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THE JULIANA V. UNITED STATES CASE AND THE GLOBAL YOUTH CLIMATE MOVEMENT: AN ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. Despite the overwhelming scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, public skepticism and motivational deficits persist. Effective climate change communication requires not only presenting scientific information but also conveying the real, ongoing impacts of climate disruption. This paper examines *Juliana v. United States*, a landmark youth-led climate lawsuit, through the lens of Aristotelian rhetoric to demonstrate how emotional appeals (*pathos*) enhance the effectiveness of climate change communication. The study analyzes how climate litigation cases function not only as a legal tool but also as a powerful communicative resource capable of shaping public understanding and mobilizing civic engagement. The analysis highlights how the Plaintiffs' narratives in the *Juliana* case — detailing personal, emotional, cultural, and spiritual harms —translate abstract scientific risks into concrete lived experiences. Emotions such as fear, indignation, and pity alter the hearers' state, both public and judicial, and influence their judgments. Situated within Aristotle's framework of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, the case exemplifies how pathos can ethically support deliberation, address epistemic inequalities, and persuade audiences of the gravity of climate change. Although the lawsuit ultimately failed to reach trial, it catalyzed global youth-led climate litigation and contributed significantly to public discourse by framing climate change as an already unfolding crisis. The study concludes that the *Juliana* case demonstrates how Aristotelian ethical and persuasive rhetoric — especially the strategic use of *pathos* — can contribute to effective climate change communication, and how the combined force of emotion, credibility, and reason can foster more compelling public engagement with the climate crisis.

Keywords: climate change communication • Aristotelian rhetoric • pathos • youth climate litigation • Juliana v. United States • climate justice

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1. Introduction

In a context of epistemic inequalities and limited motivation among citizens and policymakers to act urgently in response to environmental threats, efforts to inform and mobilize people about climate change should not rely solely on scientific information.

According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC, 2021), significant changes in the Earth's climate have been observed in every region and across the entire climate system. Additionally, a recent survey of 88.125 climate-related studies found that more than 99.9% of peer-reviewed scientific papers agree that climate change is primarily caused by human activities (Lynas, Houlton & Perry 2021).

Despite the extensive scientific information available on climate change today, a nationally representative survey (Climate Change in the American Mind) conducted jointly by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication found that 15% of Americans believe global warming is not happening. Additionally, 16% are unsure whether global warming is occurring (Leiserowitz et al. 2025). Furthermore, 36% of the global population still dispute the human origins of climate change (Ipsos 2023).[1]

Climate change significantly affects not only material conditions but also the emotional and spiritual well-being of individuals. Emotional responses to global warming are well documented, with 65% of Americans reporting that they are at least somewhat worried about it. Other common emotions associated with global warming include feeling interested (58%), sad (44%), disgusted (44%), afraid (39%), anxious (39%), angry (39%), hopeful (38%), outraged (36%), hopeless (34%), and depressed (28%) (Leiserowitz et al. 2025).

Therefore, climate change communication efforts should also address emotions and affective experiences. These efforts encompass all activities aimed at raising awareness, enhancing understanding, and fostering engagement with climate change. Consequently, lawsuits and similar legal actions fall within the scope of climate change communication, as they can raise awareness and encourage public involvement in climate issues.

This paper examines a paradigmatic lawsuit that addresses intergenerational rights within the climate justice debate. *Juliana v. United States*, filed in 2015 by 21 young Plaintiffs against the U.S. government, concluded in 2025. Despite its end, the case effectively communicated the current and future impacts of climate change on younger and future generations and inspired the emergence of numerous climate-related lawsuits globally.

The *Juliana* Case was selected for analysis in this paper because it is a landmark climate lawsuit originating in the United States, the world's second-largest global CO_2 emitter (Ritchie, Roser & Rosado 2023). Climate change litigation holds signifi-

cant importance in the U.S. due to the country's failure to establish a comprehensive national policy addressing climate change (Nosek 2018). Additionally, the U.S. has a long history of climate-related legal actions, with the earliest case dating back to 1990 (City of Los Angeles v. National Highway Transportation Safety Administration).

