Original Research Article

Redefining Peace at the Crossroads: Multilateralism, Justice, and Sustainability in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 2025

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ABSTRACT

The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2025 unfolded amid profound geopolitical polarization and systemic fragility. While the official theme "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16, the speeches revealed that consensus on these principles remains fragmented. This study conducts a qualitative thematic analysis of leaders' statements, systematized through a comparative thematic classification table and heatmaps. Five coding dimension security, justice, development, rights, and sustainability provided analytical anchors, but results demonstrate that peace was consistently framed through integrative themes: a justice development nexus in Africa and Latin America, a law rights security triad in Europe, multilateral cooperation in ASEAN, sovereignty versus justice polarization in North America and Israel versus Arab states, and sustainability justice interdependence across the Global South. Compared with UNGA 78 (2023) and UNGA 79 (2024), three trends crystallized: the securitization of sustainability, deepening discursive polarization over the meaning of peace, and a crescendo of demands for UN and Bretton Woods reform. Theoretically, the findings extend the constructivist and critical institutionalist approaches, confirm the growing relevance of environmental security, and challenge liberal institutionalist assumptions about great-power cooperation. Practically, the speeches diagnose urgent global imperatives: climate finance as a form of peace finance, justice as a preventive security measure, reform as a means of institutional survival, and digital governance as a new frontier in peace. By treating the 2025 Assembly not merely as rhetoric but as a diagnostic instrument of global order, this article demonstrates that peace in the twenty-first century is being redefined as a multidimensional construct of justice,

sustainability, and legitimacy yet fractured by sovereignty-first resistance.

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has historically been viewed as the most comprehensive platform for international diplomacy. Since its inception in 1945, the Assembly has met annually to ensure that each member state has an equal voice, reinforcing the principle that international legitimacy rests on universality rather than power. In contrast to the Security Council, which can sanction enforcement actions but is predominantly influenced by the five permanent members, the General Assembly derives its legitimacy from extensive representation. Each September, the General Debate commences with addresses by heads of state and government, providing a formal yet substantive account of global dialogue. These utterances lack legal binding force; their significance lies in their moral authority. They convey concepts of order, articulate interpretations of peace, justice, and development, and expose the philosophical rifts that shape the international system (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

The significance of these speeches transcends immediate diplomatic signaling. They function as diagnostic tools for global politics, illuminating emergent issues before the establishment of enforceable agreements. According to constructivist scholars, these are performative acts: by engaging in discourse within the UN context, states both mirror and shape the norms they seek to have others embrace (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1998). Leaders utilize the UNGA platform to establish their roles within a moral and political framework – as advocates of sovereignty, proponents of justice, or innovators of sustainability. The platform affords minor states uncommon prominence, while larger states can utilize it to validate their dominance or challenge competitors. Consequently, UNGA statements provide insights into the ideologies of peace and order that influence global politics.

Evolution of Themes Over Decades The thematic evolution of UNGA statements mirrors significant changes in international relations. At the first session of the UNGA in 1946, addresses focused on averting another world conflict, instituting security measures, and reaffirming the United Nations' establishment. Peace was narrowly defined as the absence of interstate warfare. The Cold War converted the Assembly into a battleground for ideological rivalry. The United States and its allies characterized peace as emancipation from communism, whereas the Soviet bloc interpreted it as liberation from imperialism. The emergence of newly independent governments in the 1960s and 1970s broadened discussions to encompass decolonization, sovereignty, and economic fairness, culminating in the demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO).

At the 50th session of the UN General Assembly in 1995, the Assembly exhibited post–Cold War optimism. Globalization, democratization, and human rights were central topics, while humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping missions were discussed as instruments of international accountability. The concept of human security, which emphasizes individuals over nations, began to shape the discourse, foreshadowing subsequent discussions on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

UNGA 70 in 2015 was a pivotal moment, marked by the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainability was comprehensively incorporated into the dialogue of peace for the first time, most explicitly articulated in SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Leaders underscored that peace cannot be maintained without development,

and development cannot transpire without peace. This formalized the "peace-development nexus," positioning sustainability at the core of international legitimacy.

In recent years, assemblies have mirrored escalating crises. The 75th United Nations General Assembly, conducted virtually in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, underscored the importance of health security and global solidarity while simultaneously exposing divisions in international cooperation. The 78th UN General Assembly in 2023 and the 79th in 2024 were characterized by discussions centered on Ukraine, Gaza, and climate financing, with nations divided between sovereignty-centric principles and reforming justice initiatives. The recent sessions anticipated the themes of 2025, wherein the appeal for peace was universal, while its substance was intensely divisive.

Why UNGA 80 (2025) Matters The 80th session of the UNGA in September 2025 was convened amid an unprecedented confluence of crises. The conflict in Gaza, characterized by increasing civilian fatalities, dominated news coverage—the conflict in Ukraine showed no indications of resolution, challenging the resilience of international law. Climate catastrophes, such as extensive flooding in Asia and extended droughts in Africa, underscore the urgency of sustainability issues. Simultaneously, sovereign financial crises in the Global South and rapid advancements in artificial intelligence have prompted urgent inquiries regarding justice, equity, and governance. In this context, the topic "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" was not merely aspirational but essential. b

The speeches reflected this urgency. Guterres (2025) cautioned that the "rule of law is being supplanted by the rule of brute force," associating Gaza, Ukraine, and climate degradation as interrelated perils. African leaders have shown remarkable consensus about Security Council reform and debt justice. Presidents of Latin America linked climate justice to democracy and equity. ASEAN leaders underscored cooperative security and institutional primacy, whilst Europe reiterated humanitarian law and rights. Conversely, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to sovereignty-first nationalism, Israel prioritized military triumph, and Russia advocated for a multipolar approach.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Analysis of speeches at the United Nations General Assembly has garnered academic attention for decades, underscoring that discourse at the Assembly transcends mere symbolism. The annual speeches given during the General Debate have been analyzed for their impact on agenda-setting, norm diffusion, and the construction of legitimacy. The methodologies employed have varied, often favoring quantitative textual analysis or focusing exclusively on specific instances. An increasing amount of research highlights the need for more systematic qualitative thematic analysis, particularly regarding how nations articulate philosophies of peace, justice, and sustainability. This section reviews the current literature, highlights its limitations, and identifies the research gap that this study aims to address.

