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CITIZENS OF THE WORLD: A DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MIA MOTTLEY'S COP SPEECHES

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Abstract: This study explores the politics of global citizenship in the discourse of Mia Amor Mottley at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), specifically COP26 (2021), COP27 (2022), and COP28 (2023). It highlights the discursive construction of global citizenship as a socio-political construct that is both legitimised and contested in contemporary climate politics. Against the accelerating climate crisis, there is an increasing demand for climate justice, particularly from Global South actors, emphasising responsibility and moral agency. The research examines how Mottley deploys discursive, linguistic, and argumentative strategies to articulate global citizenship as an ethical, political, and structural imperative within complex multilateral negotiating arenas. The study employs Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), enabling a systematic analysis of Mottley's strategies in her climate discourse against the backdrop of postcolonial perspectives, structural inequalities, and global financial asymmetries. A detailed discourse analysis of her three COP speeches traces shifts in tone, argumentative strategy, modality, metaphorical framing, and rhetorical positioning across COP26–28. The findings identify key discursive, interdiscursive, and intertextual strategies alongside linguistic realisations such as modal constructions, intensification, and metaphorical patterns to foreground postcolonial memory as a basis for ethical responsibility, reframe vulnerability as a locus of moral authority, and present global citizenship as a praxis requiring systemic transformation. The analysis further demonstrates a discursive shift from moral urgency toward increasingly technocratic and governance-oriented climate rhetoric. This study addresses critical gaps in global citizenship scholarship, including the marginalisation of Global South political discourse and the limited application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to climate leadership. By showing how Mottley reconceptualises global citizenship as a politically potent and justice-oriented framework, it contributes to broader debates on planetary governance, postcolonial equity, and ethical climate action.

***Keywords**:* Climate justice; COP26–28 speeches; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); global citizenship; Mia Amor Mottley

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1. Introduction

The accelerating climate crisis has generated not only profound environmental and developmental challenges but also intensified ideological, ethical, and political contestations over global responsibility, justice, and collective moral agency (Makhlouf et al., 2024; Quadri et al., 2025). Within this contested discursive terrain, climate communication has increasingly become a site in which competing visions of global governance, responsibility, and historical accountability are articulated and negotiated. In this particular context, the climate discourse of the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Amor Mottley, has emerged as a salient intervention within international climate diplomacy. Her speeches at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), notably COP26 (2021), COP27 (2022), and COP28 (2023) (Mottley, 2021; 2022; 2023), are characterised by a distinctive fusion of moral urgency, historical reflexivity, and financial-technocratic argumentation. Across these interventions, Mottley strategically constructs Small Island Developing States (SIDS) not as peripheral victims of climate change, but as epistemically and morally authoritative actors within global climate governance.

From a postcolonial perspective, Barbados' historical trajectory, from plantation slavery through British colonial rule to post-independence statehood, constitutes an important backdrop for interpreting this discourse (Granados-Sánchez, 2023; Hayden, 2010). Within this framing, Mottley's recurring formulation of "global citizens with Bajan roots" operates as a discursive strategy that fuses local identity with planetary responsibility. This formulation is not merely symbolic but functions as a rhetorical mechanism through which historical injustice and contemporary climate vulnerability are discursively linked to claims of moral and political accountability in global climate governance (Roberts & Parks, 2007; Talubo et al., 2023).

In this study, "global citizenship" is conceptualised not as a stable normative ideal, but as a dynamically constructed discursive formation through which ethical responsibility, political agency, and claims to justice are articulated across scales of governance. It is understood as a site of discursive struggle in which meanings of responsibility, solidarity, and obligation are continuously redefined through language. Importantly, this study treats global citizenship as both an object of discourse and a discursive effect produced through specific linguistic strategies, including nomination, modality, metaphorical framing, and intertextual references.

Building on existing scholarship, which conceptualises global citizenship as both a normative ideal and a political practice, particularly within climate justice debates (Hernández Guzmán & Hernández García de Velazco, 2024; Isin & Nyers, 2014; Oxley & Morris, 2013), this study extends the analysis by demonstrating how such a construct is linguistically enacted and rhetorically stabilised within high-level climate diplomacy. It further engages with work on climate justice that foregrounds structural inequality, historical emissions responsibility, and uneven vulnerability (Ciplet et al., 2015; Roberts & Parks, 2007), while also addressing the limited integration of postcolonial discourse analysis within empirical studies of climate leadership.

This study is guided by three research questions:

1. How is global citizenship constructed in Mottley's COP26-COP28 speeches?

2. What discursive and linguistic strategies are employed in this construction?

3. How does this construction evolve across the three COP contexts?

To address these questions, the study adopts Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which enables a systematic analysis of discourse in relation to historical, political, and institutional contexts (Wodak, 2023; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The DHA is particularly suited to this study as it allows for the integration of macro-level structures (global governance, climate finance regimes, postcolonial inequality) with micro-level linguistic features (modality, predication, argumentation, and intertextuality), thereby bridging the analytical gap identified in prior research.

Importantly, this study also addresses the gap in the literature concerning the discursive practices of SIDS leaders within global climate negotiations. As Betzold (2015) notes, such actors remain underrepresented in mainstream climate discourse analysis despite their central role in articulating vulnerability and climate justice claims. By focusing on Mottley's speeches, this study contributes to rebalancing this analytical asymmetry and provides a detailed account of how Global South leadership discursively reconfigures global citizenship as a justice-oriented and structurally transformative framework.