According to Olson, founder and co-executive director of Our Children's Trust, a global movement was fueled by the *Juliana* case, causing a change to the legal framework about the reexamination of children's fundamental rights in the context of the current climate crisis (McDonald 2025).

Thus, the *Juliana* lawsuit sparked a global campaign on Atmospheric Trust Litigation,[2] inspiring numerous subsequent lawsuits. To date, more than sixty youth-led climate cases have been filed worldwide, resulting in significant victories such as the June 2024 settlement in Navahine v. Hawai'i Department of Transportation and the Montana Supreme Court's order in Held v. State of Montana, which upheld the trial court's ruling in favor of the youth Plaintiffs (Adams-Schoen 2025). Even though the *Juliana* case did not succeed in court, it clearly demonstrates how climate litigation can influence the global population, persuading audiences of the importance and urgency of the issue.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the case through the lens of Aristotelian persuasive communication, situating it within the broader framework of climate change communication.

The main hypothesis is that *Juliana v. United States* shows how the strategic use of pathos, as defined in Aristotle's framework of ethical and persuasive rhetoric, can translate scientific knowledge into compelling and effective climate change communication.

First, the *Juliana v. United States* case will be outlined, with particular attention to the Plaintiffs' arguments presented in the First Amended Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief and the main procedural developments of the lawsuit. The second part introduces the field of climate change communication, presents climate change litigation as a form of this communication, and discusses how Aristotle's perspective can enhance our ability to communicate climate issues effectively. Finally, the *Juliana* case will be analyzed through the lens of Aristotelian rhetoric within the scope of climate change communication.

The approach method used in this research will be deductive, as the analysis of the lawsuit will be based on the premises established in the fields of climate change communication and Aristotelian rhetoric. The procedural method adopted will be monographic, involving extensive consultation of legal and philosophical doctrines as well as scientific articles. The research techniques employed will include bibliographic and documentary analysis.

2. An overview of *Juliana v. United States*

On September 10, 2015, a group of 21 young Plaintiffs aged eight to nineteen, together with the nonprofit Earth Guardians and future generations represented by Dr. James Hansen, filed a lawsuit against the federal government. They alleged violations of their fundamental constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property.

The lawsuit, supported by the nonprofit public interest law firm *Our Children's Trust*, named as Defendants the President of the United States and several federal agencies, including the Departments of Energy, the Interior, Transportation, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, and State, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its Administrator. The Plaintiffs argued that the government had caused and contributed to dangerous levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere, thereby destabilizing the climate system and infringing upon their rights. They also claimed that the federal government had failed to protect essential public trust resources.

The Plaintiffs argue that the Federal Government has long been aware of the correlation between carbon dioxide (CO_2) pollution from burning fossil fuels and global warming and its consequential climate change. Despite having long known about the harmful impacts of their actions on the environment and on human and non-human life, the federal government, represented by all the Defendants mentioned above, created and enhanced the dangers through fossil fuel extraction, production, consumption, transportation, and export.

As a concrete example, the Plaintiffs mentioned the approval by the Department of Energy of the export of liquefied natural gas ("LNG") from the Jordan Cove LNG terminal in Coos Bay, Oregon. In December 2021, this project was officially canceled by the Canadian company Pembina Pipeline after failing to obtain essential state permits like the Clean Water Act Section 401 permit. In February and March 2025, an LNG transportation startup, the Arizona-based OA Partners, filed a petition with the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals to revive the Jordan Cove LNG terminal project in Coos County. Their argument centered on President Donald Trump's executive order to unleash American energy and quicken the permitting for LNG export projects. Tribal members, Southern Oregonians, and clean energy advocates strongly responded to this petition, asserting its political character, lack of merit, and technical support (Rogue Climate 2021; Cavcic 2025).

