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Performative Reasoning: The Strategic Use of Epistemic Authority in Parliamentary Debates

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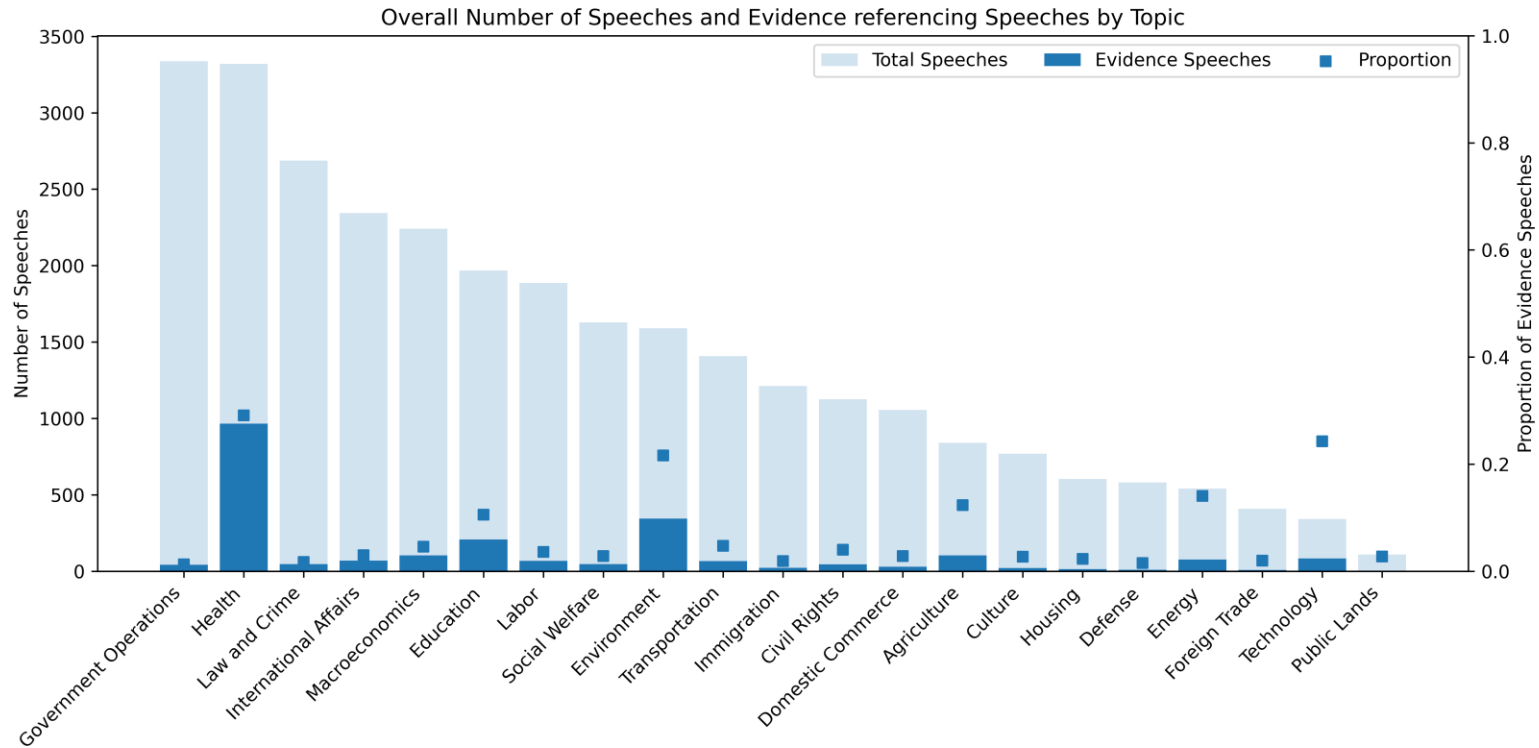
The Role of Epistemic Authority in Political Debate