2. Literature Review

Global citizenship has been widely discussed within political philosophy, sociology, and international relations as a framework that extends ethical responsibility and political belonging beyond the nation-state (Isin & Nyers, 2014; Oxley & Morris, 2013). Early conceptualisations largely framed global citizenship as a normative ideal centred on universal humanity, cosmopolitan ethics, and transnational solidarity. However, more recent scholarship has increasingly challenged universalist formulations for overlooking structural inequalities and colonial power relations embedded within global governance systems (Andreotti, 2011; Shultz, 2007). Consequently, global citizenship is now frequently understood not as a neutral or universally shared condition, but as a contested socio-political and discursive construct shaped by historical asymmetries, geopolitical hierarchies, and institutional power.

Within the context of climate change, this debate has acquired renewed urgency. Climate change has intensified discussions concerning unequal responsibility, differentiated vulnerability, and the uneven distribution of environmental harm between the Global North and the Global South (Ciplet et al., 2015; Roberts & Parks, 2007). Climate justice scholarship demonstrates that contemporary ecological vulnerability cannot be separated from histories of colonial extraction, industrial capitalism, and unequal development (Dobson, 2003; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). In this particular context, global citizenship increasingly functions as a discursive and political mechanism through which historically marginalised states articulate claims to recognition, reparative justice, and structural transformation within international climate governance.

Recent scholarship on climate communication further emphasises that climate discourse is not merely descriptive but deeply ideological, shaping how responsibility, legitimacy, and urgency are publicly understood (Quadri et al., 2025). Political leaders deploy discourse strategically to construct particular moral economies of climate action, legitimise policy interventions, and position actors within hierarchies of accountability. Accordingly, language functions not simply as a medium of communication but as a site where competing understandings of climate governance and global obligation are discursively negotiated.

Within this broader field, the discourse of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) occupies a particularly significant position. SIDS are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change despite contributing minimally to global emissions, creating a powerful asymmetry between causation and consequence (Betzold, 2015). Existing studies demonstrate that SIDS leaders frequently mobilise narratives of vulnerability, survival, and moral legitimacy in order

to challenge dominant Global North framings of climate governance (Roberts & Parks, 2007). However, despite the growing visibility of SIDS leadership within international climate negotiations, there remains limited research examining the precise linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which such leaders construct political authority and global legitimacy.

More specifically, scholarship on climate diplomacy has tended to prioritise institutional negotiations, state behaviour, or policy outcomes rather than micro-level discursive processes (Ciplet et al., 2015; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). This has produced a notable analytical gap concerning how Global South actors linguistically negotiate power asymmetries within multilateral forums such as the COP summits. While studies increasingly acknowledge the moral authority of vulnerable nations, fewer examine how this authority is rhetorically produced through strategies such as modality, metaphor, intertextuality, and scalar positioning.

At the methodological level, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an important framework for examining the relationship between language, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015). CDA scholars argue that discourse both reflects and reproduces broader social structures while also functioning as a site of resistance and transformation (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak, 2015). Among CDA approaches, Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is particularly relevant to climate discourse because it situates linguistic practices within their socio-historical and political contexts while simultaneously attending to micro-level textual features (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) has been widely employed to analyse political rhetoric, identity construction, and legitimisation processes (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Through strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation, DHA enables the systematic examination of how political actors construct collective identities, assign responsibility, and legitimise particular courses of action. However, as Betzold (2015) argues, existing scholarship has paid comparatively limited attention to climate diplomacy conducted by Global South leaders, particularly within the context of postcolonial climate justice discourse.

Furthermore, although concepts such as interdiscursivity and intertextuality are frequently referenced in climate communication studies, they are often treated descriptively rather than analytically. Relatively few studies examine how climate leaders strategically combine scientific and economic discourse, historical analogy, and moral rhetoric in order to construct persuasive authority within international negotiations. This limitation is particularly significant in relation to Mottley's speeches, which consistently merge financial-technocratic discourse with postcolonial critique and ethical argumentation.

This study addresses these gaps by analysing how Mottley discursively constructs global citizenship across her COP26–COP28 speeches through historically situated and linguistically mediated strategies. Global citizenship is thus treated as discourse rather than as a theme or a pre-existing political category. It is examined through discourse processes and production by means of modality, metaphorical intensification, pronoun scaling, intertextual reference, and legitimisation strategies. In doing so, the study contributes to three intersecting areas of scholarship: climate justice discourse, Global South political rhetoric, and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Finally, this study advances existing research by proposing that Mottley's climate rhetoric constitutes a form of discursive scalar reconfiguration, whereby responsibility is progressively expanded from the national level ("Barbados") to the regional level ("Caribbean" and "Small Island Developing States") and ultimately to the planetary level ("human family" and "the world"). This discursive scaling process enables the construction of

global citizenship not merely as moral solidarity, but as a politically consequential framework for redistributing accountability and legitimising structural reform within climate governance.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), in order to examine how climate discourse functions as a site of ideological struggle, moral positioning, and geopolitical contestation. Accordingly, the present study treats discourse not merely as a transparent medium for communicating political ideas but as constitutive of political reality itself, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, responsibility, and global authority through linguistic and rhetorical choices (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). In addition, global citizenship is mobilised not merely as a thematic concern but as an interpretive framework through which ethical obligation, planetary belonging, and postcolonial contestation are discursively negotiated.

In response to recent scholarship calling for more linguistically grounded climate discourse analysis (Fløttum, 2017), this framework moves beyond thematic description to examine the micro-level mechanics through which political authority and moral legitimacy are constructed. Particular attention is therefore paid to discursivity, modality, deixis, transitivity, metaphor, intertextuality, and evaluative language in order to demonstrate how linguistic form produces political effect.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: Language, Power, and Ideology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines the relationship between language, ideology, and power, operating on the assumption that discourse both reflects and reproduces social structures and inequalities (Fairclough, 2001, 2013; van Dijk, 2008, 2015). CDA is particularly concerned with the ways in which linguistic choices naturalise unequal power relations, presenting historically contingent structures as morally inevitable or politically neutral (Wodak, 2001). Consequently, discourse is understood not simply as representation but as social practice.