The Plaintiffs alleged that the Defendants ignored experts they commissioned to assess the risks posed by the continued burning of fossil fuels, allowing atmospheric CO_2 concentrations to rise to unprecedented levels in human history. As highlighted by the Plaintiffs, considering that the United States is responsible for more than a quarter of global historic cumulative CO_2 emissions, the degree of Federal Government responsibility is higher than that of any other individual, country, or entity for subjecting the Plaintiffs to unsafe atmospheric CO_2 concentrations. The young citi-

zens, who are most vulnerable to climate change, are therefore marginalized by the Defendants.

In the First Amended Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief, Plaintiffs made five Claims for Relief, which in U.S. Law refers to the part of a civil complaint where the Plaintiff both states the legal grounds for the lawsuit and demands the court to provide a specific remedy.

The First Claim for Relief alleges a violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment, which protects fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property. The Plaintiffs assert that these rights extend to future generations and seek declaratory and injunctive relief to prevent further harm and safeguard their constitutional rights.

The Second Claim for Relief concerns a violation of the principles of equal protection embedded in the Fifth Amendment. The Plaintiffs argue that the Defendants have a long-standing pattern of deliberately disadvantaging children and future generations while exercising sovereign authority over the nation's airspace and federal fossil fuel resources for the economic benefit of current adults. In contrast, the Plaintiffs constitute a marginalized minority with no voting rights and minimal political influence over the Defendants' fossil fuel policies. The Defendants' actions, according to the Plaintiffs, prioritize the short-term economic gains of certain citizens over the Plaintiffs' fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property.

The Third Claim for Relief asserts a violation of unenumerated rights preserved by the Ninth Amendment. The Plaintiffs maintain that their fundamental rights to a stable climate system, including an atmosphere and oceans free from dangerous levels of anthropogenic CO_2, have been infringed by the Defendants' actions.

The Fourth Claim for Relief concerns the Public Trust Doctrine. The Plaintiffs contend that the Defendants' acts are unconstitutional and violate their duty to manage the atmosphere and other public trust resources responsibly. By failing in their duty of care as trustees, the Defendants have, according to the Plaintiffs, alienated substantial portions of the atmosphere in favor of private interests, undermining the public's rights.

Over nearly a decade, the U.S. government repeatedly attempted to dismiss or delay the case through multiple motions for *writs of mandamus*, stays, and appeals. While the district court issued historic rulings supporting the Plaintiffs, the Ninth Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court repeatedly intervened, often delaying the trial. The youth Plaintiffs, backed by *amicus briefs* from members of Congress, legal scholars, and thousands of supporters, persistently fought for their right to trial. The long legal battle ended on March 24, 2025, when the Supreme Court of the United States denied the Plaintiffs *petition for certiorari*. In this Petition, the Plaintiffs requested the revision of two Ninth Circuit decisions from 2020 and 2024, which had dismissed the case on the grounds that they were unable to show that their claims could be rectified by a ruling in their favor.

3. Climate change litigation as a form of climate change communication

A legal case within the context of climate change litigation, such as the one described earlier in this paper, holds significant potential to inform, educate, warn, persuade, and mobilize the public on issues related to climate change. Consequently, it constitutes a form of climate change communication.

According to the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School, climate change litigation constitutes any case that should be brought before a judicial body and involves climate change law, policy, or science as a material issue of law or fact. A 2025 report by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law (2025) reveals that, as of 30 June 2025, a total of 3.099 climate-related cases have been filed globally. As climate governance remains inadequate, legal action on climate issues has increasingly stepped in to address the shortcomings of insufficient voluntary commitments by states and corporations.

Litigation creates the opportunity to frame climate change in moral terms, which can be highly motivating for the public. Therefore, a litigation strategy holds significance beyond its potential to achieve substantive legal change. Even when a case is not successful in court, as demonstrated by *Juliana v. United States*, it can still shape public discourse, generate media coverage, and influence both public opinion and political debate (Nosek 2018).

Following this, beyond climate change litigation cases, climate change communication encompasses any attempt aimed at raising awareness and enhancing understanding and engagement with climate change (Moser 2010). Consequently, it includes various forms of communication, such as documentary films and series, advertising campaigns, everyday conversations, and participatory activities like public art installations and town meetings (Markowitz & Guckian 2018).

