

# **Questioning Prime Ministers: Procedures, Practices and Functions in Parliamentary Democracies**

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I, Ruxandra Serban, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates parliamentary oral questioning mechanisms that involve prime ministers in parliamentary democracies. Considering the fact that prime ministers are powerful and visible actors in parliamentary democracies, and that accountability is a key component of democratic politics, it maps the mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question prime ministers in different countries, and explores the extent to which these mechanisms contribute to accountability, and the extent to which they perform other functions.

The first research component is a survey of procedural rules regarding mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question prime ministers in 31 parliamentary democracies. It draws on an in-depth examination of parliamentary rules of procedure, followed by a consultation with practitioners and officials in each country to uncover aspects of convention and practice. Subsequently, questioning mechanisms are classified based on dimensions such as their collective or individualised nature, the extent to which procedures allow more open or closed participation, as well as the degree of questioning exposure to which prime ministers are subjected. It then discusses how these dimensions might affect the practice of questioning.

Drawing on these classifications, the second research component investigates the practice of questioning prime ministers in four countries: two using collective questioning mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned together with ministers (Question Period in Canada, Question Time in Australia); and two using individualised mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned alone (Prime Minister's Questions in the UK, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland). This second component relies on quantitative and qualitative content analysis of transcripts of parliamentary debates for each case study country. Departing from the assumption that parliamentary questioning mechanisms are designed to facilitate accountability, it investigates the degree to which they do so, and the degree to which they perform other functions, such as facilitating the expression of conflict, support, or territorial representation.

## **Impact statement**

This thesis offers the first comprehensive mapping of the mechanisms through which parliamentary actors may question prime ministers across 31 parliamentary democracies, as well as a detailed, in-depth documentation of the functioning of such mechanisms in Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the UK. Considering the importance of the relationship between the head of government and the legislature in parliamentary democracies, this fills a crucial gap in our understanding of executive-legislative relations, with relevance for academic literature as well as for practitioners and proponents of parliamentary reform.

With respect to academic impact, this thesis brings an important contribution to comparative legislative studies, and also to the literature concerning executive-legislative relations. The first contribution refers to a novel dataset and classification of questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers in 31 parliamentary democracies, primarily covered in Chapter 4. The second contribution to legislative studies concerns the functions of questioning mechanisms, covered in Chapters 6-9. This thesis brings evidence of how questioning mechanisms in four countries contribute to varying degrees to key functions of legislatures: accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation. By providing a first descriptive mapping of previously under-researched terrain, it lays the ground for future studies to explore causal questions in connection to the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments.

In terms of policy impact, the findings in this thesis provide evidence that may be of interest to practitioners and proponents of parliamentary reform, who have long been preoccupied with designing effective parliamentary procedures. This thesis provides comparative evidence of what types of parliamentary questioning mechanisms exist in different countries, how they operate, and what outcomes they produce in terms of how prime ministers are questioned and held to account, and also identifies key procedural features that affect the process of questioning. In doing this, it provides a starting point for thinking about how to design effective parliamentary mechanisms for holding heads of government to account.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the mechanisms through which prime ministers are questioned in parliaments in parliamentary democracies. Considering its centrality to democratic politics in parliamentary systems, this key component of the relationship between heads of government and legislatures has so far been surprisingly under-researched. In this chapter I begin to explore this issue by contextualising my overarching question: How do parliaments question prime ministers in parliamentary democracies? I discuss the puzzles of the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments and articulate the specific research questions that will guide the analysis in this thesis. Finally, I present an overview of the thesis and summarise the strategies used for addressing each of the research questions.

### 1.1. Context and motivation

Parliaments are institutions at the heart of democratic politics. They perform key functions such as creating a link between citizens and governments, providing a forum for collective decision making, and also providing mechanisms through which governments can be held to account (Kreppel 2010; Loewenberg 2015; Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Packerham 1970). The ways in which parliaments perform their functions and the quality of their activity are crucial for the health of the political system, which is particularly important in light of contemporary discourses of democratic crisis. Considering growing concerns that democracy is facing various threats, it is important to better understand the functions of democratic institutions. From a different perspective, considering the advancements in more direct forms of democracy, it is worth investigating the mechanisms of representative democracy and the roles they play, particularly as some developments, for example calls for more frequent use of referendums, have called into question the appropriateness and relevance of representative institutions. Together with the fact that parliaments are contested institutions, subject to decline in public trust in many established democracies (Loewenberg 2015; Judge and Leston-Bandeira 2018; Leston-Bandeira 2012), these issues point to pressing questions of whether existing democratic institutions and mechanisms are fit for purpose and can meet the needs of contemporary politics, and whether they can be improved.

The relationship between heads of government and parliaments is central to all these issues, as it concerns the direct relationship between powerful political leaders and the institution to which they are accountable. In parliamentary systems the relationship between heads of government and legislatures is founded upon a confidence agreement, whereby the executive derives its authority from, and is accountable to, the legislature (Lijphart 1999; Müller et al. 2003). Accountability is usually seen through its two defining moments: the investiture and the withdrawal of confidence. The most central aspect of the interaction between prime ministers and parliaments is hence whether they successfully manage to form a cabinet and command the confidence of parliament. Events such as difficulties in the process of forming a government in Belgium (2010-11) and in Spain and Ireland (2016), or the voting out of prime ministers in Germany (2005), Canada (2011), Spain (2018) or Austria (2019) receive attention, but it remains unclear how prime ministers interact with parliaments outside these outstanding occasions.

Prime ministers wield considerable authority and visibility in parliamentary democracies, especially in the light of the personalisation or 'presidentialisation' of politics (Poguntke and Webb 2005). Yet their powers and responsibilities are scarcely defined in written constitutions, or even, as in Australia, not mentioned at all. The premiership as an institution has often developed as a result of conventions and practice, and this applies to systems as varied as the UK (Blick and Jones 2010), Canada (Brodie 2018), Belgium, or the Netherlands (Andeweg 1988; Fiers and Krouel 2005). Prime ministers have multiple roles: they chair cabinets and 'speak for' the government, but they do not just lead as first among equals

and share responsibility with ministers for government decisions; they also have powers that they exercise in a personal capacity. The prime minister has a key steering role, but individual ministers are also responsible for specific policy portfolios. This tension between the collective authority of the government, the individual authority of ministers and prime ministerial authority as leader of the government is central to parliamentary democracies. Yet there is little academic and practical understanding of how prime ministers are questioned and held accountable by parliaments. Do all parliaments provide mechanisms to allow parliamentarians to question prime ministers? When prime ministers are questioned, are they held to account on all aspects of their roles? Considering their role as leaders of the government, to what degree are they asked to answer for the government? And to what degree are they questioned on matters for which they are personally responsible?

These queries indicate the need for research into the mechanisms through which parliaments may question and hold heads of government to account. As a prominent example, Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQs) in the UK is arguably the most famous parliamentary questioning mechanism. Notoriously dismissed as theatrical and excessively adversarial, PMQs frequently elicits calls for reform (Bercow 2010; Hansard Society 2014; 2015). But what are the functions of this procedure, and how does it compare with questioning mechanisms in other parliaments? Before beginning to think about reform, a systematic empirical examination of existing alternatives is required. What type of questioning mechanism is PMQs? What are the features that define it? What other types and models exist, and how do they fulfill their roles?

Given the widespread acknowledgement in the literature that, aside from accountability, questioning performs various other functions, in this thesis I opt for the term 'questioning mechanism' to describe parliamentary mechanisms that allow parliamentary actors to interact with and address questions to members of the executive. 'Questioning' thus refers to the interaction allowed by these mechanisms. The degree to which they facilitate an exchange of information and contribute to accountability, or facilitate other functions, cannot be established without examining the content of interactions.

Evidence about public attitudes towards such mechanisms is puzzling. On the one hand, in the UK, surveys and focus groups conducted by the Hansard Society (2014; 2015) reported that the aggressive nature of PMQs puts members of the public off politics. On the other hand, in a cross-national study of parliamentary oral questions in 22 countries, Salmond (2014) found that parliamentary questioning mechanisms that allow open, spontaneous and adversarial exchanges increase engagement with and attention to politics. In Germany, the weekly Question Time was regarded as 'boring' (The Economist 2014), with a more animated PMQs-style mechanism considered desirable. Similarly, other countries such as Japan and Norway have introduced procedures that provide for the prime minister to be questioned individually and openly, explicitly modeled after the UK PMQs. In the UK itself, the initially collective Question Time in the Scottish Parliament that brought together all ministers and the First Minister to be questioned by parliamentarians, explicitly designed to be different from Westminster's PMQs and to bring about a 'new politics', also reverted to an individualised First Minister's Questions procedure at the explicit request of members in 2001 (Bradbury and Mitchell 2001). There is obviously a 'learning' effect across countries, and an interest to design better mechanisms. But is PMQs really the best model? How is the process of questioning prime ministers designed in other countries? What roles does it play? Whilst PMQs has received some academic attention, and mechanisms in other countries have also sparked discussion with respect to their roles and functions, there is a conspicuous absence of a comparative study of such questioning mechanisms.



