


The Concept of Collective Knowledge in President AS 'Speeches (2000-2025): A Social Epistemological Perspective

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the concept of collective knowledge in President A.S.'s speeches through the lens of social epistemology, focusing on the period from 2015 to 2020 within the broader temporal frame of 2000–2025. Departing from traditional individualistic accounts of knowledge, the research treats political discourse as a site where knowledge is socially constructed, authorized, and normatively deployed. Presidential speeches are approached not merely as rhetorical instruments but as epistemic practices that shape shared understanding and collective identity. Adopting a qualitative, philosophy-oriented methodology informed by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and conceptual discourse analysis, the study analyzes official speeches to identify how collective knowledge is linguistically and philosophically framed. The findings reveal that collective knowledge is articulated through multiple forms, including experiential knowledge grounded in shared social experience, historical knowledge rooted in national memory, and institutional or expert-based knowledge that confers epistemic authority. These forms are strategically mobilized to legitimize political decisions, unify the audience, and guide collective action. From a social epistemological perspective, the study highlights significant tensions between epistemic authority and democratic inclusion. While appeals to collective knowledge foster cohesion and legitimacy, they also risk suppressing epistemic plurality and marginalizing dissenting perspectives. By situating presidential discourse within debates on collective intentionality, epistemic authority, and power, this research contributes to philosophical discussions on the ethical and political dimensions of collective knowing. It demonstrates the relevance of social epistemology for understanding how knowledge functions in contemporary political life.

Keywords: *Collective Knowledge, Social Epistemology, Political Discourse, Epistemic Authority, Presidential Speeches*

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy has long been concerned with the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge. Classical epistemology, from Plato to the modern analytic tradition, has primarily approached knowledge as an attribute of individual rational agents. Knowledge, on this view, is something a subject possesses by holding justified true beliefs. While this individualistic framework has yielded important insights, it has been increasingly questioned for its inability to account for the social conditions under which knowledge is formed, communicated, and sustained.

In response to these limitations, social epistemology has emerged as a significant philosophical field that emphasizes the collective and institutional dimensions of knowing. Social epistemologists argue that knowledge is not merely produced by isolated thinkers but is shaped by testimony, authority, trust, and shared practices within communities (Goldman, 1999). From this standpoint, political institutions and public discourse become central objects of epistemological inquiry, as they play a decisive role in regulating what counts as knowledge in a society. One of the key concepts within social epistemology is collective knowledge, understood as knowledge that is attributed to groups rather than individuals. Collective knowledge involves shared beliefs, joint commitments, and socially recognized forms of understanding that cannot be reduced to individual mental states alone. As Gilbert (1989) maintains, group knowledge arises through collective intentionality, where members jointly

accept certain propositions as authoritative or binding. This conception challenges traditional epistemology by expanding the subject of knowledge beyond the individual knower.

Political leadership offers a particularly fertile domain for examining collective knowledge, since political authority often rests on claims about what “we” as a society know, remember, or have learned. Presidential speeches, in this sense, are not only rhetorical performances but also philosophical sites where epistemic norms are articulated. Through such discourse, leaders present certain beliefs as shared, self-evident, or grounded in collective experience, thereby shaping the epistemic identity of the political community.

From a philosophical perspective, the epistemic authority of presidential discourse raises important normative questions. Who has the right to speak on behalf of collective knowledge? On what grounds are certain knowledge claims accepted as common understanding while others are dismissed? Social epistemologists such as Fricker (2007) have drawn attention to the ethical dimensions of these questions, particularly in relation to epistemic injustice and the exclusion of marginalized voices from collective knowledge formation.

The period between 2000 and 2025 provides a meaningful temporal framework for analyzing these issues, as it encompasses significant shifts in political communication, public trust, and access to information. Within this context, President A.S.'s speeches offer a sustained and influential body of discourse through which collective knowledge is repeatedly invoked and redefined. Examining these speeches philosophically allows for an exploration of how collective epistemic claims evolve in response to social and political change.