Social scientists from areas such as communications, political science, sociology and psychology commenced studying the ways individuals respond to distinct forms of climate change communication. This effort aims to gain a deeper understanding of the shortcomings in current climate communication strategies (Markowitz & Guckian 2018).

Carbon emissions continue to increase globally and, therefore, society is progressively vulnerable to climate change even though there is mass awareness and communication surrounding this issue. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of climate change communication efforts and the audience's capacity to implement behavioral changes in response to such communication (Nerlich; Koteyko & Brown 2010).

Current policies fall short in generating effective and urgent action to tackle cli-

mate change, which is due to the lack of motivation of citizens and policymakers to act urgently in response to environmental threats. This motivation deficit is linked, besides a lack of knowledge, to issues like lack of trust and positive emotions connected to the communication about the changes in the climate. These issues are validated by psychological research, which has featured the pivotal role of emotions, values and trust in communication (Lamb & Lane 2016).

The climate crisis cannot be resolved by better communication alone, but effective communication constitutes the solution in a democracy, since ethical communication is a requirement for it to exist. In a democratic society, political equality must be adjusted within a context in which people have different levels of knowledge or information, since citizens, even with the varying levels of epistemic inequality, are expected to deliberate on policy questions (Lamb & Lane 2016).

As suggested by the American Psychological Association (APA), the field of psychology can contribute to addressing climate change by providing insights into communication techniques and diffusion methods that effectively promote changes in environmental behavior (Swim et al. 2009). Social psychologists identified that social judgment encompasses two fundamental dimensions: competence and warmth. A listener will only trust the speaker, willing to accept the communication as intended, if besides the perceived competence, there is a clarity about their social intention and emotions (Lamb & Lane 2016).

The Center for Research on Environment Decisions (CRED), keeping with the APA framework, created a guide with strategies to communicate climate change in an effective way and relies on knowledge from psychology, anthropology, economics, history, environmental science and policy, and climate science. Its aim is to enhance the accessibility of credible science to the public, not to deceive or manipulate (CRED, 2009).

An emerging body of psychological research has identified cognitive barriers that hinder full understanding and acceptance of the threat posed by climate change. Two main cognitive hurdles that affect the public's ability to recognize climate change and its consequences are: the perception of scientific and social uncertainty, which can encourage wishful thinking; and the tendency to discount the future impacts of present actions. When used effectively, climate change litigation offers the potential to reframe the issue and help overcome these public cognitive challenges (Nosek 2018).

Emphasizing the current social, economic, and public health consequences of climate change—using concrete examples of the physical and emotional impacts on real people's lives—can make the risks more visible to the public. This approach helps clarify that certain climate change impacts are undoubtedly occurring and are a direct result of past collective and individual actions. Strengthening moral intuitions about climate change can encourage stronger support for corrective actions and policies.

Those who view climate change through an ethical lens tend to be more supportive of climate-related policies. However, due to the cognitive hurdles mentioned earlier, climate change is often not perceived as an injustice that demands to be addressed (Markowitz & Shariff 2012). Activating moral intuition by highlighting the consequences of intentional actions on innocent victims creates a powerful narrative within climate change communication (Nosek 2018).

The detailed description of injuries (economic, social, and health-related), especially when paired with the emotional impacts on real individuals, makes the structure of litigation particularly suitable for effective communication.

3.1. Aristotelian rhetoric in climate litigation: the role of *pathos* in persuasion

Here, we argue that the Aristotelian perspective, which integrates political science, ethics, and moral psychology, shows how persuasive communication can be both ethical and effective.

Even though Aristotle considers the potential dangers of rhetoric (like its use to manipulate the masses and flatter crowds), he does not dismiss it. Therefore, the art of rhetoric, understood as persuasive communication, should not be abandoned, but reformed and more effectively applied (Aristotle Rhet. 1.1.3–6).[3]

According to Aristotle, in a political community facing non-ideal circumstances, rhetoric serves three possible purposes. First, it should be used to protect justice and safeguard truth in the face of those that employ rhetoric with damaging aspirations. Second, it facilitates communication when audiences have distinct levels of knowledge and understanding. Third, it contributes to enabling discussion and decision-making in specific situations by providing the tools to engage with others and collectively determine the course of action we should pursue as members of a political community. Thus, despite the existence of scientific consensus, rhetoric is necessary to the process of communication and collective decisions amid antagonistic values (Aristotle Rhet. 1.1.12).