UNGA Addresses as Normative Artifacts

Preliminary research on the UNGA highlights its deliberative nature. Peterson (2006) contends that speeches are crucial to the Assembly's ability to set its agenda, influencing which problems attain legitimacy as global concerns. Weiss and Daws (2018) emphasize that the Assembly's significance lies not in its enforcement of decisions, but instead in its ability to

reflect and influence norms through discourse. These works demonstrate that the UNGA serves as a venue for the expression and construction of global discourses. Expanding upon this basis, Binder and Heupel (2015) analyze the manifestation of norm contestation in speeches, specifically concerning human rights and humanitarian intervention. The Assembly functions as a platform for both normative alignment and discord, wherein states express conflicting interpretations of shared ideals. These findings highlight the foundational role of UNGA rhetoric: through their discourse in the Assembly, governments both mirror and influence the standards they reference. However, a significant portion of the research is case-specific or issue-oriented, focusing on interventions in Syria or the concept of the Responsibility to Protect. Although significant, such studies fail to encompass the broader spectrum of peace discourses across various assemblies or locations.

Quantitative and Computational Methodologies

A new surge of academic inquiry has utilized computational techniques to examine UNGA speeches. Baturo, Dasandi, and Mikhaylov (2017) advance quantitative text mining by analyzing speeches from 1970 to 2014 to elucidate the evolution of state priorities over time. Their research reveals that speeches can be systematically analyzed for problem prominence, thereby exemplifying, for instance, the emergence of development themes in the post–Cold War period. Subsequent research extends this methodology by employing topic modeling and sentiment analysis to identify topic clusters (Mikhaylov, Baturo, & Dasandi, 2020). Although this effort has produced significant discoveries, its limitations are evident. Quantitative methods identify word occurrences but seldom investigate the construction of meaning. The focus on word frequency may reduce intricate philosophical arguments to mere quantifiable units. Hansen (2006) emphasizes that discourse cannot be simplified to mere language use; it must be examined within its social and political context. Consequently, whereas text-mining methodologies reveal patterns of significance, they frequently obscure the qualitative differences in the interpretation of peace across contexts.

Interpretative and Constructivist Methodologies

Interpretive traditions in international relations have consistently highlighted the foundational role of discourse. Kratochwil (1989) and Onuf (1998) contend that speech acts are not passive reflections but performative actions that construct the social environment. Within the UNGA framework, this suggests that speeches do not merely convey national stances but actively shape peace and justice as normative principles. Recent constructivist research emphasizes that remarks at the Assembly function as platforms for contestation. Wiener (2018) emphasizes that global norms are reinforced not only by consensus but also through contestation, wherein nations express divergent interpretations. The Assembly serves as a platform for defining and redefining the concept of peace. However, little research has systematically examined how many regions concurrently establish peace within a given assembly, resulting in a deficiency in our understanding of global discursive diversity.

Nexus of Peace, Justice, and Sustainability

A different body of literature highlights the developing connection between peace and sustainability. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda formalizes this relationship, especially via SDG 16. Barnett et al. (2010) propose the "sustainability peace thesis," contending that sustainable development is intrinsically linked to security. Homer-Dixon (1999) previously asserted that environmental shortage incites conflict, a perspective that has received empirical validation in recent research connecting climate change to migration and instability (Mach et al., 2019). Nonetheless, although policy discussions frequently reference the climate–peace connection, scholarly examinations of UNGA statements have not thoroughly investigated how governments express this relationship in discourse. Bäckstrand & Lövbrand (2015) contend that discussions on climate justice expose significant North–South disparities. Systematic thematic analysis of UNGA statements could yield detailed information on how leaders conceptualize sustainability as essential to peace and whether this perspective varies by location.

Voices from the Global South and Institutional Reform

A growing body of research has examined how nations in the Global South utilize international platforms to challenge prevailing hierarchies. Acharya (2014) emphasizes the significance of "norm localization," in which regional actors modify global norms to suit their own specific settings. Murithi (2008) emphasizes Africa's enduring call for reform of the Security Council as an issue of fairness and legitimacy. Zarakol (2022) contends that the agency of the Global South is transforming the world system and contesting Western hegemony. Notwithstanding these insights, limited research has concentrated on the role of UNGA statements as instruments for these reformist aspirations. The 2025 assembly, characterized by demands for Security Council reform from Africa and Latin America, presents a distinctive opportunity for rigorous analysis of this issue. A qualitative theme analysis enables the capturing of justice-oriented discourse in change that quantitative methods may overlook.

Contemporary Scholarship on Legitimacy Crises

Current academic discourse highlights the legitimacy dilemma facing global institutions. Zürn (2018) argues that global governance faces a "crisis of legitimacy," stemming from both performance shortcomings and inadequate representation. Lake, Martin, and Risse (2021) observe that legitimacy is increasingly contested as emerging countries seek a more significant role. These ideas align closely with UNGA 2025, where leaders from Africa and Latin America articulated that peace is intrinsically linked to institutional reform. However, there are limited empirical studies that connect these theoretical discussions to the actual speeches of leaders at the Assembly.

The Absence of a Gap: Qualitative Thematic Analysis of UNGA 2025

Collectively, current literature identifies three primary limitations. Primarily, the literature is either descriptive or computational, offering vital insights into issue salience, but it lacks a thorough examination of meaning construction. The complexity of speeches—where

peace may signify security for one leader, justice for another, and sustainability for a third—is frequently overlooked in aggregate counts. Secondly, comparative regional analysis remains insufficiently established. Although studies address Africa's reform aspirations and Latin America's justice framing, few examine how regions concurrently establish peace within a single framework. Such comparisons are essential for comprehending worldwide divergences and convergences in normative perspectives.