Parliamentary questioning mechanisms are a type of non-legislative activity present in most parliaments. The literature indicates that they are primarily designed to facilitate accountability, and to allow parliamentary actors to seek information and request explanations from the government, but that they may also perform other functions, such as facilitating the expression of conflict, or territorial representation (Wiberg 1995; Wiberg and Koura 1994; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Rozenberg 2011). Do questioning mechanisms that include prime ministers confirm this proposition and facilitate multiple functions, aside from accountability? The performance of such functions is a result of the behaviour of parliamentary actors, and questioning the head of government is, arguably, a high-profile, high-stakes opportunity for parliamentarians. But how do they use this questioning opportunity? Do they just seek information from the prime minister? Do they also express criticism or support? This tension between performing accountability and performing other functions raises questions about the adequacy of such mechanisms for parliaments, and for the political system more broadly. For example, commenting on the role of Question Time in the Australian parliament, observers have noted that '[i]t is not well designed to perform as an accountability forum and it was never really intended to perform that role' (Uhr 1998, p.199). In connection to the questions about democratic politics set out above, this raises broader normative conundrums about the degree to which mechanisms designed to facilitate accountability ought only to perform this function, and the degree to which the performance of other functions hinders their usefulness. Before such puzzles can be addressed, and before we can begin to think about the effectiveness of questioning mechanisms, the first step is to investigate their existing functions. To what degree do they perform accountability? To what degree do they perform other functions?

Parliamentary questioning mechanisms contribute to the multiple functions that parliaments perform in political systems, and may support several of these functions. Providing a forum in which heads of government interact with parliamentary actors is central among them. Parliaments perform a 'linkage' function: legislators make public demands heard by the government and communicate government actions to citizens (Lowenberg and Patterson 1979; Kreppel 2010). Legislatures contribute to the continuity, stability, and legitimacy of the political system. They provide means for recruiting and socialising political leaders (Mezey 1979; Pakenham 1970; Lowenberg and Patterson 1979), but also a testing ground for existing leaders (Norton 1990). Parliamentary mechanisms that provide a forum for the expression of conflict also perform a vital 'safety-valve' or 'tension-release' function (Pakenham 1970). As part of their legitimisation function, parliaments also provide a space for support to be expressed for the government and for policy. Parliaments also perform an accountability function, providing mechanisms that allow parliamentary actors to scrutinise the government (Olson 1994; Bergman et. al 2003; Laver and Shepsle 1999). The degree to which questioning mechanisms contribute to the functions of parliaments forms a key object of investigation in this thesis.

This study addresses an important gap in the literature. Despite numerous studies examining executive-legislative relations, the specific relationship between heads of government and legislatures has been largely overlooked. Accountability is a key component of democratic politics, yet there is little understanding of the rules and practices of holding heads of government to account. In response, this study investigates the mechanisms through which prime ministers are questioned in parliaments in parliamentary democracies. Taking as its starting point the renown of the UK PMQs, it sets out to describe and classify the variability of questioning mechanisms across systems, and subsequently to explore their functioning in a set of four cases: the ways in which different types of mechanisms are used for holding prime ministers accountable, and the extent to which these mechanisms fulfil other functions. It presents a comprehensive map of the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments in different systems, consequently attempting to fill a gap in understanding this aspect of executive-legislative relations.

## 1.2. Research strategy and thesis summary

To address the issues outlined above, this study draws on several strands of literature, presented in **Chapter 2**. Firstly, it looks at the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments, and how that has been addressed in existing literature. It builds on the debate concerning the power of prime ministers and their ambiguous position in parliamentary democracies, including their multiple roles as heads of government and party leaders. Next, I turn to the functions that parliaments perform in political systems, and discuss how the relationship between heads of government and parliaments touches on several of these functions. I look at the roles of different parliamentary actors and how investigating the interaction between prime ministers and parliaments necessarily involves disaggregating parliaments into the various groups of actors they comprise. Finally, I turn to the literature on parliamentary questioning mechanisms. Building on the assumption that, by design, these mechanisms are meant to facilitate accountability, I firstly seek to conceptualise accountability and accountability processes. I review the lists of functions of parliamentary questions proposed by different authors and question the degree to which they perform such functions. Finally, I review the literature concerning questioning mechanisms that involve prime ministers, which is dominated primarily by literature investigating Prime Minister's Questions in the UK.

The review of the literature leads to the central research question:

### **How do parliaments question prime ministers in parliamentary democracies?**

To explore this overarching topic, the thesis will investigate the following questions:

1. What are the mechanisms through which parliaments may subject prime ministers to questioning?
  - How do such mechanisms vary procedurally between parliaments? How can they be classified into types?
  - How do they structure the interactions between prime ministers and other parliamentary actors?
2. To what extent do different types of questioning mechanisms fulfil an accountability function, and to what extent do they fulfil other functions?
  - What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to the function of holding to account in different types of mechanisms? How are prime ministers held accountable?
  - What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to other functions?

To address these questions, I build an empirical strategy, presented in **Chapter 3**, which relies on a two-stage approach. The first stage seeks to answer question 1, and involves a cross-national institutional survey of the questioning mechanisms available in 31 parliamentary democracies. The second stage continues the exploration of question 1 in more depth, and seeks to answer question 2. It involves a comparative case study design featuring in-depth analysis of the questioning mechanisms in four case study countries: Canada, Australia, Ireland, and in the UK.

**Chapter 4** presents a cross-national survey of rules, conventions and practices of questioning mechanisms in 31 parliamentary democracies. It builds on two stages: an in-depth examination of rules of procedure, and a consultation with parliamentary officials in each country. I identify dimensions that produce effects on how prime ministers are questioned by surveying the literature and by identifying additional dimensions through analysis of the data.

I investigate whether prime ministers are questioned alone, or together with other ministers, and whether mechanisms are set in the plenary or in committee. I investigate the regularity of questioning and classify mechanisms depending on whether they allow routine or exceptional questioning. I also investigate and classify question allocation methods and criteria, seeking to observe how different mechanisms organise

the access of parliamentarians to questioning. Next, I look at how different mechanisms configure the dialogue between parliamentarians and prime ministers: whether they require notice for questioning or not, and the degree to which they allow supplementary questions. Bringing together the regularity of questioning, the degree to which questioning is spontaneous, and the degree to which it allows more or less probing, I classify mechanisms depending on whether they facilitate more or less exposure to questioning. I posit that exposure is higher in mechanisms that allow more frequent questioning with more spontaneous questions and a higher degree of probing, and lower in mechanisms with less frequent questioning, more scripted questions and a lower degree of probing.

Drawing on the typologies developed in Chapter 4, **Chapters 5-9** investigate the practice of questioning prime ministers in four countries: two using collective questioning mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned together with ministers (Question Period in Canada, Question Time in Australia); and two using individualised mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned alone (Prime Minister’s Questions in the UK, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland). The aim of Chapters 5-9 is to explore the functions of questioning mechanisms, building on their contribution to different functions of parliaments. I focus on four key functions of parliaments: accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation.

These chapters draw primarily on data collected through quantitative and qualitative content analysis of questioning sessions during one premiership in each case, as summarised in Table 1.1. I coded 30 sessions sampled for each case study, selected randomly and stratified by year. The total number of sessions coded was 120.

**Table 1.1. Case studies**

	<b>Questioning mechanism</b>	<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Time in office</b>
<b>Australia</b>	Question Time	Julia Gillard	Labor	2010-2013
<b>Canada</b>	Question Period	Stephen Harper	Conservative	2006-2008
<b>UK</b>	Prime Minister’s Questions	David Cameron	Conservative	2010-2015
<b>Ireland</b>	Oral Questions to the Taoiseach	Enda Kenny	Fine Gael	2011-2016

The case studies are exploratory and illustrative of how questioning mechanisms operate in the four countries. **Chapter 5** introduces the four case studies and describes the patterns of participation of different parliamentary actors. It presents the degree to which parliamentarians in leadership roles – such as Leaders of the Official Opposition, leaders of other opposition parties or those in shadow frontbench roles – or in backbench roles (from either the government or the opposition side) question the prime minister in each of the four countries.

**Chapters 6 and 7** investigate the practice of **accountability** in questioning prime ministers:

1. How are prime ministers held to account in different countries? What topics are they questioned on? To what degree are they questioned about their responsibilities?
2. Who are prime ministers asked to give account for? To what extent are they asked to speak about their own actions and decisions, and to what extent are they asked to speak for the government?
3. How do different actors hold prime ministers to account? What types of questions do they ask?

To answer questions 1 and 2, the analyses in **Chapter 6** draw on content analysis regarding the topics on which prime ministers were asked questions and the form of address used in questioning prime ministers: whether they were asked to account for their own actions as heads of government and matters were attributed to them (individualised accountability), or whether they were asked to account for the actions of ministers or of the government as a whole (collective accountability). This is complemented by extensive research on prime ministerial responsibilities in each case study country. To answer question 3, the analysis in **Chapter 7** draws on the coding of types of actors who asked questions and the types of accountability displayed in their questions: the degree to which they used questions to request information, to ask for explanations, to demand action or to ask for responses to accusations. It also draws on the systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

**Chapter 8** investigates the practice of **conflict** and **support**. This chapter addresses the key issue regarding the adversarial nature of questioning in different countries, and also seeks to observe whether parliamentarians use questions as a means to express support. It draws on the coding of behaviour connected to conflict and support in questions and answers to investigate:

1. The degree to which there is evidence of conflict in different countries.
  - What do rules of procedure specify in terms of the content of questions and answers? To what degree are they enforced?
  - How much evidence is there of conflictual behaviour in questions? How do different actors perform conflict through questions?
  - How much evidence is there of conflictual behaviour in prime ministerial answers? How do prime ministers perform conflict?
2. The degree to which there is evidence of support in different countries.
  - How much evidence is there of supportive behaviour in questions? How do different actors perform support through questions?
  - How much evidence is there of supportive behaviour in prime ministerial answers? How do prime ministers perform support?