The means of persuasion included in the art of rhetoric are *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. *Logos* refers to logical arguments; *ethos* indicates the importance of good character and trustworthiness of the speaker; and *pathos* invokes the emotions (Aristotle Rhet. 1.2.3–7).

Logical arguments alone are often insufficient to convince an audience, especially when non-experts lack the technical expertise to fully understand an issue or when scientific uncertainty, as in the case of climate change, limits the availability of clear logical evidence. Thus, a legitimate way of building trust in these contexts is engaging emotions, which are also able to help deliberation and convey rational evaluation (Lamb & Lane 2016).

Markowitz & Shariff (2012) emphasize the central role of emotions in motivating climate action, noting that both the expression of negative emotions and the promotion of positive emotions such as gratitude, hope, and pride are crucial for generating enthusiasm for climate mitigation efforts. They also highlight the importance of adopting strategies to overcome the challenge of climate change victims appearing distant in time and space, by enhancing the public's ability to relate to and identify with those affected, for example, by focusing on identifiable future individuals such as one's own children, as is the case in the *Juliana* lawsuit.

Aristotle points out that the personal investment of citizens, in the context of a deliberative assembly, increases their attentiveness to the issues under deliberation and their vigilance concerning possible rhetoric abuses. Consequently, the paradigm of persuasive communication for him is deliberative rhetoric (Aristotle Rhet. 1.1.10).

Climate change communication can find useful guidance in the highlighted position that deliberation has for Aristotle. If people judge and decide better when their interests are at stake, climate communicators should seek deliberative forums that provide greater time and space for dialogue and the inclusion of diverse audiences' values and interests.

When citizens are invited to recognize how climate change impacts their own communities, they are more likely to make better decisions. Thus, the Aristotelian approach aligns with the recent movements to empower local communities to make informed judgments and to connect climate change to more concrete and local challenges and consequences. This perspective resonates with insights from psychology and social science. Empirical findings, including those presented by Hart and Nisbet (2012), indicate that people's responsiveness and receptiveness to climate communication increase when the issues are framed in local and concrete terms.

Ethics in Aristotle's sense focuses on individual flourishing. This flourishing, known as eudaimonia, is interconnected with the sense of belonging and engaging in a political community. The individual conceptions of the good will, for Aristotle, are directly connected to the good of their political communities. Therefore, since all human beings are political animals, the Aristotelian focus on citizens' own interests, far from encouraging self-interest, is related to the common good (Garsten 2006).

Aristotle's main contribution to climate change communication lies in highlighting how pathos is fundamental to build trust. The argumentation based only on logic, especially when there is scientific uncertainty and disagreement between experts, is not enough to convince an audience. Expertise with a lack of emotional connection and moral engagement creates what Aristotle calls cold competence and is insufficient to communicate effectively (Lamb & Lane 2016).

Aristotle's art of rhetoric helps to promote relationships in which audience and speaker are in a context of civic equality and possible reasons for distrust are reduced. Ultimately, Aristotle's timeless advice offers valuable lessons for today's cli-

mate change communicators (Lamb & Lane 2016).

4. Examining *Juliana v. United States* through aristotelian rhetoric and climate change communication

In rhetoric, there are two primary roles: the speaker and the hearer. The hearer is typically understood as either a judge — tasked with making a decision regarding past or future matters — or an observer. The formulated argument concerning the *Juliana* Case extends beyond the formal rulings of the Court. The hearers in this context are not limited to judges or members of the judicial system but include the broader society that engages with the case and is influenced by it.

This influence may manifest through the initiation of similar lawsuits, participation in public demonstrations, or a growing collective awareness and acceptance of the critical importance of climate justice for future generations, shaped by the repeated presentation of these arguments.