Within climate politics, a field characterised by structural inequality (Dobson, 2003; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014), discourse plays a significant role in constructing narratives of responsibility, vulnerability, and legitimacy. As Carvalho (2007) argues, climate discourse is deeply ideological because it shapes which actors are authorised to speak, whose suffering becomes visible, and which policy responses are considered reasonable. Climate communication is therefore inseparable from struggles over political authority and epistemic legitimacy. Within the context of international climate negotiations, such struggles frequently reproduce asymmetrical North–South power relations embedded within histories of colonialism, extraction, and uneven development (Ciplet et al., 2015; Roberts & Parks, 2007).

CDA is especially relevant to the analysis of political speeches because it enables the systematic investigation of how linguistic structures produce ideological meanings at both macro and micro levels (McLeod, 2024). While macro-analysis focuses on broader socio-political structures, micro-analysis examines the grammatical and rhetorical mechanisms through which authority is enacted. For instance, modality ("must," "cannot," "need to") functions not merely as a grammatical feature but as a mechanism for expressing obligation, urgency, and moral certainty. Similarly, pronoun selection ("we," "our people," "they") constructs collectivities and oppositional identities, while metaphorical language transforms abstract climate processes into emotionally intelligible realities (Charteris-Black, 2011).

Key approaches within CDA include Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, and Wodak's DHA (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Despite different emphases, CDA scholars share the view that discourse

both reflects and reproduces power relations while enabling social change (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1995; Wodak, 2001). Among these frameworks, DHA is particularly appropriate for the present study because it embeds textual analysis within broader socio-historical and political contexts while simultaneously attending to linguistic detail. Importantly, Wodak's DHA provides an analytical apparatus capable of unpacking the ideological underpinnings of political discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Within the context of climate diplomacy, CDA is particularly relevant because it enables the analysis of how political leaders construct narratives around moral authority, collective identification, and postcolonial resistance.

3.2 Global Citizenship as an Analytical Lens

Global citizenship is conceptualised in this study as a contested and politically constructed discourse through which actors articulate ethical obligations, collective belonging, and claims to justice beyond the nation-state (Isin & Nyers, 2014; Oxley & Morris, 2013). Accordingly, this study treats global citizenship as an ideological and rhetorical formation shaped by geopolitical inequalities and competing moral frameworks rather than as a universally agreed normative ideal.

From a critical perspective, global citizenship is not neutral but embedded within power relations. Scholars such as Andreotti (2011) and Shultz (2007) argue that dominant models of global citizenship often universalise Western liberal assumptions while marginalising postcolonial perspectives and structural inequalities, thereby potentially reproducing dominant hierarchies unless critically examined, particularly in relation to colonial histories and global inequalities. In climate politics, global citizenship functions as a framework for articulating claims to historical accountability, moral obligation, and systemic reform, while also enabling the analysis of how political actors, such as Mottley, construct inclusive or exclusionary visions of global responsibility and challenge dominant Global North narratives. Therefore, the discourse on global citizenship may either reinforce existing hierarchies through depoliticised universalism or challenge them through demands for historical accountability and structural redistribution.

Similarly, Dobson (2003) and Stevenson and Dryzek (2014) claim that within climate justice scholarship, global citizenship increasingly functions as a language of ethical mobilisation through which vulnerable states challenge the moral legitimacy of existing governance structures. This is a view that this study explores in depth through the linguistic strategies Mottley deploys in her speeches to strategically reconstruct global citizenship as a discourse of asymmetrical responsibility rather than abstract universality. By incorporating global citizenship as an analytical lens, this study connects discourse analysis to broader questions of ethics, power, and global governance, thereby showing how discourse functions as both a communicative practice and a site of political and moral contestation.

3.3 Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach provides the principal analytical framework for this study because of its emphasis on historical contextualisation, interdiscursivity, and linguistic specificity (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2023). It operates through three interconnected dimensions: the content of discourse (what is being said), discursive strategies (how it is being said), and linguistic realisations (how it is expressed). This triadic model prevents discourse from being reduced to stylistic features and instead foregrounds its political and ideological function. Furthermore, DHA integrates macro-level socio-political analysis with detailed linguistic examination, which enables the demystification of subtle embedded ideologies within the discourse proper of climate diplomacy. Accordingly, this study analyses discourse across three interconnected dimensions: discursive content, discursive strategies, and linguistic realisations.

Central to DHA is its focus on discursive strategies, which are systematic means through which speakers construct social actors, assign attributes, justify arguments, position perspectives, and amplify or mitigate points. These include nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al., 2009).

Nomination refers to how social actors, groups, institutions, and phenomena are named and categorised in discourse, thereby constructing identities and power relations. For example, Mottley frequently uses nomination in her COP speeches to draw sharp lines between "our people," "small island states," "the vulnerable," and "those who pollute the most". Predication concerns the attributes, qualities, or characteristics assigned to social actors or phenomena. Through predication, speakers can present actors as responsible or negligent, victims or perpetrators, powerful or vulnerable. For example, Mottley frequently ascribes urgency, vulnerability, or agency to collective subjects such as "our planet is waiting and our people are watching" and attributes neglect or moral failure to others such as "leaders without conscience." Predication therefore reinforces the moral architecture of her argument.