In addition to content analysis, to answer question 1, **Chapter 8** also draws on research on the rules regarding language and topics of questions and answers of each case study country, using parliamentary rules of procedure. It also draws on an analysis of the frequency of interventions by the Speaker to police conflict during questioning sessions in the time period analysed in each country. Finally, it draws on the systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

**Chapter 9** investigates the practice of **territorial representation** in questioning prime ministers as a form of performing linkage and representation. It builds on the coding of behaviour in connection to territorial representation: explicit mentions of territorial references, and how these references are used. It also draws on systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

- How much evidence is there of explicit territorial references in oral questions in the countries investigated?

- What do MPs seek to do when they make explicit territorial references in an oral question? Do they discuss issues of local relevance? Do they use a local issue as a starting point for inquiring about an issue with broader national relevance?

**Chapter 10** brings together the empirical conclusions of all chapters, and discusses findings and contributions to existing academic literature. It suggests that some of these findings may be of interest to practitioners and proponents of parliamentary reform. Finally, I review the limitations of the research design and suggest directions for future study.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This thesis aims to investigate how prime ministers are questioned in parliaments in parliamentary democracies. To begin to explore this question, we firstly need to understand how the academic literature has discussed the actors involved, as well as the relationships between them and the mechanisms that facilitate their interaction. In order to establish what prime ministers are answerable for when they face questioning in parliament, we need to understand the nature of the premiership as an institution, as well as their roles in different systems. Hence, the starting point of this literature review concerns the different roles and responsibilities of prime ministers. The next step is to explore how their relationship with parliament is configured, which firstly concerns the place of this relationship among the functions of legislatures, and hence its importance and relevance for the political system. Legislatures perform various functions in political systems, and questioning prime ministers may contribute to several of them: holding the executive accountable, but also leadership recruitment and testing, providing an arena for conflict and support to be expressed, or territorial representation. Secondly, the relationship between prime ministers and legislatures concerns the different parliamentary actors involved in questioning, and how their institutional roles may have an impact on how they interact with the prime minister. Next, I discuss the parliamentary mechanisms that facilitate these interactions. I review the literature on parliamentary questioning mechanisms, noting the scarcity of studies concerning prime ministers, and building on the debate regarding the functions of such mechanisms.

### **2.1. Prime Ministers: Power, roles and responsibilities**

#### **2.1.1. Prime ministerial power**

Political science research on prime ministers involves a long-standing preoccupation with the ‘power’ that heads of government hold, either across countries (Rose 1991; Jones 1991; Sartori 1997; King 1994; O’Malley 2007), or relative to other institutional actors within particular countries (for example Blondel 1998; Andeweg 1988, 1991; Arter 2004; Dowding 2013b; Hine and Finocchi 1991). The literature charts the variables that determine prime ministerial power: institutional (Jones 1991; Rose 1991), personal (Jones 1991; Strangio et al. 2013; Helms 2005), cultural or historical factors (King 1994), and interactions among these variables (Hennessy 2001; Bennister 2008; Weller 2014; Dowding 2013a; Blick and Jones 2010; O’Malley 2007). This in turn poses three distinct problems: delineating the prime minister as a singular actor and determining the precise powers or responsibilities that he or she holds in a given system, conceptualising ‘power’ in order to assess which variables might influence the prime minister’s status, and discerning the interactions between these variables.

A key issue in this debate concerns the degree to which prime ministers can be delineated as individual actors. This difficulty arises firstly because of the collective nature of government in parliamentary systems. Cabinets consist of a team of ministers, and prime ministers are part of the team; they are not ‘individuals at the top of the pile’; they are ‘leaders of teams’ (Weller 1985, p.1). Secondly, the legal responsibility for policy domains tends to lie with departmental ministers (Weller 2014; Mayntz 1982), which makes it difficult to evaluate the areas for which prime ministers are directly responsible. Whilst the elevated status of prime ministers within the cabinet is recognised in most systems (King 1994, Poguntke and Webb 2005), they are still part of a collective entity, and this is expressed constitutionally through the notion of collective responsibility. The tension between prime ministerial authority, individual ministerial authority and collective authority sits at the heart of parliamentary systems, and is crucial for understanding prime ministerial responsibility, as well as for understanding the relationship between prime ministers and other institutions.

Sartori (1997) explains how the 'power sharing' dynamics of parliamentary systems, as opposed to the hierarchical structure of presidential systems, where the president is evidently 'primus solus', poses problems for describing the structure of the executive in such systems. Depending on how much control prime ministers have over ministerial appointments, on whether or not they can be unseated by a parliamentary vote, e.g. a constructive vote of no confidence, and on whether they are leaders of their party or not, Sartori (1997, p.102) classified them as 'first above unequals', 'first among unequals', and 'first among equals'. He described British prime ministers as 'first above unequals', as they have extensive scope for ministerial appointments, and German chancellors as 'first among unequals', considering the fact that they cannot be unseated by a parliamentary vote unless the Bundestag proposes an alternative (Sartori 1997). The 'first among equals' status is the weakest in this classification, as the prime minister has little control over appointing ministers and is expected to resign with his cabinet. Italy, The Netherlands, Finland, and Belgium are considered examples of systems where prime ministers have little control over appointments, and are no 'more than a primus inter pares' (Blondel 1988, p.9; Fiers and Krouel 2005). Jones (1991) distinguishes between 'chiefs' and 'chairmen', with the first corresponding to a top-down structure in which ministers 'serve under' the prime minister, and the second describing a collegial cabinet, in which ministers 'serve with' the prime minister.

The difficulty of delineating the prime minister as a singular actor is particularly salient for studies of executives, and translates into the dilemma of whether 'prime ministerial government' or 'cabinet government' best explains the functioning of the executive in a given parliamentary system. The core executive approach, which gained significant currency in studies of the executive in the UK, represented an attempt to conceptualise executive decision-making as an interplay between multiple 'centres of political authority which take policy decisions' (Rhodes and Dunleavy 1995, p.12), thus including other institutional actors such as ministers and civil servants alongside the prime minister and the cabinet. Blick and Jones (2010) refer to the 'British premiership' as an institution comprising 'a cluster of rights, functions and people centring in the individual who occupies the post of prime minister' (Blick and Jones 2010, p.147). The rights and functions associated with the premiership are subject to change over time, in what Blick and Jones (2010) refer to as 'administrative fusion and fission'. The institution of the premiership in parliamentary democracies is thus difficult to define and contain, which makes identifying the precise roles and responsibilities of prime ministers particularly problematic.

The direct relationship between prime ministers and parliaments occupies a narrow space in this debate. In parliamentary systems, the executive derives its authority from parliament and is in turn accountable to it. As leaders of governments, prime ministers are a key component of executive-legislative relations. From a constitutional perspective, prime ministers that cannot be easily unseated by a vote in parliament occupy a strong position (Bergman et al. 2003; Smith 1991; Heywood 1991; Sartori 1997). Dealing with parliament entails a partisan and legislative dimension, as prime ministers must manage the relationship with their party in order to ensure support for government legislation (Jones 1991; Weller 1985; Malloy 2004). Parliament can be a 'power resource' (Jones 1991; O'Leary 1991; Smith 1991; Helms 2005), and an opportunity for 'self-presentation', exercising leadership (Rose 1982; Helms 2005), and sustaining authority (Foley 1993), but ultimately remains a forum to which prime ministers are accountable (Weller 2014).

Perhaps the most important recent advancement of this debate is the 'presidentialisation' thesis (Poguntke and Webb 2005), which identified a cross-national trend of increasing leadership power resources for prime ministers, increased autonomy within the party and within the executive, and a more pronounced focus on leadership in parliamentary elections. In the UK, this led to a debate regarding whether a strong leader like Tony Blair could in fact change the premiership to accrue presidential powers (Foley 2000; 2004; Poguntke and Webb 2005), or whether the office in fact affords the incumbent

more power levers within the executive compared to those held by presidents in presidential systems (Dowding 2013a; Heffernan 2013). As prime ministers seek to appeal to citizens as 'public leaders', rather than in their traditional roles as heads of government and party leaders (Poguntke and Webb 2005), the impact of this trend on their relationship with legislatures is highly salient. Considering the increased personalisation of elections in parliamentary democracies, and the growing autonomy of prime ministers vis-à-vis their parties and relative to the executive, prime ministers might aim to construct a public image that separates them from traditional institutional structures, and appeal directly to citizens. Factors such as the growing role of prime ministers in international politics and the increasing electoral focus on leaders in parliamentary democracies (Poguntke and Webb 2005, Arter 2004) indicate that heads of government are now defined more precisely as individual actors, and raises the question of whether they might use parliament as a forum in which to define their public image.