The incorporation of peace, justice, and sustainability as conceptual categories remains relatively under-researched. Despite policy frameworks acknowledging these connections, minimal academic research has methodically examined how leaders reference them at the UN General Assembly. This study rectifies these deficiencies by employing a qualitative theme analysis of UNGA 2025 statements, categorizing them into five interconnected dimensions: security, justice, development, rights, and sustainability. By creating a thematic classification table and visualizing it as a heatmap, this study presents the first systematic mapping of regional variations and convergences in the conceptualization of peace within a single assembly. This method reconciles the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy, providing both rigor and interpretive depth, thereby contributing to several bodies of literature. It enhances academic discourse on multilateralism by illustrating the rhetorical construction and contestation of legitimacy. It enhances sustainability research by integrating climate justice into peace narratives. It enhances Global South viewpoints by meticulously recording their reform requests. It illustrates the significance of qualitative thematic analysis in encapsulating the philosophical diversity of peace within global politics.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a constructivist theoretical framework, complemented by insights from critical institutionalism. Constructivism posits that international politics is shaped not only by material power but also by shared ideas, norms, and discourses. UNGA speeches, from this perspective, function as sites of norm articulation and contestation, where competing visions of peace, justice, and legitimacy are advanced and negotiated.

Objectives

This study makes two significant contributions. It illustrates that peace is not a singular concept but a debated and multifaceted construct, offering the inaugural rigorous qualitative thematic synthesis of UNGA 2025 addresses by area, uncovering global patterns and regional disparities. Two interconnected objectives are raised:

1. To map the thematic landscape of peace discourses at UNGA 2025, using qualitative thematic coding across nations.

2. To compare regional emphases, identifying convergences and divergences in how peace is defined and what it reveals about global philosophies of peace.

Correspondingly, two guiding research questions emerge:

1. How do world leaders at UNGA 2025 frame peace, justice, and sustainability in their speeches?

2. What regional similarities and differences can be identified in these framings, and what do they reveal about global philosophies of peace?

By addressing these research questions, this study not only fills a gap in international relations scholarship but also provides valuable insights into the evolving concept of peace at a time when the multilateral order is facing profound challenges.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Type

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design, grounded in the assumption that political speeches are not neutral reflections of policy preferences but performative acts that construct and shape meanings of peace in global politics. Drawing on constructivist and discourse-analytic traditions (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1998), the research treats language as constitutive of international norms rather than merely descriptive of them. Within this framework, discourse is understood as a site where power, values, and ideological commitments are articulated and contested.

Unit of Analysis and Study Population

The unit of analysis consists of official national statements delivered during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) General Debate. The study population includes heads of state, heads of government, and foreign ministers who addressed the Assembly during the 80th UNGA session held in September 2025. This session was selected due to its thematic emphasis on "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" and its occurrence amid intersecting global crises, making it a critical moment for examining contemporary articulations of peace.

Case Selection and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to include all available speeches delivered by eligible representatives during UNGA 2025. This comprehensive inclusion approach ensures broad geographical representation and maximizes analytical depth. UNGA 2025 was selected as a single, information-rich case study, justified both substantively—due to the convergence of security, humanitarian, and environmental challenges—and analytically, as it offers a unique opportunity to examine the real-time redefinition of peace across diverse political contexts.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

The dataset comprises official transcripts and verified secondary accounts of UNGA 2025 speeches. Primary sources were obtained from the UN Digital Library and official national mission websites whenever full transcripts were publicly available. In cases where complete texts were unavailable, credible summaries from established media and diplomatic reporting platforms were utilized and cross-validated across multiple sources to ensure accuracy and consistency. This triangulated approach mitigates the limitations associated with incomplete documentation.

Research Instruments and Analytical Framework

The primary research tool is qualitative thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework and adapted here into three operational stages:
1. Initial inductive coding,
2. Theme identification and categorization, and
3. Comparative synthesis.

An explicit coding schema was developed to ensure analytical rigor and transparency. Speeches were examined line by line to identify peace-related references, which were inductively coded and iteratively refined.

Thematic Categorization and Operational Definitions

Through repeated coding cycles, peace-related references were consolidated into five interrelated analytical dimensions:
1. Security (ceasefires, military stability, conflict prevention),
2. Justice (accountability, fairness, legal order, representation),
3. Development (economic growth, financing, poverty alleviation),
4. Rights (human rights, refugee protection, democracy), and
5. Sustainability (climate change, environmental protection, intergenerational equity).

These categories were selected based on their frequency in the data, their alignment with the UNGA 2025 thematic agenda, and their grounding in established peace studies and international relations scholarship.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following thematic coding, a thematic classification table was constructed to systematically map each country's discourse across the five peace dimensions. The table includes variables for country, leader, date of speech, dominant strategic themes, and a matrix indicating the presence and relative emphasis of each dimension. This structured mapping enables both intra-regional and inter-regional comparative analysis, revealing discursive patterns that may not be evident through narrative analysis alone.

Visualization and Comparative Analytics

To enhance interpretability and facilitate cross-regional comparison, the study incorporates visual analytical tools, notably a heatmap that aggregates thematic emphasis by region. The heatmap visually represents the intensity of engagement with each peace dimension, highlighting regional peace philosophies. For example, African leaders consistently engage all five dimensions, Latin American leaders emphasize justice and sustainability, ASEAN states prioritize cooperation and development, while the United States predominantly foregrounds sovereignty and security. These visualizations complement the qualitative findings by providing an accessible comparative overview.