- Persuasion as a core objective of political debate
- But persuasion might be difficult:
 - Arguments might be complex
 - Audience may lack time to process technical details
 - Communicator's credibility may be in doubt
- Speakers refer to external sources of epistemic authority to substantiate a claim
- *“Whenever a speaker grounds a claim not in their own reasoning or intuition, but in the epistemic authority of the scientific system or its output”*

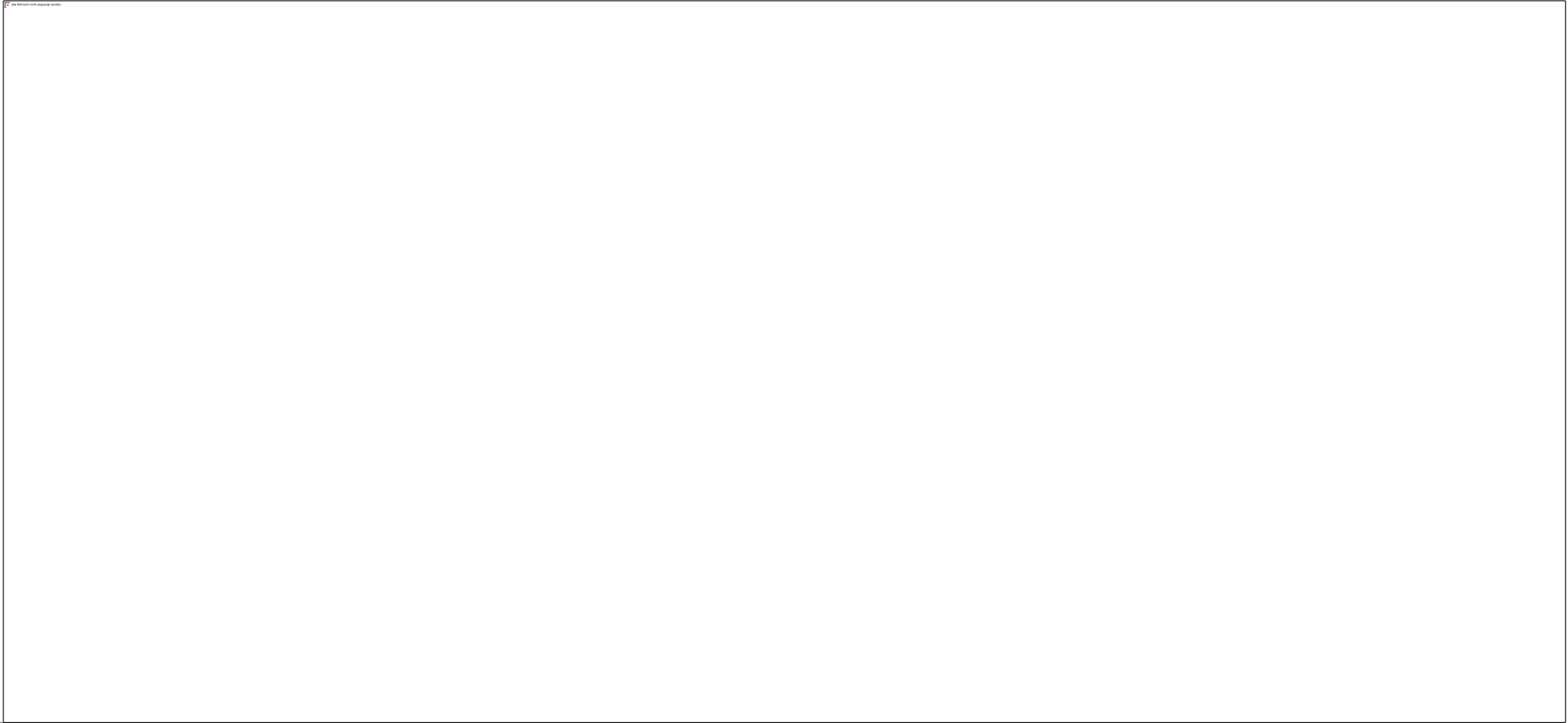
What We Know So Far

- Epistemic authority often invoked through science in an abstract sense (Qadir & Syväterä, 2021)
- Legitimacy of science as epistemic authority hardly ever contested (Qadir & Syväterä, 2021)
- Emotional appeals vs. evidence-based language (Aroyehun et al., 2025)
 - Shift to intuition over time
- Party differences for the type of sources used (Furnas et al., 2025)
- Preferences for evidence along ideological positions (Senninger & Hansen, 2025)
- Overall prevalence of references to science (Wiesner, 2026)