### **2.1.2. Prime ministerial roles**

Prime ministers fulfil multiple roles in parliamentary systems: head of government (Weller 1985; King 1994; Farrell 1988); chair of the cabinet; party leader and manager (Campbell 1982; Farrell 1988). Prime ministerial roles are 'position roles' within the political system, which require the performance of specific duties and responsibilities (Andeweg 2014; Searing 1994; Strangio et al. 2013; Weller 1993).

As heads of government, prime ministers are expected to explain government decisions before parliament, the media, and the public (Alley 1992; Mulgan 1997; Savoie 1999). Prime ministers are also spokespersons for their countries on the international stage (Campbell 1982; Farrell 1988; Strangio et al. 2013), arbiters between regional governments in federal systems (Bakvis and Wolinetz 2005, Fiers and Krouwel 2005; Weller 1989), and chairs of coalitions (Andeweg 1991). A second dimension of the role of head of government entails the powers that prime ministers exercise in a personal capacity. For example, as the legal head of government, the UK Prime Minister exercises a wide range of 'prerogative powers', which include managing the relationship between the government and the monarch, and between the government and the opposition; appointing and dismissing ministers, appointing senior judges, awarding peerages and honours, and also foreign and defence functions (Hennessy 2000; Blick and Jones 2010; King and Allen 2010; Cabinet Office 2010). The extent to which prime ministers explain their decisions in parliament, and the extent to which parliamentary actors scrutinise the use of these powers, raises important questions regarding the functioning of democratic political institutions in the UK. Across systems, the office of Prime Minister involves exclusive responsibilities that only the office holder can exercise. To what degree are prime ministers questioned about these areas of exclusive responsibility?

Across all parliamentary systems, prime ministers chair cabinets, and in this capacity manage the operation of cabinet and coordinate government decision-making (Punnett 1977; Mulgan 1997; Mayntz 1982; Alley 1992; Weller 1985, 1989; Andeweg 1981). This steering role raises additional questions of responsibility and accountability: to what extent are prime ministers asked to give account for government decisions and for the decisions of ministers? The selective, indirect, and yet decisive character of prime ministerial involvement in policy-making (Rose 1982; Weller 1985; Mayntz 1982; Eriksen 1988) invites questions about how such interventions, arguably difficult to detect and quantify, are scrutinised in parliament: what are prime ministers questioned about? Which areas of policy are perceived as within their remit?

In most parliamentary systems, prime ministers are also party leaders, and this has important implications for their relationship with parliament. Depending on the way in which leadership selection is organised, the prime minister will have a stronger relationship either with the parliamentary party group or with the wider party membership, and intra-party organisation also determines the frequency with which prime ministers have to consult their parties regarding issues ranging from cabinet decisions



to appointments (Weller 1985, Strangio et al. 2013; Cross and Blais 2012). In some systems, for example Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries (Saalfeld 2000; Andeweg 2000; Arter 2004), the positions of party leader and leader of the parliamentary party are separate. By contrast, in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK party leaders are also the leaders of the parliamentary party, and are clearly identifiable as the main spokespersons for their parties (Cross and Blais 2012; Weller 1985; Bakvis 2001; Heffernan 2006; Johannson 2013; Heppell 2013; Brett 2013). Variation regarding the prime minister's role as party leader sparks questions about the impact of this role on their interactions with parliament: are prime ministers addressed as party leaders? Do they speak in partisan capacity?

The premiership is a complex institution in parliamentary democracies, involving multiple roles and responsibilities, and at the same time an elevated, powerful status. Understanding whether, and how such prominent political leaders are questioned for their decisions, and whether parliaments provide an adequate forum for this scrutiny, is therefore a crucial question for democratic politics.

## **2.2. Parliaments: Functions and actors**

### **2.2.1 Functions of parliaments**

Whether legislatures provide a forum and mechanisms for heads of government to interact with and be held to account by parliamentary actors is a key question for the functioning of parliamentary systems. It is therefore useful to inquire how this relationship with prime ministers is situated among the functions that parliaments perform, and how the mechanisms that allow parliamentarians to question executive leaders facilitate different functions.

Classifying the functions of parliaments in political systems has been an extensive preoccupation in legislative studies. Authors have proposed various lists of functions, but there is no universally agreed upon list, and functions also overlap in the day-to-day work of legislatures. An exhaustive list of the functions of legislatures would thus be difficult to compile, and functions may also vary between different political systems. Yet this literature provides crucial insights into the consequences of parliamentary activity for political systems.

Parliaments are public-facing institutions and comprise 'the sole authoritative process for rendering legitimate government and measures of public policy which are to be binding' (Norton 1990, p.11). They contribute to the continuity, stability, and legitimacy of the political system. Their functions include linking citizens and governments, providing an arena for debate, recruiting and socialising political elites (Mezey 1979; Pakenham 1970; Lowenberg and Patterson 1979; Loewenberg 2015); 'legitimation' (Pakenham 1970; Kreppel 2010), and conflict management (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Mezey 1979). Legislatures contribute to policy-making (Mezey 1979) to a very important extent through their role in the legislative process, and in scrutinising existing policy. In the context of public disaffection with democratic institutions and decline in trust, legislatures also have an important symbolic role in communicating the values of parliamentary democracy (Judge and Leston-Bandeira 2018; Leston-Bandeira 2012).

Crucially, parliaments perform a 'linkage' function: legislators serve as intermediaries between citizens and governments by making public demands heard by the executive, and also by making government actions accessible to citizens (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Kreppel 2010; Loewenberg 2015). A key component of linkage is the ability of parliamentarians to make the interests of citizens known to the government. This refers to the various types of demographic representation that MPs may perform – in connection to social class, profession, ethnicity or gender – but also to their connection with their electorates. In countries where the electoral system encourages a close link between MPs and their

constituencies (particularly in majoritarian systems with single-member districts), territorial representation forms an important part of the work of parliamentarians (Carey and Shugart 1995).

Describing the place of conflict in parliamentary proceedings is an example of where the literature assigns different meanings to the same function; but ultimately, the key insight is that legislatures provide mechanisms and forums for conflict and disagreement to be expressed. Conflict management is carried out through procedures that provide a forum for debate between the government and the opposition (Olson 1994). Whilst conflict management primarily refers to conflict over policy positions (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979), parliaments also allow other types of expression of conflict. Debates and parliamentary questions offer parliamentarians the opportunity to express disagreement and to criticise the government. These micro-level, intra-parliamentary forms of conflict manifested in various procedures contribute to what Packenham (1970) describes as the 'safety-valve' or 'tension-release' function. Legislatures also offer an arena for parliamentarians to express support for policy (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979), for the government, or for their own party (Mezey 1979), and the dynamics of support and conflict are inter-related, particularly in the process of negotiating legislation.

In addition, parliaments are a learning space and a training ground where political elites acquire skills, and also a testing environment that contributes to the selection of executive leaders (Norton 1990). In this sense, parliaments also provide politicians with a platform to promote themselves as capable leaders, and to signal their competence to the public.

Parliaments also perform an accountability function in relation to the executive. They provide parliamentarians with 'fire alarm', exceptional mechanisms for probing the actions of governments, such as interpellations and debates on motions of no confidence (Olson 1994; Bergman et. al 2003; Laver and Shepsle 1999); but also with more routine, 'police patrol' mechanisms such as questioning mechanisms, committee hearings and legislative scrutiny (Packenham 1970; Kreppel 2010). The processes and practices of parliamentary accountability, explored further in subsequent sections, are a crucial component of democratic politics in parliamentary systems.

### 2.2.2. Executive accountability

Holding executives accountable is one of the key functions of parliaments, and a core premise of democratic politics. Accountability is defined as a deliberative (Olsen 2013), multi-stage process (Mulgan 2003; Bovens 2007; Akirav 2011; Mansbridge 2014) that involves explanation to be given by the responsible actor to a forum, which can then scrutinise the information provided (Bovens 2007; 2010). The literature distinguishes between political accountability, which involves the accountability of ministers to parliament and to the public; legal accountability, involving the judiciary; and other forms of accountability such as audit or ombudsman processes (Mulgan 2003). The analysis in this thesis focuses on the mechanisms and practices of *political accountability*, particularly parliamentary accountability – the accountability of the head of government to parliament. Drawing on the definition proposed by Bovens (2007; 2010), the prime minister is the responsible actor, and parliament is the forum. All types of accountability processes involve extracting information, extracting explanations and justifications, and imposing remedies or sanctions (Mulgan 2003). This process also relates to different types of responsibility: ‘role accountability’, which is carried out by an individual on behalf of a collective body, and ‘personal accountability’, which refers to the responsibilities held by an individual (Mulgan 2003).