Reliability, Validity, and Limitations

To ensure reliability, coding followed clearly defined operational criteria for each dimension and was cross-checked across multiple speeches to reduce interpretive bias. Validity was strengthened through triangulation with secondary reporting and consistent application of thematic categories across cases. Nonetheless, limitations remain, particularly in instances of incomplete transcripts or ambiguous rhetorical intent. Despite these constraints, methodological consistency and source verification enhance the robustness of the findings.

Alignment with Research Objectives

This methodological approach directly supports the study's research objectives by systematically categorizing peace discourse into five analytical dimensions and comparing regional emphases. The combined use of thematic tables and visual analytics enables the study to address its two central research questions:
1. How world leaders conceptualize peace, justice, and sustainability; and
2. How geographical variations reveal divergent ideologies of peace.
By integrating interpretive depth with comparative structure, the methodology bridges a gap in existing literature and provides a replicable framework for analyzing evolving global peace discourse.

Results

The examination of UNGA 2025 remarks, presented in Table 1 and complemented by a heatmap, reveals a situation in which peace is widely referenced yet profoundly divided in interpretation. All leaders articulate the concept of peace; however, their definitions, justifications, and associations with justice, rights, development, and sustainability differ significantly across domains, as shown in Table 1, including in the philosophies of international relation

Table 1. UNGA 2025: Country Themes × Peace Dimensions

UN System

Entity	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights
UN Secretariat	António Guterres	Sep 24	Rule of law vs raw power; Gaza ceasefire + 2-state; $1.3T climate finance; AI governance	✓	✓	✓	✓
UN GA President	Annalena Baerbock	Sep 24	Charter valid; UN relevance depends on members	✓	✓	—	—

North America

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
United States	Donald Trump	Sep 24	Sovereignty/anti-multilateralism; migration crackdown; tariffs; climate rollback	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗

South America / Latin America

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
Brazil	Lula da Silva	Sep 23	Multilateralism crossroads; democracy & equality; digital regulation; climate justice; UN reform	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colombia	Gustavo Petro	Sep 23	Stop Gaza genocide; armed force for Palestine; anti-US interference; climate action	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bolivia	Luis Arce	Sep 24	Condemns US presence; UNSC reform; demilitarization; end trade wars	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uruguay	Yamandú Orsi	Sep 22	"Zone of peace"; two-state Palestine; mediation offer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Europe

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
France	Emmanuel Macron	Sep 22	Recognizes Palestine; ceasefire/humanitarian; European security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
United Kingdom	Yvette Cooper	Sep 22	Migration/security; Gaza/Ukraine/Sudan peace; climate/growth agenda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ukraine	Volodymyr Zelenskyy	Sep 24	Pressure on Russia; accountability; weapons as a peace path	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Russia	Sergey Lavrov	Sep 27	Multipolarity; anti-sanctions; security narrative	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Romania	Oana-Țoiu	Sep 24	Ceasefire Ukraine; Gaza ceasefire; UNSC reform; climate neutrality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spain	Pedro Sánchez	Sep 25	Recognition wave; EU coordination; social justice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Middle East

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
Israel	Benjamin Netanyahu	Sep 26	Security-first; defeat Hamas; opposes recognition now	✓	✗	—	✗	✗
Jordan	King Abdullah II	Sep 23	Refugees; two-state; regional peace	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Egypt	Badr Abdelatty	Sep 24–26	No displacement; refugees; Suez disruption; regional stability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Syria	Ahmed al-Sharaa	Sep 24	Reintegration; sanctions relief; justice probes	✓	✓	✓	✗	—

Africa

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
South Africa	Cyril Ramaphosa	Sep 25	Multilateralism; AU-UN; debt justice; Gaza genocide claim; UNSC reform	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nigeria	Kashim Shettima (VP)	Sep 24	Multilateralism renewal; UN reform; debt relief; digital divide; climate; Palestine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ghana	John Dramani Mahama	Sep 25	UN reset; Africa's role; veto reform; climate; Palestine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kenya	William Ruto	Sep 24	Gaza humanitarian; UN/IMF/WB reform; African representation; credibility of institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

South Asia

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
Pakistan	Shehbaz Sharif	Sep 26	Gaza ceasefire; development finance; regional peace	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

ASEAN

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
Thailand	Sihasak Phuangketkeow	Sep 25	Human cost of wars; WPS; cross-border cooperation	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Indonesia	Prabowo Subianto	Sep 24	Strong UN; two-state; peacekeeping surge; SDGs; climate neutrality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
Singapore	Vivian Balakrishnan	Sep 27	Multilateralism; ICJ/UNCLOS; trade; cyber/oceans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Malaysia	Mohamad Hasan (FM)	Sep 25	UN reform; Gaza/Palestine justice; multilateralism; Global South development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brunei	Sultan/Rep.	Sep 24–26	ASEAN cooperation; "place in world"; regional peace	✓	✓	✓	—	—
Cambodia	Hun Manet	Sep 24–26	Transformation; sovereignty; ASEAN role; border issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Laos	Sonexay Siphandone	Sep 24–26	ASEAN centrality; cooperation; peaceful relations	✓	✓	✓	—	—

Asia (non-ASEAN)

Country	Leader	Date	Core Strategic Themes	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
China	Li Qiang	Sep 26	Pro-multilateralism; anti-protectionism; development-first globalization; AI governance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Japan	Shigeru Ishiba	Sep 24	Rule-of-law foreign policy; Gaza humanitarian; Ukraine support; Indo-Pacific stability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Cross-Regional Synthesis

Table 1 and the visualizations reveal that, although peace is the most frequently cited concept, its interpretations are spatially focused and structurally distinct. Africa and South America are the largest normative blocs, consistently addressing all five dimensions—security, justice, development, rights, and sustainability—with considerable vigor. Their comments suggest an agreement on a justice-centered philosophy of peace, in which structural inequalities must be addressed for stability to be credible and sustainable. This is not coincidental: both regions have historically faced marginalization within global institutions, and their leaders have consistently linked peace with reform and redistribution. Ramaphosa's (2025)

asserton that "there can be no peace without justice, and there can be no justice without reform" (September 25) and Lula da Silva's (2025) statement that "peace is not the silence of guns, but the presence of democracy, equity, and climate justice" (September 23) illustrate this shared viewpoint. The heatmap (Figure 1) demonstrates that Africa and South America display the highest density across all dimensions.