This study adopts a social epistemological approach to analyze the concept of collective knowledge in President A.S.'s speeches from 2000 to 2025. Rather than assessing empirical accuracy or political effectiveness, the focus lies on the philosophical structure of the knowledge claims themselves: how they are framed as collective, how epistemic authority is distributed, and how communal understanding is constructed through language.

By situating presidential discourse within the framework of social epistemology, this article aims to contribute to philosophical discussions on collective knowledge, epistemic authority, and the relationship between power and knowing. Understanding how political leaders articulate collective knowledge illuminates broader questions about the nature of shared belief and the ethical responsibilities involved in speaking for a community. In this way, the study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of social epistemology to contemporary political philosophy.

Literature Review

Philosophical discussions of knowledge have traditionally emphasized the epistemic subject as an individual rational agent. In the classical analytic tradition, knowledge is commonly defined as justified true belief, a formulation that presupposes an individual bearer of belief and justification (Gettier, 1963). Although this model has been foundational for epistemology, critics have argued that it inadequately captures the ways in which knowledge is socially embedded, transmitted, and sustained across communities and institutions.

The rise of social epistemology in the late twentieth century marked a decisive shift away from strictly individualistic accounts of knowledge. Scholars such as Margaret Gilbert, Philip Pettit, and Raimo Tuomela have developed theories of group belief and collective intentionality, arguing that groups can function as genuine epistemic agents. Tuomela (2004), for instance, distinguishes between individual “I-mode” beliefs and collective “we-mode” beliefs, suggesting that collective knowledge involves commitments that bind members of a group as a social unit rather than as isolated individuals.

Another significant strand of the literature focuses on the role of testimony, trust, and authority in the production of knowledge. Coady (1992) challenges the assumption that testimony is epistemically secondary to perception or reason, arguing instead that much of what individuals know is necessarily dependent on social sources. In political contexts, testimonial knowledge becomes especially salient, as citizens rely heavily on institutional and leadership-based sources for information about social reality. This insight has important

implications for understanding presidential discourse as a conduit of socially authorized knowledge.

Political philosophy and social epistemology intersect most clearly in analyses of epistemic authority and legitimacy. Raz (2006) argues that authority involves the right to guide beliefs and actions, a claim that extends naturally to political leaders who present themselves as epistemic guides for the public. When presidents assert that “we know” or “we have learned,” they implicitly claim epistemic authority on behalf of the collective, positioning themselves as spokespersons for shared understanding rather than merely individual knowers. Critical philosophers have also examined how power influences the formation and recognition of collective knowledge. Foucault’s (1980) work on power/knowledge emphasizes that knowledge is inseparable from social power relations and institutional structures. From this perspective, political discourse does not simply reflect collective knowledge but actively produces it by defining what is acceptable, rational, or true within a given historical context. Presidential speeches, therefore, can be understood as sites where epistemic norms are reinforced or contested.

More recent philosophical work has extended these concerns by examining the exclusionary dimensions of collective knowledge. Medina (2013) argues that dominant epistemic frameworks often silence or marginalize alternative perspectives, leading to epistemic oppression. In political discourse, appeals to collective knowledge may obscure internal disagreement or suppress minority viewpoints, presenting contested beliefs as universally shared. This critique is particularly relevant for analyzing the ethical implications of collective knowledge claims in presidential rhetoric.

While existing literature has extensively theorized collective knowledge, epistemic authority, and the social dimensions of belief, relatively little philosophical attention has been paid to sustained analyses of presidential speeches as epistemic texts. Most studies of political speech remain within the domains of linguistics or political science, leaving a gap in philosophical inquiry. This study seeks to address that gap by applying social epistemological theory to presidential discourse, thereby contributing to ongoing debates about collective knowledge and political authority.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative methodological framework informed by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with philosophical discourse analysis. While philosophy does not traditionally rely on empirical methods, recent work in social epistemology has increasingly acknowledged the value of systematic and transparent procedures when engaging with large bodies of text, particularly in applied and interdisciplinary contexts. The present methodology aims to preserve philosophical rigor while ensuring analytical clarity, replicability, and conceptual coherence.