Considering the complex nature of institutional relationships in parliamentary systems, conceptualising prime ministerial accountability specifically poses some challenges. In the rational choice principal–agent model, parliamentary democracy is based on the premise that the executive derives its authority from the legislature and is in turn accountable to it. This relationship entails two defining moments: the delegation of power, which is expressed institutionally as a vote of investiture or an expression of confidence in the new government; and the annulment of this initial contract through a vote of no confidence in the government (Laver and Shepsle 1999; Strom 2003). The first of these moments sets the premises of the accountability relationship: the executive, as the ‘agent’, is accountable to the legislature, which acts as the ‘principal’, given that the latter has formally granted its confidence. The second moment constitutes the expression of accountability as the termination of the contract. However, votes of no confidence, as an ultimate manifestation of the accountability relationship, are only a solution of last resort, and are in fact rarely used. Accountability is carried out between these two defining moments, and is enacted through the various mechanisms and processes through which executives present and justify their actions to parliament. It is, consequently, better viewed as a continuous relationship. Furthermore, the principal–agent model (Bergman, Muller and Strom 2003, Laver and Shepsle 1999) describes the delegation–accountability relationship between parliaments and cabinets, and between cabinets and prime ministers, but remains silent about the direct relationship between prime ministers and parliaments. This is understandable considering the complex nature of accountability relationships in parliamentary systems: government accountability entails individual ministerial responsibility, which involves the responsibility of ministers for their departments, and collective responsibility, which involves the support provided by ministers to government decisions (Woodhouse 1994; Everett 2016; Mulgan 2003). But the precise accountability relationship between prime ministers and legislatures remains a notable gap.

Considering the fact that prime ministers have a range of powers for which they are personally responsible, but that they are additionally responsible for government decisions as heads of government, delineating their precise accountability relationship with the legislature remains problematic. Considering the complex nature of this process, understanding the mechanisms through which it is carried out is crucial for understanding executive–legislative relations.

### **2.2.3. Parliamentary actors**

The ways in which the various functions performed by parliaments are enacted are a result of the interactions between parliamentary actors within different mechanisms. In order to understand the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments, it is hence necessary to identify the actors with whom prime ministers may interact during questioning mechanisms, and to discuss the factors that might drive their behaviour.

#### **Meanings of government and opposition**

The government-opposition divide is likely to have a significant effect on the interaction between parliamentarians and prime ministers (Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2011). There is considerable variation in what “opposition” means in different political systems, as parliaments provide opposition parties with different opportunity structures (Helms 2008; Norton 2008; Kaiser 2008). Consequently, opposition actors in different systems are likely to adopt different strategies when interacting with prime ministers. In systems such as Belgium or the Netherlands where opposition parties are co-opted in the governing process (Andeweg et al. 2008), and where the government-opposition divide is less pronounced than in Westminster systems (Andeweg 2013; Dewan and Spirling 2011), opposition actors may be less confrontational. In Westminster systems the opposition must play the role of an alternative government, and is consequently likely to use parliamentary procedures to distance itself publicly from the government (Norton 2008; Dewan and Spirling 2011; Andeweg 2013). We would expect the opposition to be primarily confrontational in interactions with prime ministers, and very rarely to express support for the government or for policy. However, interactions with prime ministers may not be representative of how opposition actors behave across all parliamentary procedures, and of the motivations that they pursue. Uhr (2009) notes that in New Zealand Question Time remains a distinct occasion for manifesting opposition and conflict, with other more consensual practices associated with other procedures. Similarly, cross-party work in Select Committees in the UK House of Commons (Benton and Russell 2012; Russell et al. 2015) is different from the adversarial behaviour displayed at PMQs. Building on the previous discussion of the functions of parliaments, this suggests that providing a forum for conflict and disagreement to be expressed may be a distinct function of questioning mechanisms that involve prime ministers, resulting in notably adversarial parliamentary encounters in some systems.

Furthermore, the ‘opposition’ is not a unitary actor, and comprises both backbench and frontbench roles. The Leader of the Opposition is a prominent position in Westminster systems, where they are expected to be the ‘prime-minister-in-waiting’ (Andeweg 2013; Alderman 1992). European parliamentary democracies display a richer variety of opposition leadership roles (Uhr 2009), and consequently a wider range of possible patterns of interactions with prime ministers. Finally, the increased autonomy of leaders from their parties signalled by the ‘presidentialisation’ thesis (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Strangio et al. 2013) raises further questions about how MPs in leadership positions use their interactions with prime ministers. Particularly in Westminster systems, we may expect them to assume a prominent role in questioning, and to seek to lead the attack against the prime minister.

Correspondingly, being on the government side entails a variety of meanings. Whilst the distinction is relatively clear in the case of a single-party majority government, arrangements ranging from a coalition government to minority government with support from other parties in parliament will generate different patterns of interaction between MPs on the government side and the prime minister. Such parliamentarians are generally assumed to provide support for the government in parliament, as they share ideological goals with the prime minister and the government, and an interest for the party to fare well. Government backbenchers generally provide support for the government during their interactions with prime ministers in the UK (Bates et al. 2014; Chester and Bowring 1962; Borthwick 1993), Australia

(Weller 1985; McGowan 2008; Larkin 2012), and New Zealand (Palmer and Palmer 2007). But government backbenchers may also use parliamentary questions for other purposes, and their acquiescence should not always be taken for granted. Government backbenchers could potentially also use questions to attack the prime minister on sensitive policy issues if there are intra-party disagreements, or if the member is part of a coalition party that wishes to 'keep tabs' on the prime minister. Use of parliamentary questions as intra-coalition monitoring devices has been documented in the case of questions to ministers in the UK and in Germany (Martin and Whitaker 2019; Höhmann and Sieberer 2019).

The structuring effect of parliamentary procedure remains significant. Different mechanisms bring prime ministers together with different sets of actors: Question Time in Australia, Canada and New Zealand implies the presence of the government frontbench alongside the Prime Minister, to be questioned by MPs; the Liaison Committee in the UK, and Foreign Affairs committees in the Nordic countries facilitate interaction between prime ministers and senior backbenchers from all parties (Kelso et al. 2016; Arter 2004). In order to investigate how prime ministers are questioned in different mechanisms, it is essential to understand which actors may participate, and how parliamentary rules of procedure configure their participation.

### **Modes of interaction**

The institutional position of MPs along the government–opposition divide is likely to be significant for their interactions with prime ministers, but other patterns of interaction are also possible. King (1976), Andeweg and Nijzink (1995) and more recently Russell and Cowley (2018) have discussed executive–legislative relations as different modes of interaction between parliamentary actors. Andeweg and Nijzink (1995) reinterpreted King's (1976) typology into three categories: non-party, corresponding to an executive–legislative mode; inter-party, comprising an intra-coalition and an opposition mode, and compared to an arena; and cross-party, which corresponds to a 'market place' where different interests are traded. Actors interact as 'ministers and MPs' in the cross-party and non-party modes, as government and opposition members in the inter-party mode, and as party members in the intra-party mode (King 1976).

As types of environments, plenaries are described as more partisan than committees (Andeweg 2013), which are more likely to favour cross-party interactions (King 1976; Andeweg and Nijzink 1995; Andeweg 2013; Norton 2000). The notion of 'modes' is a useful conceptual tool for thinking about parliamentary interactions, and a starting point for considering how different parliamentary mechanisms could facilitate different types of behaviour. This question is especially relevant for mechanisms concerning prime ministers: How do these patterns play out during questioning? Under which conditions do we observe more adversarial, 'opposition mode' politics? How important is the 'intra-party' mode in questioning, with backbenchers providing support for the government and the prime minister, and the opposition frontbench and backbench making a united front against the prime minister?

The framework developed by King (1976) and Andeweg and Nijzink (1995) conceptualises relationships in parliament mainly as interactions between collective actors. This raises the question of where prominent individual actors, such as party leaders or prime ministers, would fit into this scheme. Investigating the ways in which prime ministers are questioned therefore requires investigating both collective-level behaviours displayed by government and opposition backbenchers during questioning, as well as the degree to which these groups act cohesively, but also individual-level behaviours displayed by parliamentarians in leadership roles.

## 2.3. Questioning mechanisms

### 2.3.1 Typologies and classifications

The mechanisms through which parliamentary actors may question prime ministers are a subset within the range of mechanisms that facilitate executive–legislative interaction. The literature has traditionally labelled such mechanisms as ‘oversight’ or ‘accountability’ mechanisms. In the rational-choice institutionalist tradition, Bergman et al. (2003, p.110) define accountability mechanisms as devices through which principals can either acquire information about the agent’s intentions and behaviour, or sanction or reward the agent. The analysis in this thesis takes a step back from defining all questioning mechanisms as ‘accountability mechanisms’, given the widespread acknowledgement in the literature that, aside from accountability, the activity of questioning performs various other functions. I therefore opt for ‘questioning mechanism’ as a term to define parliamentary mechanisms that allow parliamentary actors to interact with, and pose questions to, members of the executive. This creates scope for this thesis to investigate and map the variation of questioning mechanisms in the first instance without assuming which function they perform, and subsequently to explore the degree to which they perform accountability or other functions. To aid this mapping process, the literature provides some classifications of accountability mechanisms and of questioning mechanisms specifically; but there has been no equivalent effort to identify and classify the specific questioning mechanisms that include prime ministers.

Several studies have mapped the diversity of oversight mechanisms in different countries, e.g. oral and written parliamentary questions, committees of inquiry, committee hearings, interpellations (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2004, 2012; Yamamoto 2008). Focusing on the timing of scrutiny, Bergman et al. (2003), Pelizzo and Stapenhurst (2004; 2012) and Maffio (2002, cited in Russo and Wiberg 2011) classified oversight tools as ex-post and ex-ante, listing parliamentary questions as a form of ex-post oversight. Questioning mechanisms in particular have been studied extensively, both from a procedural and from a behavioural perspective.