Where Is Epistemic Authority Used?



Who Refers to Epistemic Authority Where?



Methods

Speech parts with references to epistemic authority were manually coded

- 1) Type of epistemic authority referenced
 - 2) Argumentative style of reference
- Preliminary results (coded roughly 50% of cases so far)

What Epistemic Authority Is Used?

1. Artefactual (specific studies, reports)
 - “A new study shows ...”
2. Individual (scientists)
 - “Prof. Maier stated that ...”
3. Institutional (universities, research institutes)
 - “The University of Oxford stated ...”
4. Diffuse (abstract references)
 - “The science is very clear about this ...”

How Is Epistemic Authority Used?

1. Trust Cue

- “Studies clearly show”

2. Legitimising

- “Studies show that our decision was right”, “Given this evidence, the government must ...”

3. Conditional

- “We must see this evidence in light of the economy”

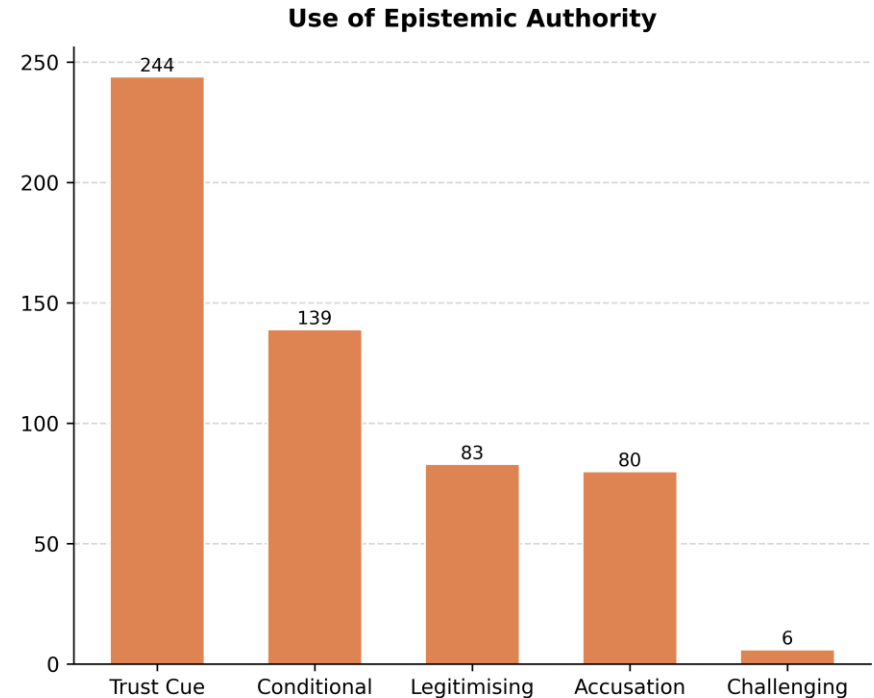
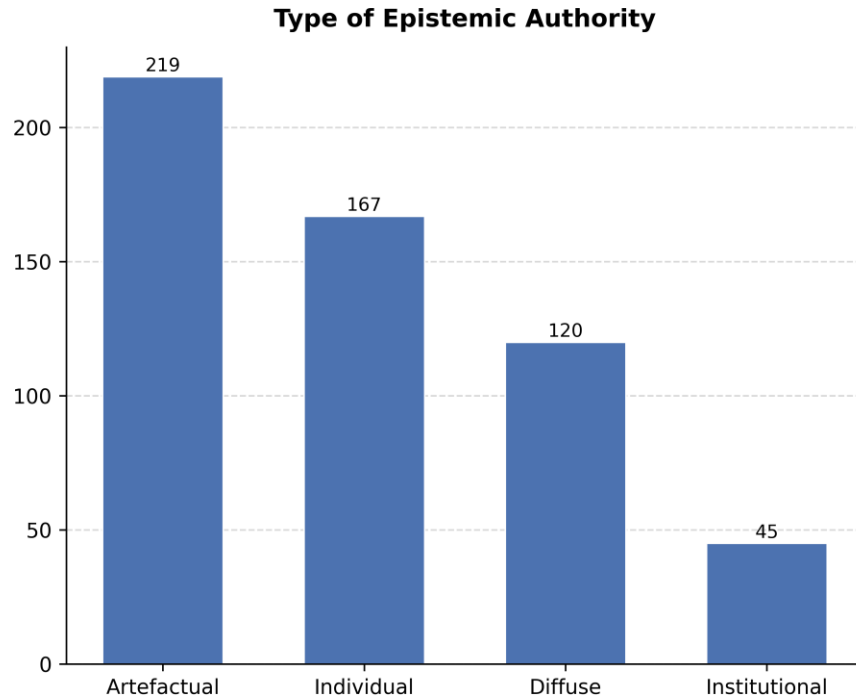
4. Accusatory