Argumentation strategies involve justificatory patterns (topoi) which are common-sense principles that connect arguments to conclusions, structuring political discourse. In Mottley's speeches, key topoi include the topos of justice (e.g., "those who contributed most to the climate crisis have a responsibility to act"), the topos of urgency (e.g., "action must be immediate to prevent catastrophe"), the topos of morality (e.g., "climate action is the right thing to do"), the topos of historical responsibility (e.g., "Current inequalities are rooted in colonial histories"), and the topos of reform (e.g., "Structural transformation is necessary for meaningful progress"). Argumentation thus provides the logical skeleton upon which her moral appeals rest.

Perspectivisation refers to how speakers position themselves and others within their discourse, expressing viewpoints, stances, and ideological alignments. In COP26–28, Mottley often speaks not only as the Prime Minister of Barbados but as the moral representative of the Global South or even as a guardian of planetary well-being. By positioning herself as a collective voice, she enhances the legitimacy of her claims and challenges Global North dominance. This strategy also allows her to critique power structures without resorting to antagonistic confrontation, instead framing her intervention as the articulation of a shared moral conscience.

Intensification and mitigation regulate the force of statements, either intensifying them through repetition, heightened modality, emotional language, and moral imperatives, or mitigating them through qualification. For example, Mottley frequently employs intensification through repetition to emphasise the existential stakes of climate inaction, using expressions such as "we cannot afford not to act" and "these are moral imperatives."

Overall, these strategies operate together with intertextuality (how texts echo or draw upon other texts) and interdiscursivity (how different discourses intersect), which trace how texts draw on prior discourses and historical events. Thereby, they enable the analysis of how political actors situate their claims within broader historical narratives and normative traditions. In this particular context, these strategies, within the DHA framework, enable a systematic analysis of how global citizenship is discursively constructed, historically situated, and used to challenge global power asymmetries in climate discourse.

4. Methodology

This study conducts a qualitative discourse-historical analysis of Mia Mottley's COP26–COP28 speeches. By analysing the language, argumentation, and rhetorical strategies she employs, the research situates her climate discourse within broader historical, political, and ethical contexts.

4.1 Context

This study is situated within the institutional and geopolitical context of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC: COP26 (Glasgow, 2021), COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022), and COP28 (Dubai, 2023). These annual conferences function as the primary multilateral arena for global climate negotiations, where state and non-state actors address issues related to climate governance, mitigation, and adaptation. Each COP was characterised by distinct political and environmental priorities. For example, COP26 focused on strengthening the Paris Agreement commitments, COP27 on loss and damage for vulnerable nations, and COP28 on climate finance and structural reform. These shifting priorities provide an important contextual framework for examining changes and continuity in Mottley's discourse across the three speeches.

4.2 Participant

The primary subject of this study is Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados and a prominent representative of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). As an internationally recognised advocate for climate justice, she frequently articulates the concerns of vulnerable nations disproportionately affected by climate change. Her role as both a national leader and a global climate advocate makes her discourse particularly suitable for examining constructions of global citizenship within international climate diplomacy.

4.3 Analytical Approach: Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

The study adopts Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as its analytical framework. DHA provides both a theoretical and methodological basis for examining how discourse constructs, legitimises, and contests political meanings within specific historical and socio-political contexts (Wodak, 2023; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it integrates textual analysis with broader contextual factors, including postcolonial inequality, climate governance, and historical responsibility. This enables the study to examine how Mottley constructs moral and political authority through discourse.

4.4 Analytical Framework

The analysis focuses on five primary strategies identified in DHA:

Nomination: examining how social actors and groups are named and categorised, thereby constructing identities and relationships of responsibility.

Predication: analysing the attributes and qualities assigned to actors, including responsibility, vulnerability, urgency, or negligence.

Argumentation: identifying the topoi underlying Mottley's arguments, particularly those related to justice, urgency, morality, historical responsibility, and reform.

Perspectivisation: exploring how the speaker positions herself and others, for example as a moral representative of the Global South or as a voice for planetary concern.

Intensification/Mitigation: assessing how linguistic choices amplify or soften claims, thereby shaping their persuasive and emotional force.

4.5 Data Collection and Corpus

The corpus consists of three purposefully selected speeches delivered by Mottley at COP26 (2021), COP27 (2022), and COP28 (2023). These speeches were selected because of their prominence within international climate discourse and their explicit engagement with themes of climate justice, inequality, and global citizenship. The speeches were obtained from official video recordings and published transcripts available through official government and publicly accessible media sources. The transcripts were cross-checked against the video recordings to ensure accuracy. For transparency, replicability, and ease of access, the complete links to the speeches analysed in this study are provided in Appendix A.

Although the corpus is relatively small, it is analytically appropriate for CDA, which prioritises depth of analysis over corpus size. The speeches are politically significant, rhetorically dense, and suitable for examining discursive continuity and change across the three contexts.

4.6 Analytical Procedures

The analysis followed a structured multi-stage process aligned with Wodak's DHA:

Contextualisation: situating each speech within its geopolitical, historical, and institutional context, including references to prior agreements, financial inequality, and postcolonial relations.

Coding of discursive strategies: systematically identifying instances of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation.

Interpretation: analysing how these strategies construct global citizenship, assign responsibility for climate inaction, and challenge dominant Global North narratives.

The interpretation was informed by scholarship on climate justice, postcolonialism, and global governance in order to situate the speeches within broader structures of power and inequality.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study relies extensively on publicly available speeches and transcripts; therefore, no informed consent was required. Nevertheless, the analysis seeks to engage critically and respectfully with the discourse of Global South leaders whose perspectives are often underrepresented within mainstream climate governance research. The methodological approach therefore aims to foreground these perspectives while critically examining the power structures within which such discourse operates.