#### ➤ **Open or closed mechanisms**

Several studies have classified questioning mechanisms based on procedural rules, and have tried to measure the extent to which procedures allow broader or more restricted participation from parliamentarians. In a study of 17 European parliaments, Russo and Wiberg (2011) proposed a typology of parliamentary questions based on four criteria: form of answer (written/oral); timing of question (advance notice/spontaneous); possibility for other members to join the debate; and whether or not motions can be voted on at the conclusion of procedures. They note that the most important dimension in classifying oral questions is the timing of the question, which determines the extent to which questions allow political debate between parliamentary actors. Salmond (2014) classified questioning mechanisms based on whether spontaneous questions are allowed (open procedures) or not (closed procedures). Looking at two procedures in the Norwegian Storting, Rasch (2011) differentiated between open and restricted access procedures, depending on how time and participation are regulated – essentially on the extent to which parties control how members ask questions. He posited that the submission of questions in procedures that are less time restricted is likely to be less controlled by parties, while procedures where time is limited are more likely to be controlled, as parties seek to manage who gets to ask questions during the available time.

An important contribution of these classifications is their focus on the effects of procedure on the behaviour of parliamentary actors: whether questions are submitted in advance, and whether spontaneous and follow-up questions are allowed are important dimensions for describing how procedures regulate behaviour (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1994; Wiberg 1995; Damgaard 1994;

Rasch 1994; Mattson 1994; McGowan 2008). The extent to which procedures allow more inclusive or restrictive participation is also essential for assessing questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers.

➤ **Plenary or committee mechanisms**

Some studies distinguish between plenary and committee mechanisms (Yamamoto 2008; Maffio 2002), but most classifications focus on plenary mechanisms such as oral questions (Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014). Committee questioning mechanisms remain virtually unexplored (with the exception of Jensen 1994, Arter 2004, and Kelso et al. 2016). The UK Parliament has introduced a committee mechanism (via the Liaison Committee) to complement the main plenary mechanism (PMQs), specifically in order to configure a more focused forum of scrutiny by exposing the Prime Minister to questioning from senior backbenchers (Kelso et al. 2016). As the dynamic of interaction between actors is likely to be qualitatively different in a plenary setting compared to a committee setting, it is useful to include this as a dimension in classifying questioning mechanisms that include prime ministers.

➤ **Collective or individualised mechanisms**

In a comparative descriptive account of questioning mechanisms with prime ministers in Westminster systems, Weller (1985) observed that the UK PMQs places the Prime Minister 'at the centre of parliamentary attention' (Weller 1985, p.170). This is in contrast with Question Time in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where prime ministers appear together with ministers and receive much less attention and speaking time.

Discussing Question Time in the UK parliament historically, before the introduction of Prime Minister's Questions, Chester and Bowring (1962) also noted the difficulty of delineating the specific responsibilities of prime ministers that can be subjected to questioning. They admitted that prime ministers will not normally be considered responsible for matters that are within the remit of particular departments, but they will 'answer questions about matters of which [they have] been personally concerned [...] general arrangements of government [...] matters that affect several departments or policy in general [...] matters that affect government policy as a whole' (Chester and Bowring 1962, p.306–307). This observation remains relevant to collective mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned together with ministers. It is expected that prime ministers will be questioned on different matters than ministers, due to this difference in responsibilities, and that collective questioning is likely to be different from individualised questioning.

An important step, therefore, in evaluating how prime ministers are questioned for their different responsibilities, is to distinguish conceptually between collective and individualised questioning mechanisms. Whilst the UK PMQs has received some attention (Chester and Bowring 1962; Borthwick 1993; Bates et al. 2014; Lovenduski 2012; Bull and Wells 2012; Reid 2014; Bevan and John 2016; Hazerika and Hamilton 2018; Waddle et al. 2019), there has been less research on collective mechanisms, with the exception of a few procedural descriptions in comparative studies focusing on Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Weller 1985; McGowan 2008; Larkin 2012).

In mapping the ways in which procedures influence the interaction between actors, previous classifications have not identified systematically which members of the executive are targeted by different procedures: whether a given procedure or mechanism includes one or several ministers, and whether they also include prime ministers. As discussed in previous sections, studies have focused on identifying who can ask questions, and how, but have not investigated who is subject to questioning.

The nature of government in parliamentary democracies is collective. Prime ministers lead the government and are collectively responsible together with their cabinets, but in most systems they are

not responsible for specific ministerial portfolios (Mayntz 1982; Rose 1982; Jones 1991; Andeweg 1991; Fiers and Krouel 2005). Instead, they are expected to answer for the general directions of policy (Mayntz 1982; Rose 1982), and in some countries they also have a set of 'prerogative powers' for which they are personally responsible. This division of responsibility also draws on the distinction between personal and role accountability (Mulgan 2003). Prime ministers are expected to account for their own actions, but they are also expected to speak for the government as a collective, and thus to perform role accountability. Consequently, whether or not they are questioned individually or together with ministers who are responsible for specific policy areas is likely to have an important effect on the types of questions that parliamentarians ask prime ministers. Considering the tension between prime ministerial authority and the collective authority of the government, this aspect is important for understanding how prime ministerial accountability is carried out.

In investigating questioning mechanisms, previous classifications discussed in this section have identified variables that produce effects on the dialogue between questioners and ministers. Building on these insights, and incorporating them into the empirical strategy in Chapter 4, this thesis seeks to extend this debate by identifying other variables that describe the practice of questioning prime ministers, i.e. variables that potentially produce effects on how questioning is conducted.

### **2.3.2. Functions of questioning mechanisms**

Practitioner and academic literature concerned with accountability and oversight mechanisms assumes that questioning mechanisms are designed to facilitate executive accountability (Pelizzo and Staphenurst 2004; 2012; Bergman et al. 2003; Yamamoto 2008). Some authors looking at oral parliamentary questions in particular have rightfully questioned this assumption, and have suggested other potential functions (Rasch 1994; Wiberg 1994; 1995; Shepherd 1999; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Martin 2011a; Rozenberg and Martin 2011). If the standard assumption is that these mechanisms are meant to fulfil an accountability function, then exploring how they perform that function, and whether they also perform other functions, is a useful step in understanding how they work.

#### **Questioning mechanisms and behaviour**

Studying the functions of questioning mechanisms concerns the behaviour of parliamentary actors. Approaching this issue involves looking at how behaviour during questioning mechanisms has been discussed by previous research, and investigating whether existing studies have looked at functions specifically, and if so, how.

Studying behaviour in questioning mechanisms has been an extensive preoccupation in the literature. Several studies have counted which actors asked the most questions as a way of measuring behaviour (Wiberg 1994, 1995; Rasch 1994; Mattson 1994, Bates et al. 2014). Patterns of participation in questioning mechanisms have been linked to variables such as party affiliation, government/opposition status, electoral incentives, or policy expertise (Wiberg 1994; Rasch 1994; Mattson 1994; Damgaard 1994; Wiberg 1995; Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2011; Rasch 2011; Bailer 2011).

As Vliegenhart and Walgrave (2011) note, less attention has been devoted to studying the behaviour of actors by looking specifically at the *content* of their interventions. Exceptions include studies that explored the issues raised through questions: policy topics (Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2011; Bevan and John 2016), or local constituency-related issues (Rozenberg et al. 2011; Martin 2011b; Russo 2011; Soroka et al. 2009; Zittel et al. 2019). Other studies have surveyed the style of interventions: whether different parliamentary actors posed answerable questions, the extent to which prime ministers offered comprehensive replies (Bates et al. 2014), as well as forms of attack in questions and answers by prime ministers and Leaders of the Opposition (Harris 2001; Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019).



## **Functions of parliamentary questions**

Whilst these studies were useful for mapping the content of questions, few of them have sought to go a step further and investigate the functions of questioning mechanisms explicitly. Specifically, what are the consequences of the types of behaviour displayed in questions?

The functions of parliamentary questions are an important area of research in legislative studies (Martin 2011a; Rozenberg and Martin 2011). A series of studies have proposed extensive lists of 'functions' associated with parliamentary questions, and the types of behaviour proposed in this literature offer a valuable starting point (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993; Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1995; Shepherd 1999). In their list of the functions of parliamentary questions, Wiberg (1995) and Wiberg and Koura (1994) distinguish between micro-functions, of which they provide an extensive list, and macro-functions – control, political profile, and responsiveness. The list of micro-functions includes items such as 'to request information', 'to press for action', 'demonstrating the government's faults', 'gain personal publicity' or 'show concerns for constituency interests' (Wiberg 1995, p.181). Franklin and Norton's (1993) lists of 'functions' and 'reasons for tabling questions' used as part of a survey conducted on MPs in the House of Commons include 'holding ministers accountable' and 'taking up constituency interests'. Some categories recur between studies. Most authors make reference to promoting constituency concerns as a form of representation (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Franklin and Norton 1993; Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2011; Chester and Bowring 1962; Shepherd 1999; Blidook and Kerby 2011). Other recurring categories include requesting information and pressing for action (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993); allowing ministers to make statements (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993); attacking ministers and 'tension release' (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Franklin and Norton 1993; Shepherd 1999). These points of agreement suggest that an important contribution to this literature could focus on developing the categories more systematically, in order to build a comprehensive list of the functions of questioning mechanisms.