UNGA 2025 Regional Emphasis on Peace Dimensions

	Security	Justice	Development	Rights	Sustainability
UN System	2	2	2	2	2
North America	1	0	0	0	0
South America / LatAm	5	5	5	5	5
Europe	6	5	6	5	4
Middle East	4	2	3	2	1
Africa	4	4	4	4	4
South Asia	1	1	1	1	1
ASEAN	7	7	7	5	3
Asia (non-ASEAN)	2	2	2	2	2

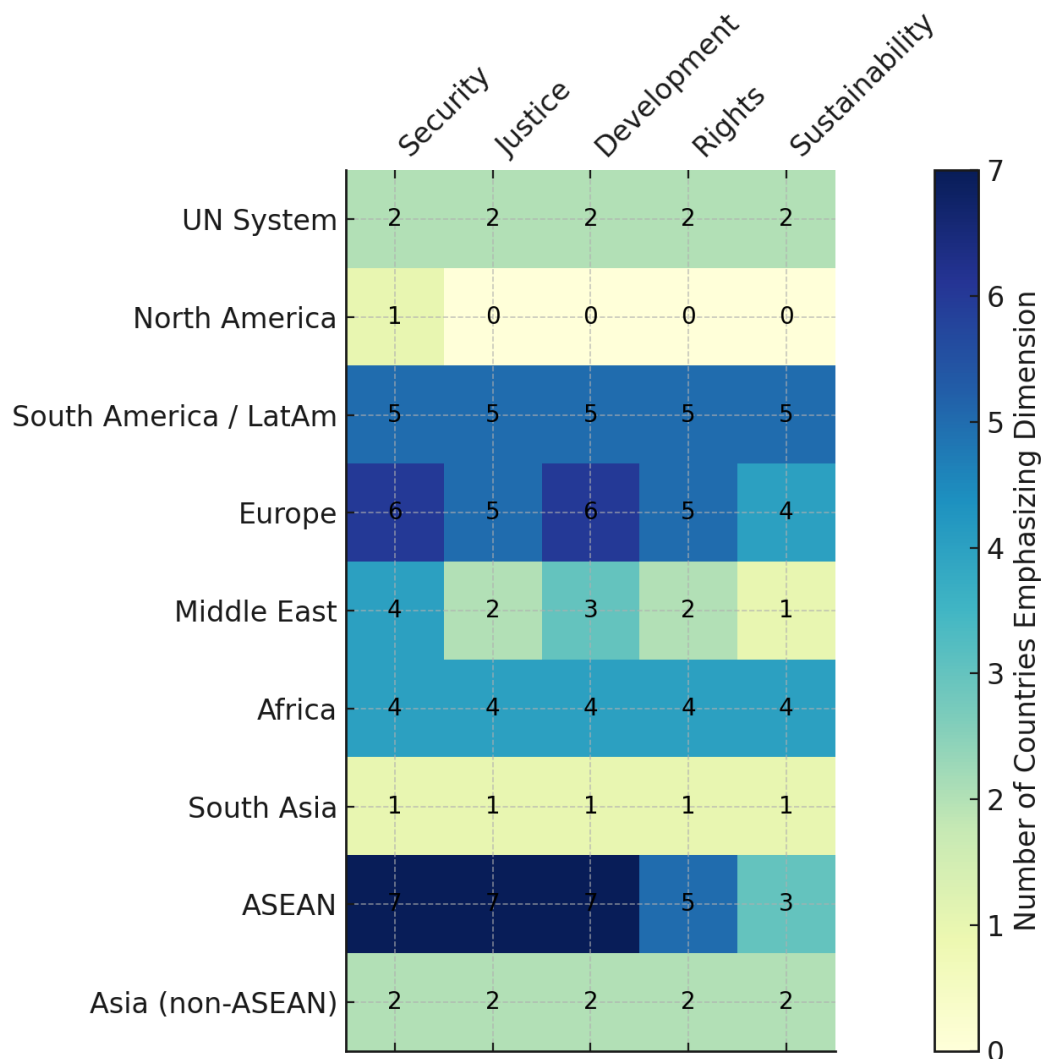Number of Countries Emphasizing Dimension

Figure 1 Heatmap of UNGA 2025 Regional Emphasis on Peace Dimensions

Europe and ASEAN adopt an intermediate stance, characterized by comprehensive and balanced priorites, although each region emphasizes distinct aspects. Europe primarily depends on the law–rights–justice nexus, reflecting its normative legacy and contemporary issues, including those concerning Ukraine and Gaza. Zelenskyy's claim that "weapons are the path to peace because they are the path to justice" (September 24) exemplifies the tension between security imperatives and legal accountability that characterizes Europe's discourse. Conversely, ASEAN underscores collaboration, multilateralism, and institutional legitimacy, with Malaysia declaring that vetoes have "stifled peace" (September 25). ASEAN policymakers

link peace to cooperative norms and regional cohesion, aligning with Acharya's (2014) notion of "norm localization." In Table 1, both regions effectively address all five characteristics; however, Europe exhibits a narrower scope of sustainability, while ASEAN shows a reduced focus on rights among smaller governments.

Non-ASEAN Asia, represented by China and Japan, primarily convey peace through developmentalism and international legal structures. Li Qiang of China (2025) proclaims, "Development is the mother of peace" (September 26), whereas Ishiba (2025) of Japan highlights maritime law and humanitarian principles. This illustrates a dual perspective: China links peace to equitable globalization, whereas Japan associates peace with legal order. Table 1 categorizes Asia as strong in development and legal frameworks, moderate in rights, resulting in an intermediate heatmap intensity.