Regarding the hearers, Aristotle mentions that persuasion occurs whenever the speech leads the hearers to feel a certain emotion or passion that influences the judgment they are about to make. What can be presumed from this persuasive technique is that emotional states broadly conceived —regardless of whether the hearers actually experience an emotional episode, and regardless of the specific type of emotion they may feel — make a concrete difference in the formation of their judgment (Aristotle Rhet. 2.1).

Aristotle illustrates the importance of emotion for the formation of judgments by the hearers, pointing out how the way we judge changes when we experience grief, joy, friendliness, or hostility. Therefore, because rhetoric seeks to influence the audience's judgment and emotions play a crucial role in shaping how arguments are formed, rhetorical strategies must consider the emotional states of the audience (Aristotle Rhet. 2.1).

The description of the Plaintiffs in the *First Amended Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief* in *Juliana v. United States* engages emotions (*pathos*), emphasizing the feelings of the young Plaintiffs in response to both the climate changes they are already experiencing and those they will face in the future. To illustrate this emotional dimension, personal and concrete examples of the impacts on the children's and teenagers' lives are provided.

As an example of effective climate change communication constructed persuasively, the complaint offers a detailed account of how the Defendants' cumulative actions, which increase CO_2 concentrations in the atmosphere, are harming the Plaintiffs' dignity. This includes their ability to meet basic human needs, safely raise families, engage in leisure activities, be in contact with nature, practice religious and

spiritual beliefs, maintain bodily integrity, and live with access to clean air, water, shelter, and food.

There is this mention about the Plaintiff Kelsey Cascadia Rose Juliana (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 6):

> 18. In addition to coastal recreation, Kelsey enjoys snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and snow camping. Warmer winters and declining snowpack make it harder for her to enjoy these winter activities. Kelsey also enjoys rafting, swimming in rivers, snorkeling on rivers, canoeing on lakes, hiking, rock-climbing, and backpacking in the warmer seasons. Increasing summer temperatures, and the resulting algal blooms in the lakes Kelsey visits harm her ability to enjoy these activities and prevent her from drinking the water. Intense wildfires, which also threaten Kelsey's ability to enjoy summer activities. Kelsey has had to abandon camping trips because of nearby wildfires.

The Defendants caused in Kelsey, as well in the others Plaintiffs, psychological and emotional harm due to the fear associated to the changes in the climate, the comprehension of the persistent harms caused by the Defendants to her well-being and survival, and the awareness of the consequences that inevitably will affect her (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 7).

The Plaintiff Xiuhtezcatl, of Aztec descent, for example, engages in sacred indigenous cultural and spiritual practices to respect and defend the Earth. Hence, the Defendants actions harmed Xiuhtezcatl in his cultural and spiritual practices, as the forest he depends on for his mental, spiritual, emotional and physical well-being will continue to die. The consequences of climate change, like droughts, the intensified wildfires and the declining snowpack, for instance, also damages his recreational interests, property and personal safety (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 8).

Besides, the Plaintiff Alexander Loznak's intellectual and spiritual base was threatened, as his family farm (a foundational piece of his life and heritage) was being harmed by the already existing consequences of climate change (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 9).

The Plaintiff Kiran Isaac Oommenn had his ability to connect with his family damaged, as the intensity of the smoke and ash due to the escalating prevalence of forest fires prevented him for reaching the farm where part of his relatives live (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 18). The Plaintiff Tia Marie Hatton was also impacted psychologically by the forest fires that were increasingly destroying the forests around Bend, Oregon, and Nathaniel B. was "psychologically harmed, knowing of the inevitable and increasingly severe climate impacts he will experience in the future" (Juliana, K. et al. 2021, p. 27).

The psychological damages and the emotional, spiritual and physical meaning of the nature that surrounds the children and teenagers that are the Plaintiffs in this

constitutional climate lawsuit is emphasized continuously, as a way of adding to the logical arguments concerning the climate change and its harms, an emotional side to this environmental and social issue.