A few of these categories have been directly tested empirically, for example in Franklin and Norton's (1993) survey of 70 MPs in the House of Commons, which asked whether questions perform different functions from a list proposed by the author, and also what their motivations were in asking questions. Another example is Shepherd's (1999) study of the functions of PMQs, which proposed a set of 11 functions derived from Pakenham's (1970) list of the functions of parliaments, and sought to measure six of them by analysing PMQs sessions over three parliamentary sessions. The study lists a few functions that are difficult to measure by analysing speeches: socialisation, influence on the executive, recruitment, training, and party representation. Other types of behaviour may also pose measurement difficulties: evaluating parliamentary performance (Franklin and Norton 1993), personal publicity (Chester and Bowring 1962), or getting the government to compromise (Wiberg and Koura 1994).

Empirically, the functions of questions have been also been approximated by various measures. Looking at oral questions referring to defence policy in the UK, France, Germany and Spain, Vliegenhart and Walgrave (2011) used the number of questions asked by opposition members as a measure of inter-party conflict, and the number of questions asked by government MPs as a measure of intra-party dissent. Authors have sought to measure the functions of questions either by looking at explicit content or by trying to make inferences about latent content. Studies of territorial representation in questions exemplify this. Authors such as Martin (2011b), Russo (2011) and Zittel et al. (2019) coded explicit mentions of constituencies or territorial units in questions to estimate the degree to which questions are used for territorial representation. Other authors have sought to measure the latent functions of parliamentary questions. A study of Canadian Question Period looked at whether and the extent to which questions are 'motivated by constituency interests' (Soroka et al. 2009, p.570). This approach assumed that there are less explicit ways in which MPs perform territorial representation, mainly by asking questions with direct policy relevance to constituencies, or by taking policy positions that are in line with public opinion in the constituency.

Although accountability is presumed to be a key function of questions, few studies have sought to measure this empirically. In a study of Question Time in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK, McGowan (2008) coded whether questions were answered or not to measure accountability. Discussing oral questions in the Knesset, Akirav (2011) suggests that 'effective' questions must achieve three goals: demanding action, requesting policy statements, and eliciting information. For the UK, Shepherd (1999) measured 'oversight of the executive' as a function of PMQs by counting the frequency of questions asking the PM to 'explain' or demanding an 'inquiry'. The literature also suggests that accountability may be performed alongside other functions, and that it may be achieved both directly, by explicitly asking for information, and indirectly, as a by-product, by asking politicians to address an issue publicly (Rasch 1994; Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1995). Whilst some steps have been suggested for how to identify behaviour related to accountability in questions, the extent to which questioning mechanisms perform other functions still remains to be explored.

The lists proposed in the literature offer useful starting points for studying the functions of questioning mechanisms. To build a systematic study, categories labelled as 'functions' should be conceptualised more clearly: whether they refer to the motivations and reasons that drive political actors to behave in a certain way, or whether they refer to the implications and consequences of their behaviour. The latter refers to *functions* as defined by Packerham (1970): the consequences of behaviour, in this case the consequences of behaviour during questioning. A measurement strategy would have to discuss the degree to which some functions can be inferred from the manifest content of questions, and the degree to which some may be latent or less explicit. Considering the centrality of accountability, an exploration of functions should start with a systematic mapping of behaviours associated with this concept, and subsequently to consider which other functions may be measured. The next section looks at previous studies of prime ministers and parliaments, and of questioning mechanisms concerning prime ministers. Building on insights from these studies, Chapter 3 proposes a conceptualisation and operationalisation of functions of questioning mechanisms.

### 2.3.3. Prime ministers and questioning mechanisms

Existing studies suggest that, in some systems, prime ministers may have fewer occasions to engage with parliament compared to places such as the UK, Canada or Australia, where this relationship is a centrepiece of parliamentary life. The Italian system places very little emphasis on executive questioning (Furlong 2004). In Germany, the weekly Question Time used to attract little public attention, and questions were often taken by junior ministers (Mayntz 1982; Helms 2004). To counteract this trend, in 2017 the German Bundestag introduced a monthly Question Time modelled on the UK PMQs, to allow parliamentarians to question the Chancellor. Hence, investigating the mechanisms through which prime ministers are questioned, as well as how they operate, is crucial for understanding how their relationship with parliaments is configured in different systems.

In contrast to the relative lack of comparative literature on questioning mechanisms concerning prime ministers, the relationship between the UK Prime Minister and the House of Commons has been the subject of several studies (Dunleavy et al. 1990, 1993; Burnham et al. 1994; Rush 2014). These studies measured the frequency of prime ministerial presence in the House of Commons between 1868 and 1990 through statistical analysis of questions, statements, speeches, and interventions in debates, and found that prime ministers have gradually engaged less with the House of Commons outside the formal occasion of Prime Minister's Questions introduced in 1961. In turn, this implies a steady decline in the parliamentary accountability of the Prime Minister (Dunleavy et al. 1990, 1993; Burnham et al. 1994; Riddell 2005), and, concomitantly, a change of focus towards extra-parliamentary opportunities. Rush (2014) went further, bringing Dunleavy et al.'s (1990) study up to 2010, and extending it to include an analysis of the parliamentary participation of Leaders of the Opposition and other party leaders. Although these studies identified important trends and variables, little is revealed about the internal dynamic of questioning mechanisms.

Examples of other questioning mechanisms have been described in general studies of parliaments or prime ministers (Rogers and Walters 2015; Norton 2014; Weller 1985; Rose 1982) and in studies of parliamentary questions (Franklin and Norton 1993; McGowan 2008; Salmond 2014). Several replication studies following from the analyses applied by Dunleavy et al. (1991;1993) on the UK charted the types of parliamentary procedures in which prime ministers may participate in Italy (Furlong 2004), Canada (Crimmins and Nesbitt-Larking 1996), and Ireland (Elgie and Stapleton 2004). Arter (2004) reviewed the mechanisms through which prime ministers are questioned in Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, giving an indication of the variety of procedures available in different parliaments.

But the UK remains, by far, the case with the richest literature. Some studies have focused on the opportunity structure created by PMQs for different actors. Bates et al. (2014) investigated a sample of the first 10 sessions of PMQs for each Prime Minister from Margaret Thatcher to David Cameron, and focused on the changing importance of parliamentary actors, speaking time and topics, and on the interaction between types of questions and the fullness of answers provided. In an extensive study using time series cross-sectional models on all PMQs sessions between 1997 and 2008, Bevan and John (2016) analysed the policy content of questions, and the ways in which opposition and government backbenchers used questions to further their policy agendas. Although both studies on PMQs investigated the topics raised in questions, this analysis was not linked to prime ministerial responsibilities – either exclusive or shared with other ministers. Considering the tension between the various roles that prime ministers hold, a useful approach in investigating the accountability function of questioning mechanisms would therefore be to look at how topics raised in questions map onto prime ministerial responsibilities. This is also linked to the roles of prime ministers: the degree to which they are asked to speak for their own responsibilities, actions and statements (individual accountability, as described by Mulgan 2003)

and the degree to which they are asked to speak for other ministers, or for the government (collective accountability).

Studies on the UK provide valuable pointers for thinking about the functions of questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers, and particularly point towards the salience of conflict as a feature of questions. Some studies have recognised the conflictual nature of exchanges and have mapped behaviours displayed during questioning. Authors have documented conflict strategies in questions at PMQs in the form of asking unanswerable questions (Bates et al. 2014; Murphy 2014) or ‘face-threatening acts’ (Harris 2001; Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019).<sup>1</sup> Analysing question-and-answer exchanges between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition at PMQs, authors have identified types of face-threatening remarks inductively, such as negative personality statements; implications of an enduring negative character trait; aspersions/disparaging insinuations; condescending remarks, or mockery (Waddle et al. 2019). Through a similar inductive approach, Bull and Wells (2012) analysed 18 sessions of PMQs to identify instances of face-threatening acts in the Leader of the Opposition’s questions, such as ‘contentious presuppositions’ or ‘inviting the opponent to make a face-damaging act’. They also identified ‘conflictual questions’ as a strategy used by the Leader of the Opposition, but did not go further to identify distinct types of conflictual questions or to quantify their frequency. Murphy (2014) also looked at face-threatening acts and instances of impoliteness in questions at PMQs. The types identified were meant to be illustrative of impoliteness: accusing the Prime Minister of not answering a question, or of inaction/slow action, drawing attention to faults in government policy or in the prime minister’s leadership. These studies focused on the linguistic aspects of conflict: identifying instances of insults and face-threatening strategies, and classifying them inductively. They offer a useful starting point for investigating conflict as a function of questioning mechanisms by identifying explicit instances of conflict in questions, but this exercise could be taken further by developing a systematic classification of such conflictual remarks. Moving beyond rhetoric and insults, such a classification should identify the aims of conflictual remarks, and the higher-level purposes of intra-parliamentary conflict: Who do different actors criticise? For what? Such a systematic classification would help map behavioural patterns: whether the opposition is critical towards the government and the Prime Minister, and the degree to which different actors express criticism; but also whether government backbenchers express criticism towards the government and the Prime Minister. Such a strategy would also help differentiate between technical criticism of policy and more political forms of conflict involving criticism of the Prime Minister or the government.