- “You refuse to listen to the science”

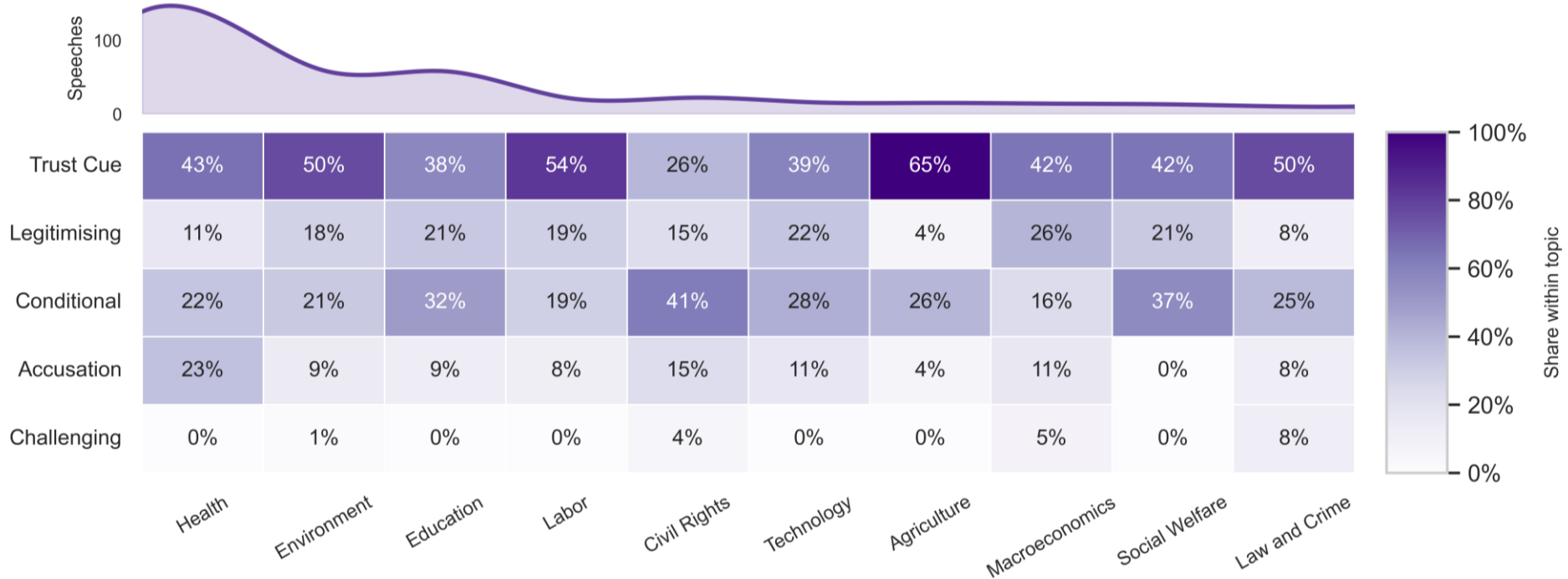
5. Challenging