The research design consists of two complementary components. First, a Systematic Literature Review is employed to identify and synthesize relevant philosophical discussions on collective knowledge, epistemic authority, and political discourse. Second, a qualitative conceptual analysis is applied to a corpus of presidential speeches in order to examine how collective knowledge is articulated in practice. The SLR functions as a theoretical grounding mechanism, ensuring that the analysis of speeches is informed by established and contemporary philosophical debates.

Systematic Literature Review Procedure

The SLR follows established guidelines adapted from Okoli (2015) and Petticrew and Roberts (2006), modified to suit philosophical inquiry. The review process involved the following stages: (1) identification of relevant literature, (2) screening and eligibility assessment, (3) conceptual categorization, and (4) philosophical synthesis. Academic databases such as PhilPapers, JSTOR, and Google Scholar were used to locate peer-reviewed

philosophical works published between 2000 and 2025 that address collective knowledge, social epistemology, and epistemic authority.

Inclusion criteria for the SLR were: (a) philosophical relevance to social or political epistemology, (b) explicit discussion of collective or group knowledge, and (c) theoretical or normative engagement rather than purely empirical analysis. Exclusion criteria included works limited to technical linguistics or political science without epistemological engagement. The final body of literature was analyzed thematically to identify recurring concepts, arguments, and points of disagreement.

Data Selection

The primary data for analysis consists of official speeches delivered by President A.S. between 2015 and 2020. This period was selected due to its political significance and relative discursive consistency, allowing for focused philosophical analysis. Speeches were obtained from publicly accessible official archives to ensure authenticity and reliability. Only speeches addressing national policy, collective identity, or shared experience were included, as these contexts most clearly involve appeals to collective knowledge.

Analytical Framework

The analysis applies a conceptual-interpretive method grounded in social epistemology. Rather than coding for frequency or statistical patterns, the study examines how collective knowledge is philosophically framed through language. Particular attention is paid to:

the attribution of knowledge to collective subjects ("we," "the nation," "our people"),
the use of epistemic verbs (e.g., know, understand, recognize),
appeals to shared history, experience, or expert consensus, and
the implicit norms governing epistemic authority and inclusion.

These elements are interpreted through the conceptual lenses developed in the SLR, allowing for a philosophically informed reading of the texts.

Philosophical Validity and Rigor

Philosophical rigor in this study is ensured through conceptual consistency, transparency of selection criteria, and sustained engagement with existing literature. The use of an SLR enhances the credibility of the theoretical framework by demonstrating systematic engagement with relevant philosophical sources. Reflexive analysis is also employed to minimize interpretive bias, acknowledging the normative dimensions inherent in social epistemological inquiry.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

As the study relies exclusively on publicly available texts, no ethical risks related to human subjects are involved. However, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the interpretive nature of philosophical analysis and the restricted temporal scope of the data (2015–2020). These limitations are offset by the depth of conceptual engagement and the focused analytical framework adopted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative philosophical analysis of President A.S.'s speeches delivered between 2015 and 2020. The results are organized thematically rather than statistically, in line with the conceptual aims of social epistemology. The analysis reveals consistent patterns in how collective knowledge is constructed, attributed, and authorized within presidential discourse. These patterns are summarized in tables and a conceptual figure for clarity.

Dominant Forms of Collective Knowledge

The analysis identified three dominant forms of collective knowledge recurrent across the speech corpus: experiential knowledge, historical knowledge, and institutional or expert-based knowledge. These forms differ in their epistemic sources and philosophical implications.

Table 1 Forms of Collective Knowledge in President A.S.'s Speeches (2015–2020)

Type of Collective Knowledge	Description	Typical Linguistic Markers	Philosophical Significance
Experiential Collective Knowledge	Knowledge derived from shared social experience	"we have seen," "we have learned," "we experienced"	Emphasizes communal learning and shared agency
Historical Collective Knowledge	Knowledge grounded in national memory and past events	"our history teaches us," "we remember," "as a nation we know"	Constructs continuity and collective identity
Institutional / Expert Knowledge	Knowledge attributed to experts, institutions, or state bodies	"science tells us," "our experts agree," "official data shows"	Establishes epistemic authority and legitimacy

Table 1 shows that collective knowledge in the speeches is not treated as a single epistemic category. Instead, it is constructed through multiple sources, each carrying different normative weight. Experiential knowledge emphasizes unity, historical knowledge reinforces identity, and institutional knowledge legitimizes policy decisions.