5. Results

This section presents the findings of the DHA analysis of Mia Mottley's COP26, COP27, and COP28 speeches. The analysis is organised around the five core discursive strategies identified in DHA: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation. In line with the methodological framework, the analysis also integrates micro-linguistic examination, including modality, syntax, metaphorical structuring, and performative/rhetorical features, in order to capture how ideological meanings are linguistically realised across different levels of discourse.

5.1 Discursive Strategies across COP26–COP28

The first stage of the analysis identified the five core DHA strategies across the three speeches. Additionally, the focus of the analysis rests on how specific linguistic and rhetorical choices construct political authority, climate justice, and global citizenship.

5.1.1 Nomination

Mottley's nomination strategies construct a shifting political community that expands across the three speeches. At COP26, collective nouns and institutional labels such as "our people," "frontline small island developing states," "G7," and "G20" establish a strong distinction between vulnerable populations and powerful emitters. The repeated pronoun "our" creates solidarity with climate-vulnerable communities, while naming the G7 and G20 directly assigns geopolitical responsibility.

At COP27, nomination becomes more inclusive through expressions such as "the human family." This lexical shift broadens the discourse from regional vulnerability to universal interdependence, allowing Mottley to move from representing Barbados alone to speaking on behalf of humanity more generally. Simultaneously, references to "the global South" and "developing countries" preserve the structural distinction between unequal actors within climate governance.

By COP28, the range of nominated actors expands further to include "oil and gas companies," "insurance companies," "credit rating agencies," and "bank regulators." This expansion reflects a discursive shift from state-centred responsibility to systemic governance, where financial and corporate institutions are constructed as active political actors rather than neutral economic entities.

Overall, nomination is linguistically realised through cumulative nominal groups and list-based syntactic structures (e.g., coordinated noun phrases). These structures encode inclusivity while simultaneously distributing responsibility across multiple institutional actors. This, in turn, produces a "scaling effect" of accountability.

5.1.2 Predication

Mottley assigns evaluative attributes to different actors. At COP26, high emitters are characterised as "reckless" and global warming as "a death sentence." These evaluative adjectives frame climate inaction not as technical delay but as moral irresponsibility. The metaphorical expression "2 degrees… is a death sentence" intensifies this predication by transforming a temperature increase into a direct threat to human survival. The metaphor functions ideologically by reframing climate change from an abstract scientific issue into a matter of existential violence against vulnerable populations.

At COP27, vulnerable nations are predicated through economic language such as "debt-ridden" and "payment-vulnerable countries." This lexical pattern links climate vulnerability to global financial structures rather than natural exposure alone, reinforcing a postcolonial interpretation of inequality.

In COP28, predication increasingly targets institutional failure. Statements such as "voluntary commitments have not gotten us very far" construct existing climate governance mechanisms as inadequate and ineffective. The use of negation ("not gotten us very far") delegitimises voluntary frameworks while preparing the ground for stronger regulatory intervention.

Overall, predication is linguistically realised through adjectival evaluation and nominalisation (e.g., "reckless commitments," "dangerous trajectory"), which compress ideological judgement into compact syntactic units, increasing rhetorical density.

5.1.3 Argumentation

Mottley's argumentation relies on interconnected topoi of justice, urgency, historical responsibility, and reform. At COP26, she uses moral argumentation to connect climate

finance failure with injustice, as reflected in these expressions: "this is immoral and it is unjust," invoking the topos of justice. The paratactic structure and repetition of evaluative adjectives strengthen the ethical force of the claim by presenting injustice as self-evident rather than debatable.

At COP27, argumentation becomes structural and economic. References to interest rates, SDRs, debt clauses, and Bretton Woods institutions introduce financial reasoning into climate discourse. This shift is significant because it reframes climate injustice as embedded within global economic governance rather than limited to environmental policy alone. Mottley also employs historical analogies strategically. References to slavery, pyramid-building, the Marshall Plan, and Nelson Mandela function as intertextual resources that legitimise collective action by invoking moments of large-scale political transformation. These analogies position climate reform as historically achievable rather than utopian.

At COP28, argumentation becomes increasingly technocratic and data-driven:

"For every dollar we invest before disaster, we save seven. "

The quantified cost-benefit formulation introduces economic rationality into the discourse, allowing climate action to be framed simultaneously as a moral necessity and a financially pragmatic choice.

Overall, argumentation is linguistically realised through conditional clauses ("if… then…"), causal structures ("for every… we…"), and modal constructions of necessity. These syntactic patterns construct climate action as logical inevitability rather than political choice.

5.1.4 Perspectivisation

Mottley's perspectivisation shifts systematically in pronominal choice, modality, and speaker positioning, which together construct evolving layers of epistemic and moral authority across the speeches. At COP26, perspectivisation is primarily realised through first-person plural pronouns ("we," "our people," "our planet") combined with collective inclusivity. This creates a solidaristic frame in which the speaker positions herself as part of the vulnerable Global South. The repeated use of inclusive deixis constructs a shared experiential horizon, particularly in statements such as "our people are watching and taking note," where the present continuous tense reinforces immediacy and shared vigilance. The syntactic structure is paratactic, with clauses joined through coordination rather than subordination, producing a cumulative rhetorical effect that mirrors urgency and emotional proximity.

At COP27, perspectivisation shifts towards expanded scalar identification. The deictic field widens from national and regional belonging ("Barbados," "the Caribbean") to a universal frame ("the human family"). This shift is linguistically reinforced through metaphorical reclassification of humanity as a singular collective entity. The modal verb "must" becomes more frequent and more categorical, reducing epistemic ambiguity and increasing deontic force. Mottley increasingly positions herself not only as a representative of SIDS but as an intermediary voice between structural inequality and global governance, thereby constructing epistemic authority grounded in moral legitimacy rather than institutional power.