Nonetheless, the Middle East represents the most fragmented and perplexed coalition. Israel establishes a security-victory paradigm, with the Prime Minister Netanyahu declaring that peace will only be attained through the destruction of Hamas (September 26). Conversely, Arab nations—Jordan, Egypt, Syria—define peace as inclusive of justice, dignity, and rights for Palestinians, as illustrated by King Abdullah II's assertion that "there is no peace without a Palestinian state" (September 23), which is the most explicit counterargument. This separation is evident in Table 1, where Israel is scored exclusively on security, while Arab states are assessed on justice, rights, and development. The heatmap clearly demonstrates a high level of justice, while indicating weaknesses in sustainability and in rights on the Israeli side.

North America, particularly the United States, exhibits the lowest level of engagement with the Assembly's theme. United States President Donald Trump's sovereignty-focused viewpoint rejects climate action and institutional justice, equating peace with security grounded in national power and influence. Table 1 reveals that North America is the sole exception to the security region. The synthesis highlights a disjointed global discursive framework. Peace is a universal concept; nonetheless, its meaning is complex. Africa and Latin America emphasize justice, reform, and sustainability; Europe stresses legal frameworks and rights; ASEAN underscores cooperation; Asia amalgamates development and law; the Middle East remains divided; and the U.S. embraces an isolationist approach centered on sovereignty. The findings suggest that the Assembly in 2025 functions as a platform for consensus while simultaneously highlighting significant philosophical divisions in world politics.

Integrative Thematic Findings

The categorization of speeches into five dimensions offers clarity; however, the more crucial discovery is the manner in which leaders interlink these dimensions to form cohesive themes. These themes exemplify the elevated logics through which peace is conceptualized, illustrating that dimensions do not function independently but are discursively intertwined. Five significant thematic integrations arise from the analysis.

1. Justice–Development Nexus African and Latin American leaders regularly integrate justice with progress. Shettima of Nigeria (2025) cautions against compelling residents to choose between "nourishing their children and settling debts" (September 24), thereby transforming financial justice into a developmental assertion. Lula da Silva interconnects democracy, equity, and climate justice, articulating peace as integral to equitable development. This connection redefines peace as unattainable without rectifying economic systems that perpetuate poverty and debt reliance. Table 1 shows that both Africa and South America

consistently emphasize justice and development across virtually all discourses, establishing this connection as one of the most prominent cross-regional topics.

2. Law–Rights–Security Triad European discourses amalgamate law, rights, and security into a cohesive triangle. Yvette Cooper (2025), UK, characterizes peace as encompassing civilian protection, accountability, and reconstruction (September 22), whereas Zelenskyy associate's security with justice by armament (September 24). Macron's acknowledgment of Palestine establishes security based on rights and legal legitimacy. Collectively, these statements demonstrate how Europe conceptualizes peace as achieved through legal frameworks and rights, rather than mere brute force. The triangle is similarly evident in ASEAN, as illustrated by Singapore's Balakrishnan on cyber law on September 27; however, Europe articulated it most emphatically, establishing it as a unique, integrative concept.

3. Multilateral Cooperation ASEAN leaders emphasize that peace is fundamentally a collaborative endeavor. Malaysia asserts that vetoes "stifled peace" (September 25), whereas Indonesia's Prabowo links peace to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (September 24). These talks illustrate the integration of justice, development, and sustainability into a collaborative, multilateral approach that regards peace as the outcome of common problem-solving. Table 1 illustrates this, as ASEAN encompasses all dimensions while continually alluding to institutions. This subject aligns with Acharya's (2014) notion of norm localization, where smaller governments promote global norms by integrating them into collaborative regional frameworks.

4. Sovereignty vs. Justice Polarization The most pronounced thematic conflict is evident in the Middle East and North America. Israel and the United States have diminished the concept of peace to mere sovereignty and triumph, dismissing sustainability, rights, and justice. Netanyahu's assertion that "peace will come when Hamas is destroyed" (September 26) exemplifies the security-first, zero-sum framework. President Donald Trump's repudiation of climate and justice narratives reflects this. In contrast, leaders from Jordan, Egypt, and Africa/Latin America emphasize justice as a prerequisite for peace, frequently referencing the Palestinian issue. This results in a discursive division between sovereignty-oriented and justice-oriented ideologies, as illustrated in Table 1.

5. Sustainability–Justice Interdependence A novel concept has emerged: the amalgamation of sustainability and justice. Leaders from Latin America and Africa associate climatic catastrophe with institutional violence, positioning environmental protection as a matter of justice. Lula's concept of "climate justice" and Petro's association of environmental degradation with genocide exemplify this amalgamation. Nigeria and Kenya both associate climate with violence, underscoring the notion that sustainability is essential for peace. This emerging paradigm, as illustrated in Table 1 by the intersection of the sustainability and justice emphases, is represented in the heatmap by a significant regional density along these two dimensions.

Academic Significance of Thematic Integration

These thematic linkages enhance outcomes beyond mere descriptive categorization, demonstrating that the five dimensions are not isolated concepts but components of intricate discursive frameworks through which governments formulate their approach to peace. The justice-development nexus illustrates the integration of material equity and moral fairness; the law-rights-security triad exemplifies how institutional order upholds security; multilateral

cooperation reveals how smaller states promote peace via institutional legitimacy; the sovereignty-justice polarization highlights essential conflicts in worldviews; and the sustainability-justice interdependence presents a new framework for peace in the Anthropocene.

These findings highlight the significance of qualitative thematic analysis. Quantitative word counts may quantify the prevalence of terms such as "peace" or "justice." However, they fail to account for the intricate interplay of aspects that manifest as cohesive themes, elucidating profound ideologies of world order. Table 1 and the heatmap not only depict these emphases but also validate their relative significance among regions.