Collective Epistemic Subjects

A central finding concerns how knowledge is attributed to collective epistemic subjects rather than individuals. The speeches repeatedly construct the nation as a knowing agent.

Table 2. Collective Epistemic Subjects and Their Roles

Collective Subject	Epistemic Role	Example Function in Discourse
"We" (Citizens + Leader)	Shared knower	Creates solidarity and mutual responsibility
"The Nation"	Historical knower	Frames knowledge as timeless and stable
"Experts / Institutions"	Authoritative knower	Justifies decisions as rational and objective

Table 2 illustrates that collective knowledge is distributed across different social actors. While citizens are positioned as co-knowers, experts and institutions are presented as epistemically superior, reinforcing hierarchical structures of knowledge authority.

Epistemic Functions of Collective Knowledge

Beyond its descriptive role, collective knowledge performs clear philosophical and political functions in the speeches.

Table 3. Epistemic Functions of Collective Knowledge

Function	Description	Philosophical Implication
Legitimation	Justifies political decisions	Converts belief into obligation
Unification	Minimizes disagreement	Suppresses epistemic plurality
Moral Orientation	Guides collective action	Frames knowledge as normative

Collective knowledge is not presented neutrally. It is used to legitimize authority, reduce epistemic dissent, and frame political choices as morally necessary rather than contestable.

Temporal Distribution of Knowledge Appeals (2015–2020)

The frequency and type of collective knowledge appeals vary across the studied period. Although the study is qualitative, a conceptual frequency mapping reveals notable shifts.

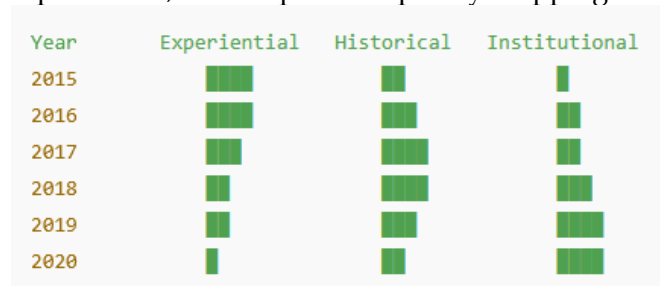


Figure 1. Conceptual Distribution of Collective Knowledge Appeals (2015–2020)

Figure 1 shows a gradual shift from experiential and historical collective knowledge toward institutional and expert-based knowledge, particularly in later years. Philosophically, this suggests an increasing reliance on epistemic authority and expert testimony, reducing the role of shared experience as a primary knowledge source.

Epistemic Inclusion and Exclusion

A significant result concerns the implicit boundaries of collective knowledge. While the speeches frequently invoke “we,” they rarely acknowledge internal disagreement. Alternative perspectives are largely absent, and collective knowledge is presented as unified and uncontested. This finding supports critiques in social epistemology that collective knowledge claims can obscure epistemic diversity. By presenting certain beliefs as universally shared, the discourse marginalizes dissenting or minority viewpoints, raising concerns about epistemic justice and democratic deliberation.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the central claim of social epistemology that knowledge in political contexts is not merely an individual cognitive achievement but a socially constructed and normatively loaded phenomenon. The analysis of President A.S.’s speeches (2015–2020) demonstrates that collective knowledge is systematically invoked as a shared epistemic resource through which political authority is justified and communal identity is reinforced. This supports the view that political discourse functions as an epistemic practice that shapes not only belief but also the conditions under which beliefs are accepted as legitimate.