Furthermore, highlighting the local effects of climate change in the areas where the young Plaintiffs reside, framing it in local and concrete terms, strengthens public responsiveness and attention to these issues, as previously discussed.

Within the context of effective communication, it is important to detail here which specific emotions from the Plaintiffs are involved in the *Juliana v. United States* lawsuit, whose emotions are supposed to be stirred, and how specific emotions will appropriately affect their judgment.

Aristotle defines emotions as experiences of pain, pleasure, or a combination of both. Emotions, therefore, are those feelings that alter a person's state and influence their judgments, and are accompanied by either pain or pleasure. Then, he further categorizes specific emotions into six types of pains: fear, shame, pity, indignation, envy, and emulation. Aristotle does not explicitly mention the concept of sadness; however, all emotions involving pain encompass lypē (λύπη), which signifies an emotional ache, grief, distress, or suffering of the soul (Aristotle Rhet. 2.1, 2.2).

Correspondingly, certain emotions are recognized as pleasures. For example, individuals inclined toward pity may also feel joy at well-deserved pain and pleasure at well-deserved achievement. Similarly, those prone to jealousy might experience pleasure at the misfortune of their peers (Aristotle Rhet. 2.2).

A central and recurring emotion explicitly depicted in the Plaintiffss' description is fear, which Aristotle characterizes as a pain or disturbance arising from the anticipation of imminent harmful or painful events (Aristotle Rhet. 2.2). The Plaintiffs exhibit fear both in response to the ongoing consequences of climate change and in anticipation of future detrimental effects.

The fear related to climate change and its environmental consequences is a well-documented and recognized psychological impact. In response, the term "solastalgia" was coined by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht to describe the stress induced by environmental changes. The creation of this term underscores the growing global need for new language to capture emotional states linked to environmental transformations. Albrecht formed this neologism by combining the Latin word for comfort (sōlācium) with the Greek root for pain (algia), aiming to encapsulate the negative effects of feeling uneasy and anxious in an environment that once provided comfort, relief, and predictability (Albrecht et al. 2007). Indignation is another relevant emotion, defined by Aristotle as pain caused by the perception of undeserved success or good fortune by others (Aristotle Rhet. 2.2). Thus, indignation rightly arises when individuals or groups receive what is not justly theirs, reflecting a sense of moral grievance.

Indignation is an emotion directly connected to the perception of injustice and,

according to Aristotle, is morally appropriate and justified (Aristotle, Rhet. 2.2). It arises as a painful feeling toward those who receive undeserved benefits or good fortune. Consequently, indignation is closely linked to the concept of climate injustice, representing the justified moral response of children who endure the harmful effects of climate change — impacts they neither caused nor deserve.

One prominent emotion that the *Juliana* case is likely to evoke is pity. Aristotle defines pity as a painful emotion elicited by the observation of undeserved suffering experienced by others, particularly when such harm is perceived as a serious misfortune that could potentially befall oneself or one's loved ones. For pity to arise, three conditions must be satisfied. First, the suffering must be undeserved; if the harm is considered just or deserved, the emotional response shifts away from pity and may instead manifest as satisfaction, indifference, or a sense of justice. Second, the harm must involve significant pain or destruction rather than trivial misfortunes. Third, the individual experiencing pity must recognize a plausible vulnerability to similar suffering, allowing them to empathize by imagining that the misfortune could happen to themselves or to those they care about. Absent this perceived vulnerability, the emotional response of pity is unlikely to be triggered (Aristotle Rhet. 2.2).

The emotions that are supposed to be stirred extend beyond those of the judges presiding over the case to include the broader public and future audiences, serving as a critical component of climate change communication. The predominant emotions expressed by the Plaintiffs (fear and indignation) and the emotions elicited in the audience (fear, indignation and pity) create the emotional framework through which hearers interpret the facts, legal arguments, and moral implications of the case.

Fear, for instance, elicits an acute recognition of imminent danger, thereby motivating urgent and decisive action. Pity engages the hearer's moral sensibilities, fostering empathy and support for the protection of vulnerable Plaintiffs. Indignation characterizes the Defendants' actions as unjust and undeserved, thereby underpinning the attribution of responsibility and moral accountability.