Discussion

The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2025 occurs amid heightened geopolitical instability, economic fragility, and environmental urgency. The official theme, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions," encapsulates the core of Sustainable Development Goal 16; nonetheless, the debates reveal that achieving consensus on these themes remains challenging. The speeches are distinguished not only by their shared themes but also by the intensity and diversity with which the notion of peace was reinterpreted. In numerous administrations, security and sovereignty are paramount; in others, peace is intrinsically connected to justice, rights, sustainability, and institutional reform. This section rigorously examines these findings through comparative, theoretical, and practical frameworks, situates the 2025 assembly within broader trends, and delineates the implications for the future of global governance.

From UNGA 78 to UNGA 80: Tracing Shifts

A critical perspective requires assessing not only what UNGA 2025 reveals but also how it exemplifies the convergence of advances since 2023. At UNGA 78 (2023), climate change is predominantly framed as an environmental or developmental issue. Leaders deliberate about mitigation and adaptation, primarily within the parameters of Sustainable Development Goals or humanitarian obligations. At UNGA 79 (2024), the dialogue made little progress, with climate concerns increasingly being incorporated into discussions on migration, food scarcity, and conflict prevention. Nonetheless, it has not yet become essential to the peace agenda. By 2025, the transformation in speech is apparent. Leaders across Africa, Latin America, and specific areas of Asia consistently highlight climate as a pivotal factor affecting peace rather than a peripheral one. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil explicitly links climate justice to global equity, while John Mahama of Ghana warned that ignoring environmental deterioration would render all institutions irrelevant. This evolution demonstrates the gradual securitization of sustainability, as the climate has shifted from a developmental issue (2023) to a cross-sectoral concern (2024) and ultimately to a peace imperative (2025).

The advocacy for UN reform, however ongoing, has markedly escalated. During UNGA 78, calls for Security Council reform were raised, albeit often in fragmented form. During UNGA 79, the dialogue regarding debt relief intensified; however, it lacked unified South–South solidarity. By 2025, Africa, Latin America, and specific areas of Asia had achieved significant cohesion. Ramaphosa, Ruto, Mahama, Shettima, Lula, and Arce, in their speeches to the UN Assembly, all assert that reform is fundamentally connected to peace. The alignment of

previously peripheral regions signifies a substantial shift in the distribution of discursive power within the Assembly.

Ultimately, geopolitical fragmentation escalated. The 78th and 79th sessions of the UN General Assembly witnessed vigorous discussions between Russia and Western nations regarding Ukraine, while the 2025 session brought the Gaza crisis into this context. The result was a conceptual dichotomy: the United States and Israel advocated a sovereignty-centric, security-focused paradigm, while Europe, Africa, and Latin America contended that justice and rights are essential for peace. The Middle East was fragmented, resulting in Israel's isolation from the Arab nations. This revealed both fragmentation and the consolidation of two opposing paradigms of peace—one grounded in coercive sovereignty and the other in normative fairness.

Theoretical Implications

The thematic analysis of UNGA speeches reveals contextualization's of multilateralism, legitimacy, and peace. Multiple theories elucidate the significance of the 2025 Assembly. Liberal Institutionalism. Keohane and Nye's (2012) interdependence theory posits that in a society characterized by intricate relationships; international institutions are essential for coordination. The continual references to the UN and calls for its reform at UNGA 2025 underscore this assertion: even the most disenchanted nations did not advocate the dissolution of the UN, but rather its reorganization. The sovereignty-first positions of the U.S. and Israel undermine the predictive efficacy of liberal institutionalism. When major forces disregard institutional norms, liberal frameworks struggle to elucidate institutional resilience. The 2025 assembly indicates that institutions endure not only by promoting cooperation but also by being compelled to remain relevant through alliances from the Global South.

From a constructivist perspective, legitimacy is grounded in collective norms rather than in material power alone. The persistent focus on fairness, sustainability, and representation by Africa and Latin America exemplifies what Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) refer to as norm entrepreneurship. These regions aimed to reconceptualize peace not merely as the absence of conflict, but as a state of structural fairness and sustainability. Their convergence illustrates that norms are socially produced and can be redefined from the margins. The difficulty lies in the uneven acceptance of norms, as sovereignty-first actors often oppose justice-based norms, resulting in a fractured discursive landscape.

Critical theorists emphasize that institutions are not impartial; instead, they perpetuate power inequalities. The 2025 speeches confirm this: Africa and Latin America sought not only improved outcomes but also a louder voice. Reform was regarded not merely as procedural maintenance but as a matter of fundamental fairness. This illustrates what Hurrell (2007) terms the justice of participation: in the absence of representation, institutions cannot maintain legitimacy. Empirical data substantiate this assertion: the more pronounced and cohesive the South's demand for reform, the more acute the legitimacy crisis of the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions appear.

The climate-peace nexus established in 2025 corresponds with Homer-Dixon's (1999) assertion that environmental degradation is a fundamental cause of conflict. Nonetheless, the 2025 speeches advanced the discourse by presenting climate not merely as a catalyst for conflict but also as a matter of justice. Lula's concept of "climate justice" and Petro's association of militarism with environmental degradation expand the notion of environmental security

into a framework of intergenerational justice. This expands Barnett et al. (2010)'s sustainability peace thesis, positing that sustainable development and peace are interdependent.

Furthermore, Latin American politicians, particularly Petro and Arce, reiterate dependency critiques by associating militarism and underdevelopment with systemic disparities within the global system. Africa's leaders adopted a more forceful posture, identifying themselves not as victims but as agents of their own destiny. This illustrates Escobar's (2011) advocacy for decoloniality in global governance. Collectively, these actions indicate a shift from a discourse of dependence to a proactive redefinition of global justice. In addition, the ASEAN speakers highlight Acharya's (2014) thesis of norm localization, in which smaller states modify global standards to fit regional contexts. By emphasizing veto reform, collaborative multilateralism, and cyber regulations, ASEAN conceptualizes peace through institutional solidarity rather than unilateral sovereignty. This illustrates how middle and small powers express peace through a unified voice, countering the unilateralism of great powers.