- “This study is poorly conducted”

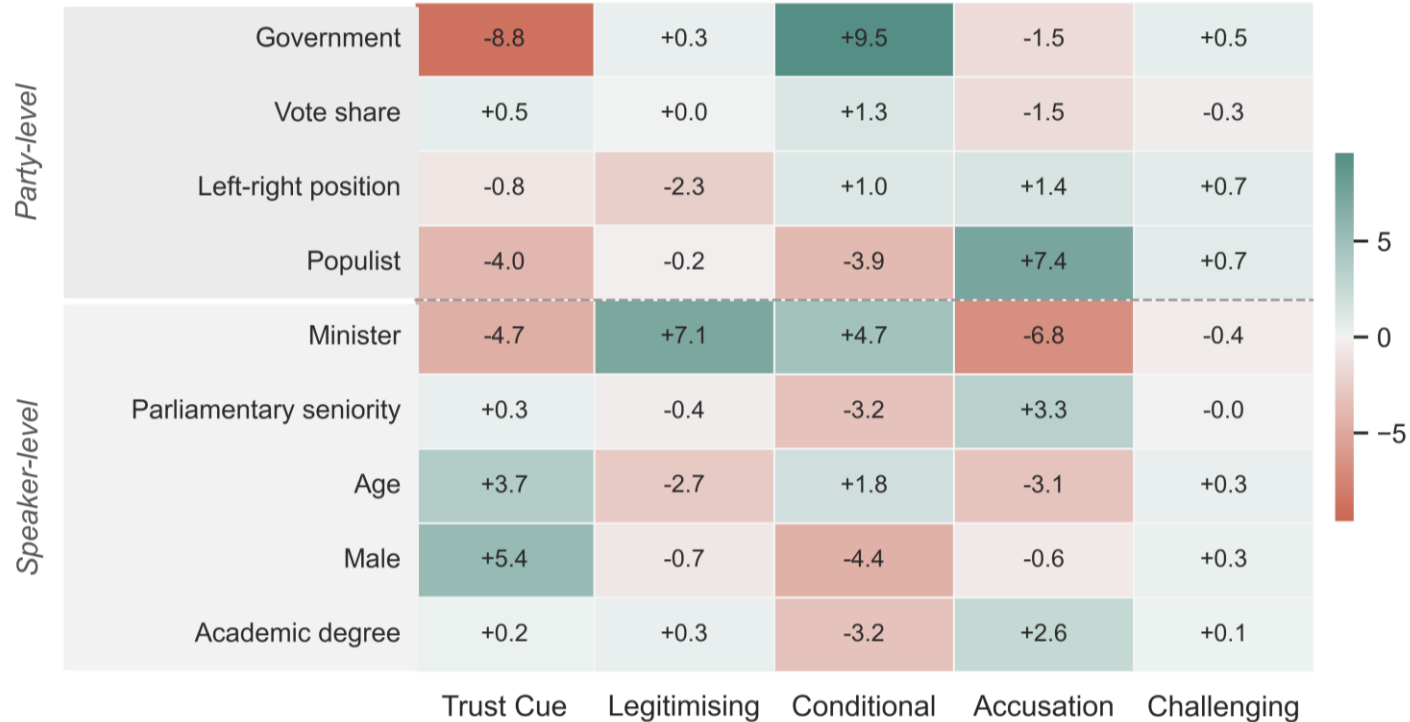
What Epistemic Authority Is Used and How?