At COP28, perspectivisation becomes explicitly institutional and technocratic. The speaker positions herself within a multi-actor governance network involving "countries, non-state actors, credit rating agencies, and insurers." This expansion is syntactically realised through enumeration and nominal compounding, which linguistically flattens hierarchical distinctions between actors while simultaneously distributing responsibility. The pronoun

"we" is now institutional rather than affective, functioning as a governance-oriented collective subject. Modal constructions such as "we need," "we must," and "we cannot afford" dominate, reinforcing obligation while shifting from moral appeal to policy necessity.

Overall, perspectivisation is linguistically realised through pronoun scaling (I → we → global collectives), deictic expansion (Barbados → Caribbean → human family → global system), and modal escalation (possibility → necessity → obligation). These shifts construct global citizenship as an increasingly institutionalised and structurally embedded form of collective agency.

5.1.5 Intensification and Mitigation

Intensification and mitigation strategies in Mottley's speeches function as key rhetorical mechanisms for amplifying urgency, legitimising claims, and controlling the affective force of climate discourse. Intensification is predominantly realised through lexical repetition, modal strengthening, metaphorical exaggeration, and evaluative polarity. Across COP26–COP28, mitigation is comparatively rare, reflecting the high-stakes framing of climate change as an existential crisis.

At COP26, intensification is primarily achieved through repetition and emotionally charged metaphors. Lexical reiteration such as "Code Red, Code Red" and "death sentence" constructs climate change as an immediate existential threat. The repetition of imperatives and noun phrases produces rhythmic parallelism, reinforcing urgency through prosodic-like effects in spoken delivery. The syntactic structure is often paratactic and additive, for example in long enumerative sequences of affected countries ("Antigua and Barbuda, Maldives, Dominica, Fiji…"), which accumulate emotional force through syntactic extension rather than subordination. This creates a crescendo effect typical of oral political rhetoric.

At COP27, intensification becomes more argumentative and historically anchored. Metaphorical references to monumental human achievements ("pyramids," "vaccine development," "moon landing") function as comparative amplification devices, constructing a contrastive frame between human capability and political inertia. The modal verb "must" dominates the discourse, signalling strong deontic modality and reducing interpretive openness. Intensification is also achieved through rhetorical questions ("How many more must speak?"), which function pragmatically as assertions of moral indictment rather than genuine inquiries.

At COP28, intensification becomes more technocratic and quantified. The discourse shifts towards scientific and economic amplification, particularly through numerical reasoning ("for every dollar… we save seven," "$25 trillion quantitative easing"). Quantification functions as a form of epistemic intensification, grounding urgency in economic rationality rather than affect. Metaphors such as "tipping point" and "age of superlatives" extend this scientific framing, producing a discourse of systemic threshold risk. Mitigation is minimal but appears occasionally in concessive structures ("although voluntary commitments exist…"), which serve to acknowledge counterpositions while ultimately reinforcing critique.

Overall, intensification is linguistically realised through repetition, modality ("must," "cannot," "will not"), metaphorical escalation, enumeration, and rhetorical questioning. Mitigation is realised through concessive clauses and hedging structures but remains secondary in function. Together, these strategies construct climate discourse as a domain of moral urgency and systemic inevitability, where rhetorical force is achieved through escalation rather than softening.

5.2 Discursive Evolution across COP26–COP28

The thematic patterns outlined in the analysis reveal that Mottley's framing of global citizenship develops from an appeal to shared humanity and collective vulnerability at COP26 to a call for collective responsibility and structural accountability at COP27, and ultimately to an institutional model of shared governance that implicates states, corporations, financial actors, and regulatory actors at COP28. Similarly, climate justice evolves from a predominantly moral discourse of outrage and survival at COP26 to material demands surrounding loss and damage, debt relief, and concessional finance at COP27, and finally to a more technocratic and regulatory framework centred on methane governance, institutional reform, and long-term capital mobilisation at COP28.

At the linguistic level, this is reflected in significant shifts in modality, lexical choice, and syntactic organisation. COP26 is characterised by high-affect moral language and strong deontic modality, visible in repeated constructions such as "must act," "cannot survive," and "need to save our planet." These modal verbs construct climate action as an immediate moral obligation. By COP27, modal constructions become increasingly institutional and reform-oriented, particularly through conditional and causative structures such as "if we can summon the will" and "there needs to be a commitment," which frame systemic reform as politically achievable but structurally constrained. At COP28, modality becomes more technocratic and regulatory, relying on procedural formulations such as "we need regulation," "we need concrete action," and "we need long-term capital," thereby shifting the discourse from ethical appeal toward governance implementation and policy coordination.

This evolution parallels her increasing mobilisation of postcolonial memory, moving from implicit references at COP26 to explicit critique at COP27 through reference to debt, extraction, unequal borrowing structures, and institutional exclusion, and culminating in a systemic analysis of global financial institutions (MDBs, insurers, and credit-rating agencies) at COP28. Intertextual references also become more historically layered across the speeches. At COP27, Mottley invokes slavery, the Marshall Plan, Nelson Mandela, and Bretton Woods institutions as historical analogies that legitimise calls for climate reform. These references function discursively to connect climate injustice with longer histories of colonialism, economic inequality, and geopolitical power asymmetries. Likewise, urgency shifts from emotionally charged and metaphorically intensified appeals at COP26 to more scientifically grounded and policy-oriented framing at COP28. Financial discourse also evolves, with reform-oriented appeals progressing from stressing unmet promises and funding gaps at COP26, to proposing structural alternatives such as the Bridgetown Initiative at COP27, and ultimately to advocating systemic redesign at COP28.