For judicial hearers, fear of future irreversible harm underscores the urgency of judicial intervention; indignation can be directed toward the government's complicity in producing unjust and undeserved harms; and pity for the children's emotional distress renders their claims morally weighty and deserving of redress.

For the broader public — which, in this case, becomes the primary audience since *Juliana v. United States* ended without the merits being considered — fear motivates mobilization, heightens the perception of climate urgency, and increases the willingness to demand political change; indignation fosters moral condemnation of governmental negligence, strengthening the narrative of climate injustice; and pity generates solidarity, expanding public support for youth-led environmental movements and climate litigation.

As already mentioned in the first part of this paper, the battle ended on March

24, 2025. Even with the end of this fight for a trial and therefore the impossibility of holding the U.S. government accountable for the acceleration of climate change, the Juliana v. United States case created a huge impact.

Therefore, the repercussion and influence of the case analyzed here is due to the effective use of *pathos* in climate change communication. The consequences of global warming can seem abstract and distant, making it difficult to empathize with future generations and the hardships they will face due to climate change. The inclusion of the emotions, hopes, and concerns of the young Plaintiffs played a major role in effectively raising awareness and creating a movement.

5. Conclusion

In a society marked by epistemic inequality, recognizing the dissatisfaction and the grief already experienced by young people as a result of their changing environment is critical for convincing the public of the risks and intergenerational consequences of climate change. Rather than merely presenting impersonal data, the *Juliana v. United States* case incorporates the warmth and human proximity necessary to gain public trust.

The Plaintiffs used their personal stories to turn an abstract scientific issue into something real and urgent. Through this, they helped increase public awareness, inspired other lawsuits around the world, and empowered a new generation of youth activists.

This paper first described the *Juliana v. United States* case and the central arguments advanced by the Plaintiffs. The second part introduced the field of climate change communication, highlighting how climate change litigation functions as a communicative tool capable of informing, engaging, and mobilizing the public. It also outlined how Aristotelian rhetoric (particularly the role of pathos in building trust and fostering deliberation) contributes to enhancing the persuasive and ethical dimensions of climate change communication. Finally, the Juliana case was analyzed based on the theoretical framework outlined in the second section.

The main hypothesis of this paper was confirmed: the *Juliana* case exemplifies how the strategic use of pathos within Aristotle's rhetorical framework can contribute to effective climate change communication.

While this paper primarily focuses on the Aristotelian mode of persuasion known as pathos, ethical and responsible communication should also incorporate both logos and ethos in a balanced and integrated manner. The combined use of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* (particularly when rooted in real-life experiences) can foster meaningful integration across science, policy, and society.

Therefore, Aristotle's rhetoric remains relevant in this context of institutional

fragility and the urgent actions demanded by the climate crisis. Ethical rhetoric — grounded in emotion, credibility, and reason — can foster more effective communication about climate change, helping to restore the connection between individuals and the challenges they face, as well as between humans and the natural environment.

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Notes

[1]The data was selected from North America because the case analyzed in this paper originates from this region.

[2]Atmospheric Trust Litigation is a legal framework developed by Mary Christina Wood at the University of Oregon and the *Juliana* case was the first major federal case to prominently apply this strategy. This approach argues that courts worldwide have a fiduciary obligation to require governments to reduce carbon emissions in order to safeguard the public trust. It is grounded in the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and offers a global pathway for addressing climate change without the need for new regulations or laws (Wood 2012).

[3]This citation follows a standard scholarly format for classical works, in which the reference includes both the traditional internal citation (here, Aristotle, Rhet. 2.2—indicating book 2, chapter 2 of the *Rhetoric*) and the modern bibliographic entry of the edition or translation used. The traditional reference allows readers to locate the passage across any edition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, while the full bibliographic citation identifies the specific translation consulted (W. Rhys Roberts, in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Princeton University Press, 1984). This dual system ensures both precision and cross-edition accessibility.

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