How Is Epistemic Authority Used Across Different Topics?



How Do Speakers Use Epistemic Authority?



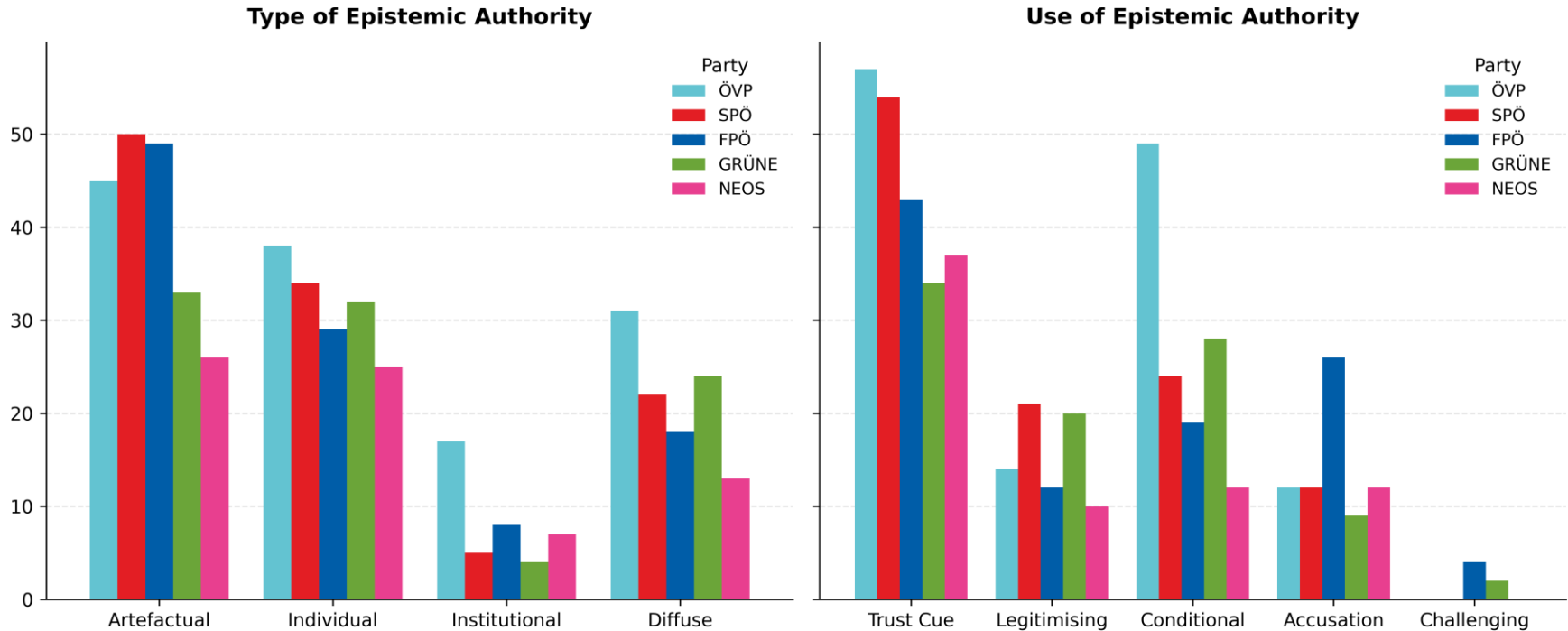
Thank You!

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What Types of Epistemic Authority Are Used and How?



References

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