Overall, the theoretical importance of UNGA 2025 is in its affirmation that peace is not a unique concept but a socially constituted and contested norm. Liberal institutionalist assumptions regarding collaboration are challenged, while constructivist and critical theories gain prominence, and environmental security emerges as a key explanatory framework for the twenty-first century. The integrative themes described in the Results section connect to the consequences of UNGA 2025.

1. Justice–Development Nexus. This subject emphasizes that peace policy cannot treat development as an isolated priority. Debt reduction, trade reform, and equitable growth should be conceptualized not solely as economic strategies but as essential components of preventive peacebuilding. Multilateral development banks must incorporate principles of justice into their financing policies.

2. Law–Rights–Security Triad. Europe's conceptualization of peace demonstrates that security acquires legitimacy solely when grounded in rights and legal frameworks. Transitional justice and accountability systems must be integrated into peacekeeping mandates rather than being deferred until the post-conflict period.

3. Multilateral Cooperation. The discourse of ASEAN demonstrates that smaller states can assert agency via a unified voice. Regional groups should be strengthened as peace actors rather than regarded as peripheral entities. This indicates that the impetus for reform may originate from coalitions of small and medium-sized states.

4. Sovereignty vs. Justice Polarization. The conflict between the U.S./Israel and the Global South highlights the danger of stagnation. If players focus on sovereignty- and obstruct-justice-oriented changes, the UN faces the threat of irrelevance. Reform efforts should be structured to close this gap through hybrid procedures that balance sovereignty and justice.

5. Sustainability–Justice Interdependence. The rise of climate justice as a component of peace recontextualizes the allocation of funding. Climate financing has now become peace finance. The implication is that COP processes and Security Council discussions must be amalgamated. Otherwise, inaction on climate change will evolve into a subsequent security crisis. By connecting Results themes to practical implications, the analysis demonstrates that UNGA 2025 was not merely a rhetorical event but a diagnostic tool for the global order.

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical insights, the speeches also yield several pressing policy lessons.

1. Justice as Preventive Security. The alignment of Africa, Latin America, and Asia toward reform suggests that the UN and Bretton Woods institutions must change, or their legitimacy would deteriorate. Reform is not superficial but fundamental. Policymakers must emphasize the expansion of the Security Council, the adoption of equal voting rights, and debt restructuring to avert institutional obsolescence.

2. Financing Peace through Climate. Climate finance should be redefined as peace finance. Guterres's appeal for $1.3 trillion per year exemplifies the magnitude of the need. Development agencies, international financial institutions, and climate funds must incorporate security externalities into their financing arrangements. Neglecting to finance climate adaptation now equates to inciting conflicts in the future.

3. Justice as Preventive Security. Justice mechanisms accountability, transitional justice, and debt equity should be incorporated into preventive peacebuilding. This necessitates reallocating resources from post-conflict reconstruction to pre-conflict justice frameworks.

4. Digital Peace Frontier. The emergence of cyber standards in speeches from Brazil and Singapore indicates that digital governance has become a component of the peace agenda. This necessitates that the UN develop frameworks for disinformation, cybercrime, and AI governance, incorporating them into discussions on peace and security.

5. Regionalization of Peace. Africa's collective need for change, ASEAN's collaborative security efforts, and Latin America's emphasis on justice demonstrate that peace is increasingly expressed at the regional level. Policymakers should endorse regional organizations as primary responders and norm innovators, thereby harmonizing global frameworks with regional aspirations and priorities.

Conclusion

The 80th UNGA demonstrates that peace in the twenty-first century is multifaceted, encompassing security, justice, development, rights, and sustainability. In contrast to earlier assemblies, in which rhetorical agreement frequently concealed differences, the 2025 session exposed them. It also unveiled convergences: the climate–peace nexus, the justice–development paradigm, and the reform agenda collectively indicate a burgeoning consensus on the definition of peace. Theoretically, the UNGA 2025 aims to promote discussions on multilateralism and the legitimacy of international institutions. It substantiates constructivist and critical assertions that norms are socially produced and that legitimacy is predicated on fairness. It enhances environmental security theory by incorporating sustainability as a form of justice. It also contests liberal institutionalism, demonstrating that institutions persist not by default but by modification. The Assembly emphasizes that peace cannot be compartmentalized. Funding climate initiatives equates to funding peace. Justice serves as a form of preventive security. Reform is essential for survival. Policymakers must address these imperatives or jeopardize the UN's relevance.

Recommendations

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

This study advances the scholarly understanding of global peace discourse in three substantive ways. First, it reconceptualizes peace as a multidimensional and regionally contingent construct, empirically demonstrating that contemporary peace narratives are no longer articulated in isolation but embedded within intersecting frameworks of justice, development, sustainability, and legitimacy. By operationalizing peace through five coding dimensions and mapping their integrative configurations across regions, the research moves beyond binary peace–security paradigms and contributes a relational model of peace framing to international relations scholarship.

Directions for Future Research

While this study provides a comprehensive thematic analysis of the 2025 UN General Assembly, several avenues for future research remain open.

1. Future studies could employ longitudinal discourse analysis across multiple decades of UN General Assembly sessions to assess whether the observed securitization of sustainability and polarization of peace narratives represent structural shifts or cyclical responses to global crises.

2. Comparative research could explore elite versus public discourse alignment, examining whether national leaders' peace framings at the UN resonate with domestic political narratives and public opinion. Such analysis would deepen understanding of the domestic–international norm feedback loop.

3. Methodological expansion through computational text analysis and network mapping could complement qualitative thematic coding, enabling large-scale comparison across institutions, regions, and time periods while preserving analytical rigor.

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