral concern demonstrates how institutions navigate the communicative double bind of maintaining neutrality while conveying urgency. This has broader implications for understanding how international law functions in practice, suggesting that robust documentation practices help overcome political barriers to justice by creating evidentiary foundations that withstand contestation.

Our findings critically engage with existing scholarship by challenging simplistic dichotomies between objectivity and advocacy in institutional documentation. The theme of “bureaucratic empathy” suggests that procedural rigor and moral concern are not mutually exclusive but can be mutually reinforcing in contexts of mass violence. This extends Sliwinski’s argument about witnessing as a human right by showing how institutional practices operationalize this right through systematic documentation Sliwinski (2019).

Our study demonstrates that institutional moral witnessing represents a crucial mechanism for addressing epistemic injustice in contexts of genocide. By systematically documenting patterns of violence while preserving the moral significance of suffering, institutions like the UN Commission of Inquiry create credible foundations for legal accountability and historical memory. The interplay of technical competence and moral authority that characterizes administrative moral witnessing offers a promising framework for understanding how institutions document atrocity while maintaining both procedural integrity and ethical responsibility.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study has traced the paradoxical condition of genocide documentation in Palestine: while the field proclaims definitional contestability as a theoretical principle, institutional practices systematically reproduce epistemic closure through procedural rigor and evidentiary triangulation. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry’s 2025 report United Nations Human Rights Council (2025) exemplifies this tension, navigating between acknowledging political contestation while strategically re-imposing definitional certainty through multi-agency corroboration. This paradox reveals how Palestinian suffering becomes simultaneously hyper-visible through extensive documentation yet perpetually vulnerable to procedural footnoting and administrative absolution.

Our analysis demonstrates that the central task is not to perfect a legal definition of genocide, but rather to unbind the discursive frameworks through which Palestinian life and death are rendered intelligible. The concept of administrative moral witnessing suggests that institutional credibility must be reconceived to resist the rationalized erasure of Palestinian subjectivities. This requires altering the rules of speaking about genocide such that Palestinian testimony is neither marginalized through

bureaucratic procedures nor transformed into sanitized data points that obscure lived experiences of violence. As Medina argues, epistemic resistance must extend to challenging the very structures through which knowledge about suffering is produced and validated Medina (2013).

The strong correlations between humanitarian access restrictions and mortality rates, combined with testimonial evidence of systematic violence, create an ethical imperative for institutions to develop more responsive approaches to moral witnessing. Future documentation practices must balance procedural integrity with bureaucratic empathy—maintaining methodological rigor while preserving the moral significance of Palestinian suffering. This involves rethinking how quantitative data and qualitative testimony interact in constructing institutional credibility, ensuring that numbers never fully replace narratives in representing human experience.

Following the critical tradition of Fricker and Margalit, we conclude with a meta-reflection: philosophy and legal scholarship must rigorously examine their own conditions of speech to avoid complicity in the rationalized erasure of Palestinian life Fricker (2007); Margalit (2002). The definitional debates surrounding genocide often function as discursive mechanisms that obscure the systematic nature of violence against Palestinians, transforming political questions into technical disputes about legal criteria. To resist this complicity, scholarly work must foreground how epistemic practices themselves can perpetuate injustice, even when framed as neutral or objective inquiry.

Future research should explore how emerging documentation technologies might either challenge or reinforce existing patterns of epistemic injustice. Comparative studies of institutional witnessing across different contexts of mass violence could identify practices that successfully navigate the double bind between procedural neutrality and moral urgency. Research examining how affected communities perceive and participate in documentation processes would provide crucial insights for developing more ethically responsive approaches to genocide documentation that center Palestinian voices and experiences rather than subsuming them within bureaucratic frameworks.

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