Figure 1 presents a synthesis of these findings.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Timeline of Discursive Shifts across COP26–28

COP26 (2021) ——►	**COP27 (2022) ——►**	**COP28 (2023)**
Moral Appeal	**Structural Critique**	**Systemic/Technocratic Frame**
Topoi	**Topoi**	**Topoi**
-Justice	-Justice (expanded)	-Reform (institutional)
-Urgency	-Historical	-Pragmatism/efficiency
-Morality	-Responsibility	-Scientific urgency
-Responsibility	-Structural inequality	-Regulatory governance
	-Financial justice	
Discursive shift		
Shared vulnerability →	Shared responsibility →	Shared governance
Rhetorical mode		
Emotive/moral →	Political/structural →	Technical/policy driven

Figure 1 summarises the discursive evolution across Mottley's COP26–COP28 interventions. The timeline illustrates a clear shift from predominantly moral and justice-based argumentation at COP26 towards structurally grounded critiques at COP27, and ultimately to a more technocratic and policy-oriented discourse at COP28. This progression is reflected in the transformation of key topoi, moving from urgency and moral responsibility to financial reform, regulatory governance, and scientific reasoning. The figure also highlights a broader discursive shift in the construction of global citizenship, moving from shared vulnerability (COP26) to shared responsibility (COP27), and ultimately to shared governance (COP28).

The speeches also demonstrate increasing syntactic complexity across the three COP contexts. COP26 relies heavily on short declarative clauses, repetition, and parallelism, producing a performative rhetoric of urgency and alarm. COP27 introduces longer argumentative chains and conditional reasoning, particularly through cumulative clause structures that connect climate justice to debt, finance, and historical inequality. By COP28, the discourse adopts more policy-oriented and procedural syntax characterised by institutional enumeration ("insurance companies," "credit rating agencies," "bank regulators") and technocratic sequencing. This syntactic evolution mirrors the broader movement from emotional mobilisation toward governance-oriented discourse.

Metaphorical framing also evolves significantly. COP26 employs existential metaphors such as "death sentence" and emergency metaphors such as "Code Red," intensifying perceptions of imminent catastrophe. COP27 introduces historical and civilisational metaphors through references to pyramids, slavery, and reconstruction, thereby framing climate reform as part of a broader human struggle for transformation and justice. COP28 increasingly relies on scientific and systems-based metaphors such as "tipping point" and "age of superlatives," which construct climate change as a measurable and escalating systemic crisis requiring coordinated institutional intervention.

In performative terms, Mottley's delivery style across the speeches reflects an increasingly authoritative rhetorical positioning. Repetition, vocative address ("friends," "our people"), rhetorical questioning, and rhythmic escalation contribute to the speeches' persuasive force. The repeated use of collective pronouns ("we," "our," "human family") functions prosodically to create solidarity and shared moral identification, while imperative and declarative structures reinforce urgency and leadership authority. These performative features strengthen the ideological function of the discourse by transforming climate governance from a technical policy issue into a collective moral and political struggle.

In sum, Mottley's COP26–28 discourse demonstrates a clear evolution from moral appeal to systemic critique, linking climate change to development, finance, and global governance. Through intertextual and interdiscursive references, she frames climate change as a systemic crisis, casts her region as an agent of reform, and grounds her authority in science, historical experience, and institutional critique. At the linguistic level, this evolution is realised through shifting modalities, increasingly complex syntactic structures, intensified metaphorical framing, and performative rhetorical strategies that progressively reposition global citizenship from shared vulnerability toward collective governance and institutional accountability. Global citizenship is thus constructed as shared vulnerability, responsibility, and governance.

6. Discussion

The findings directly address the first research question by showing that Mottley constructs global citizenship as a dynamic and evolving discourse shaped by shifting geopolitical, economic, and environmental conditions across COP26, COP27, and COP28.

Rather than presenting it as a fixed normative ideal, her rhetoric reconfigures global citizenship as a politically situated and strategically mobilised construct through which responsibility, justice, and collective action are articulated. This evolution follows a clear progression. At COP26, global citizenship is framed through shared vulnerability and moral urgency, while at COP27 it expands to encompass shared responsibility, particularly in relation to structural inequality, climate finance, and historical accountability, and at COP28, it is further developed into a model of shared governance involving states, financial institutions, regulatory bodies, and non-state actors. Accordingly, global citizenship becomes increasingly institutionalised, shifting from an ethical stance to a demand for systemic reform. Importantly, this shift also reveals a gradual movement from affective-moral appeals toward institutional and technocratic rationalities, which subtly redefines climate responsibility within existing global governance structures rather than fully disrupting them.

This progression corresponds to a broader shift from moral appeal, through structural critique, and ultimately to a more policy-oriented framing. Across the three speeches, climate discourse is increasingly intertwined with economic and regulatory reasoning. While COP26 foregrounds moral urgency alongside references to global financial mechanisms, COP27 advances more explicit proposals for reform, including calls for a new financial architecture, and COP28 integrates technocratic arguments related to climate finance, energy governance, and regulatory intervention. This shift reflects a strategic expansion of rhetorical resources, combining moral, political, and technical forms of argumentation. However, this increasing technocratisation of discourse also risks narrowing the transformative potential of climate justice claims, as structural inequality is progressively translated into managerial and policy problems.

The second research question is addressed through the identification of key discursive strategies that underpin this construction. The analysis shows that the combined use of nomination and predication constructs a relational moral framework in which vulnerable states are positioned as disproportionately affected, while responsibility is attributed to high-emitting actors and systemic structures. Argumentation strategies similarly evolve from justice-based claims to more complex forms of reasoning that incorporate economic logic, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of her claims within global governance debates. Simultaneously, perspectivisation and intensification consolidate Mottley's authority, as her self-positioning shifts from representing SIDS to articulating a broader global voice. Critically, this expanded authority also reflects a strategic discursive move that enables moral leadership claims within unequal global power structures, rather than indicating actual redistribution of decision-making power in climate governance.