One of the most significant results concerns the plurality of collective knowledge forms identified in the speeches—experiential, historical, and institutional. Philosophically, this plurality challenges reductive accounts of collective knowledge that treat it as a single epistemic category. Experiential and historical forms of collective knowledge align with communitarian views that emphasize shared practices and memory as sources of understanding. Institutional and expert-based knowledge, by contrast, reflects a more hierarchical epistemic structure in which authority is grounded in expertise rather than participation. The coexistence of these forms suggests that collective knowledge in political discourse is internally differentiated and strategically mobilized.

The increasing reliance on institutional and expert knowledge over time, particularly toward the end of the studied period, raises important epistemological concerns. While appeals to expert authority can enhance epistemic reliability, they may also weaken the participatory dimension of collective knowledge. From a social epistemological standpoint, this shift risks transforming collective knowledge from a shared epistemic achievement into a form of delegated belief, where citizens are positioned primarily as recipients rather than contributors to knowledge. This development reflects ongoing tensions between epistemic efficiency and democratic inclusion. The construction of the collective epistemic subject further illustrates the normative dimensions of knowledge attribution. By repeatedly invoking an inclusive “we,” the speeches present the nation as a unified knowing agent. However, this apparent inclusivity masks an asymmetrical distribution of epistemic authority. While citizens are symbolically included as co-knowers, genuine epistemic agency is largely reserved for institutions and experts. Philosophically, this raises questions about whether such collective knowledge claims meet the conditions for genuine group knowledge or merely simulate collective intentionality for rhetorical purposes.

The results also highlight the exclusionary potential of collective knowledge claims. The absence of acknowledged disagreement suggests that collective knowledge is presented as stable, uncontested, and universally shared. Social epistemology has long warned against such representations, as they risk producing epistemic injustice by marginalizing dissenting perspectives. When political leaders speak as if collective knowledge is already settled, they foreclose opportunities for critical reflection and democratic epistemic engagement.

Furthermore, the legitimating function of collective knowledge underscores its normative force. Knowledge claims in the speeches are not merely descriptive but prescriptive, guiding action and framing political decisions as rationally unavoidable. This supports the argument that political knowledge is inseparable from power and obligation. From a philosophical perspective, this raises ethical questions about the responsibility of political leaders when invoking collective knowledge, particularly in contexts marked by uncertainty or pluralism.

Taken together, these findings contribute to broader debates in social and political epistemology concerning epistemic authority, collective intentionality, and democratic legitimacy. The study demonstrates that presidential discourse is a crucial site for examining how collective knowledge is constructed and operationalized. It also suggests that philosophical analyses of collective knowledge must attend not only to abstract group epistemology but also to concrete discursive practices through which collective knowing is enacted.

In conclusion, the discussion reveals that collective knowledge in President A.S.'s speeches functions as both an epistemic and a political instrument. While it fosters unity and legitimizes governance, it also risks suppressing epistemic diversity and reinforcing hierarchical knowledge structures. These tensions highlight the need for a normative framework that balances epistemic authority with inclusivity, a task that remains central to contemporary social epistemology.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the concept of collective knowledge in President A.S.'s speeches from 2015 to 2020 through the lens of social epistemology. The analysis has shown that collective knowledge in presidential discourse is not a neutral reflection of shared understanding but a philosophically significant construction shaped by power, authority, and normative aims. By identifying multiple forms of collective knowledge—experiential, historical, and institutional—the study demonstrates that political leaders strategically mobilize different epistemic sources to legitimize decisions and shape collective identity. From a philosophical perspective, the findings highlight important tensions at the heart of collective knowledge. While appeals to shared knowing foster unity and coherence, they also risk obscuring disagreement and marginalizing alternative epistemic perspectives. The increasing reliance on institutional and expert-based knowledge further underscores the hierarchical nature of political epistemic authority, raising questions about epistemic inclusion, democratic participation, and the ethical responsibilities of those who claim to speak on behalf of a collective. Ultimately, this research contributes to social and political epistemology by showing how abstract theories of collective knowledge operate within concrete political discourse. It underscores the need for greater philosophical attention to the ways collective knowledge is constructed, authorized, and contested in public life. Future research may extend this analysis to comparative political contexts or explore how collective knowledge claims are challenged in counter-discourse, thereby deepening our understanding of the epistemic foundations of political authority.

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