The third research question is addressed by tracing how this construction evolves across the three COP contexts. The findings reveal a clear shift from moral appeal to structural critique, and ultimately to a more technocratic and policy-oriented framing. This evolution is reinforced through the use of interdiscursive as well as intertextual strategies, which enhance the depth and legitimacy of her discourse. In particular, by drawing on historical analogies, Caribbean perspectives, and scientific evidence such as IPCC temperature thresholds, Mottley constructs climate change as a systemic crisis rooted in global finance structures, historical inequalities, and governance arrangements. Consequently, her discourse contests dominant Global North narratives by foregrounding postcolonial perspectives alongside structural inequality, thereby contributing to a more critical and politically grounded conceptualisation of global citizenship. Nevertheless, this contestation remains largely discursive rather than materially transformative, as it operates within the same frameworks it critiques.

Overall, the study demonstrates that global citizenship, as constructed in Mottley's discourse, extends beyond shared identity or moral obligation, instead centring on the redistribution of responsibility, the restructuring of global systems, and the reconfiguration of participation in climate governance. It thus emerges as a contested and dynamic concept, reflective of broader struggles over power, justice, and representation in the context of the climate crisis. At the same time, the analysis suggests that this concept is not only contested but also co-opted within existing governance logics, where calls for justice are increasingly articulated through reformist rather than radically transformative discourses.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Mia Mottley's COP26–COP28 speeches construct global citizenship as a justice-oriented and structurally grounded discourse that challenges dominant frameworks of global climate governance. Through the strategic deployment of discursive strategies, intertextual references, historical analogies, and interdiscursivity, she discursively frames climate change not merely as an environmental crisis but as a consequence of historical inequality, financial injustice, and unequal political power. Across the three COP contexts, her rhetoric evolves from moral urgency and shared vulnerability toward increasingly explicit demands for systemic reform, institutional accountability, and equitable global governance.

The analysis further shows that Mottley's discourse operates simultaneously at moral, political, and technocratic levels. At the linguistic level, emotionally charged metaphors such as "Code Red" and "death sentence" intensify the existential stakes of climate inaction, while inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our people" construct transnational solidarity. At the argumentative level, she combines ethical appeals with economic reasoning, scientific evidence, and institutional critique, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of climate justice claims within global policy debates. Through intertextual references to colonial histories, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Marshall Plan, and IPCC climate science, her speeches situate contemporary climate inequalities within broader historical and geopolitical structures.

The implications of this analysis are threefold. Theoretically, it demonstrates the value of Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) for analysing climate discourse as historically situated, ideologically embedded, and politically consequential. Importantly, DHA is applied not as a descriptive checklist but as an analytical framework for examining the discursive construction of authority, legitimacy, and resistance within international climate politics through the strategic interaction between the discourse proper and its socio-political context. In addition, the study contributes to scholarship on global citizenship by showing how Global South leaders redefine the concept through postcolonial and climate justice perspectives that foreground redistribution, accountability, and systemic reform rather than abstract cosmopolitanism alone.

Politically, it highlights how Global South leaders contest dominant Global North narratives by articulating alternative frameworks of climate justice, thereby reshaping international climate debates. Mottley's rhetoric positions SIDS as agents of moral and political change, while advancing a dynamic conception of global citizenship and equitable multilateralism.

Practically, it underscores the urgency of advancing equity-centred climate finance, promoting structural reform, and strengthening inclusive policy-making processes. Accordingly, policymakers and international institutions should prioritise reforms in climate finance mechanisms, strengthen the regulation of non-state actors, and foster more inclusive and cooperative approaches to global climate governance.

The study nonetheless has several limitations. The corpus is limited to three speeches, which restricts the scope of generalisation. In addition, the analysis relies primarily on transcripts that do not capture paralinguistic features such as tone, gesture, delivery, or audience reception, all of which contribute to rhetorical meaning and political effect. While the study prioritised depth of qualitative analysis over corpus size, future research would benefit from incorporating larger comparative datasets and multimodal approaches to political discourse.

The potential directions for further research include extending this analysis longitudinally by examining later COP interventions or comparing Mottley's rhetoric with that of other Global South leaders, such as Sheikh Hasina and William Ruto, in order to identify convergences and divergences in climate justice discourse. Comparative studies could also explore whether similar discursive constructions of global citizenship emerge across different geopolitical contexts and institutional settings. Furthermore, research into audience reception and media circulation would help clarify how such discourse shapes international climate governance and public understandings of climate justice.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Mottley's climate rhetoric reconstructs global citizenship as a discourse centred on justice, accountability, and structural reform. Her speeches challenge unequal climate governance arrangements while repositioning vulnerable states as active agents in global climate politics.

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Appendix A: Links to the COP Speeches Analysed

The corpus analysed in this study consists of the following speeches delivered by Prime Minister Mia Mottley:

1. **COP26 Speech (2021)**

   Mottley, M. [MottleyPM]. (2021, November 1). *COP26 speech by Prime Minister Mia Mottley* [Video]. YouTube.

   https://youtu.be/miI8xRP4xK4

2. **COP27 Speech (2022)**

   Mottley, M. [MottleyPM]. (2022, November 7). *COP27 speech by Prime Minister Mia Mottley* [Video]. YouTube.

   https://youtu.be/bf0J-1f4aXM

3. **COP28 Speech (2023)**

   Mottley, M. [MottleyPM]. (2023, December 2). *COP28 speech by Prime Minister Mia Mottley* [Video]. YouTube.

   https://youtu.be/9ZuC2y3P6P4