Other studies point towards a support function of questioning mechanisms. Bates et al. (2014) classified ‘helpful questions’ as a type of question that prompts the prime minister to present government policy. This builds on studies on PMQs (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993) and on the Australian House of Representatives (Larkin 2012) which identified helpful questions as a distinct government backbench behaviour. This insight provides a starting point for investigating ‘support’ as a distinct function of parliamentary questions, performed through explicit appreciative remarks. In this sense, support can be manifested by government backbenchers praising the government, but also by opposition actors either praising their own side, or potentially making appreciative remarks about the government or government policy. This poses a similar, higher-level question as that raised for conflict: What is the aim of appreciative remarks during questioning? Who do different actors display support for? Identifying and classifying appreciative remarks in questions, as well as their object, will form part of the investigation in this thesis. Similar to the systematic conceptualisation of conflict described above, this

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<sup>1</sup> This body of literature defines ‘face’ following Goffman (1967), to mean ‘positive social value’. In this sense, such insults damage the prime minister’s ‘face’, or positive public standing. The term is used with the same meaning by Harris (2001), Bull and Wells (2012), Waddle et al. (2019).

would allow us to map how different actors perform support, and for whom: whether it is primarily a type of behaviour performed by government backbenchers towards the government and the prime minister, or whether the opposition also sometimes expresses support for their own side, or, perhaps exceptionally, for the government side.

Aside from indications that questions may perform a conflict or support function, there has been very little empirical exploration of other functions of questions to prime ministers. One notable absence is territorial representation, aside from the studies concerning questioning in Ireland (Martin 2011b) and Canada (Soroka et al. 2009), which included oral questions to all members of the government, and on written questions in Italy (Russo 2011). Representation, or linkage, is a key function of legislatures and an important part of the work of MPs. In their survey of MPs in the UK House of Commons. Franklin and Norton (1993, p.105) found that 'Defending or promoting constituency interests' and 'Making ministers aware of points of concern to constituents' were listed as reasons for using oral questions, but there has been no empirical exploration of constituency representation at PMQs. In their classification of micro-functions of parliamentary questions, Wiberg (1995) and Wiberg and Koura (1994) also listed showing interest for the concerns of constituents as a function of parliamentary questions. Given that territorial representation would plausibly be a function of questions to the Prime Minister in the UK, to what degree does this apply in other systems? Considering the public nature of oral questioning mechanisms, to what degree do MPs use their opportunity to question prime ministers to perform linkage?

Aside from giving parliamentary actors a chance to question prime ministers, these mechanisms also provide prime ministers with a speaking platform and an opportunity to display leadership. The rhetorical aspects of public interventions by prime ministers have received some attention. For example, Grube (2016) categorised 'rhetorical roles' of prime ministers in public, extra-parliamentary speeches; Allen et al. (2013) looked at the televised leaders' debate before the 2010 UK general election to assess how leaders used their speaking time. Authors discussing Canada and Australia indicate that parliament is a 'forum' where prime ministers have to defend the government and maintain personal contact with ministers and backbenchers (Punnett 1977; Weller 1989). As leaders of their parties in Canada, New Zealand, and the UK, prime ministers can use Question Time to maintain the morale and unity of the parliamentary party (Lovenduski 2012; Alley 1992; Hockin 1977). The nature of prime ministerial answers during PMQs has received some attention. Authors have analysed the reactive side of responses: the extent to which prime ministers answer questions (Bates et al. 2014), and also answering and rhetorical techniques (Harris 2001; Bull and Wells 2012; Reid 2014). Some of the linguistics studies that mapped conflict in questions have also investigated instances of face-threatening acts and impoliteness in prime ministerial answers at PMQs. Murphy (2014) identified remarks such as accusing an MP of lacking knowledge, accusing them of posturing, or pointing to their party's unpopular policies. Waddle et al. (2019) discussed 'negative personality traits', 'disparaging insinuations' or 'patronising remarks' as examples of face-threatening acts performed by prime ministers. In an extra-parliamentary context, Allen et al. (2013) discussed types of attacks used by UK party leaders in televised debate: providing a reason referring to policy or character for not preferring the other candidates. The performance of support for the government in prime ministerial speeches has also only received attention in extra-parliamentary contexts. Grube (2016) suggested that prime ministers act as 'policy advocates'; referring to party leaders, Allen et al. (2013) used the notion of 'acclaim' to discuss a leader's expression of support for their own side. But an equivalent, systematic analysis has not been undertaken for the interventions of prime ministers in a parliamentary context.

Considering the fact that prime ministers must balance their role as impartial head of government with that of party leader, and the fact that questioning mechanisms provide them with an opportunity to address parliament, the proactive dimension of how they use their speaking time during questioning

would benefit from more systematic exploration. For example, to what degree do they use their speaking time to defend their own side or to attack the opposition? To what degree do they use answers to promote the government's policies, to acclaim their party, or their own actions and decisions? A systematic examination of conflict and support in prime ministerial answers would add significant insights to the literature on the functions of questioning mechanisms.

## **2.4. Chapter conclusions**

The relationship between prime ministers and parliaments is undoubtedly an important part of the politics of parliamentary democracies. Yet, as this review has shown, important questions about this relationship remain unanswered. Considering the prominent role of prime ministers in these systems, the means through which parliamentary actors may question them about their political decisions, and how these mechanisms operate and perform their role, remain largely uncharted territory. The first essential question concerns the types of mechanisms available in different parliaments. The renown of the UK PMQs might lead us to assume that other countries also provide an equivalent mechanism, but is that the case? Do parliaments provide mechanisms through which parliamentary actors may question prime ministers? How do such mechanisms vary procedurally between countries? Considering the notoriety of PMQs, and the corresponding level of attention that it has received in the literature, how does it compare to other questioning mechanisms, about which very little is known? The absence of a comprehensive study of such mechanisms suggests the need to survey mechanisms through which prime ministers and parliamentary actors interact in different parliaments. On a conceptual level, this involves building a classification of such mechanisms. Classification firstly requires drawing on dimensions identified by existing literature discussed in this chapter: plenary or committee; open or closed mechanisms; procedures requiring notice for questions or allowing spontaneous questioning. Next, as discussed in this review, I add collective or individualised as a salient dimension in describing how prime ministers are questioned. Finally, I identify other dimensions through the cross-national survey of mechanisms proposed in the Methodology chapter.

The second essential question concerns the degree to which such mechanisms perform an accountability function, and whether practice indicates that they also fulfil other functions. Both political scientists and practitioners are interested in the quality of executive accountability. Considering the complex nature of accountability relationships in parliamentary democracies, and the tension between prime ministerial authority, collective government authority and individual ministerial authority, what are prime ministers questioned about? Considering the multiple roles of prime ministers, to what degree are they questioned about their responsibilities, and to what degree are they asked to speak for the government, or for their parties? We have seen that evidence shows that some mechanisms also perform other functions, aside from accountability: they offer parliamentary actors a chance to express disagreement and to criticise the prime minister; but also to express support, or to represent the interests of citizens. Prime ministers are powerful and visible actors; understanding how accountability is carried out through different parliamentary mechanisms, and whether such mechanisms also fulfil other functions such as conflict, support, or linkage, is essential for understanding executive-legislative relations in parliamentary democracies. The next chapter sets out an empirical strategy designed to address these questions.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

The question underpinning this thesis is the following: How do parliaments question prime ministers in parliamentary democracies? To answer this overarching question, I built an empirical strategy addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the mechanisms through which parliaments may subject prime ministers to questioning?
  - How do such mechanisms vary procedurally between parliaments? How can they be classified into types?
  - How do they structure the interactions between prime ministers and other parliamentary actors?
2. To what extent do different types of questioning mechanisms fulfil an accountability function, and to what extent do they fulfil other functions?
  - What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to the function of holding to account in different types of mechanisms? How are prime ministers held accountable?
  - What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to other functions?

The first question warrants a descriptive, exploratory study that seeks to map the diversity of mechanisms through which parliamentary actors may question prime ministers. It takes as its starting point the familiar institution of PMQs in the UK, and asks the extent to which this questioning mechanism is unique, and whether there are similar mechanisms operating in other countries. On a conceptual level, the study seeks to identify the dimensions that define the functioning of questioning mechanisms. Taking PMQs as a baseline, in what respects are other mechanisms similar to it, and in what respects are they different? This first stage of this research strategy therefore takes the form of a **cross-national survey** of parliamentary questioning mechanisms concerning prime ministers in 31 countries, detailed in section 3.1 below.

The second question leads to a **comparative case study design** that explores the functioning of different types of questioning mechanisms identified through the survey in the first stage. This second stage aims to compare different **types of questioning mechanisms** in countries, and relies on quantitative and qualitative content analysis of parliamentary debates.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis adopts an overtly institutionalist approach, and draws specifically on empirical institutionalism (Peters 2012). This academic tradition rests on the assumption that institutions matter and produce visible consequences for political behaviour, and seeks to observe and examine these consequences. Whilst acknowledging that cultural, historical, economic and social variables are also significant in explaining the processes observed, the mission of this research is to provide a systematic documentation of the functioning of institutions with respect to rules and conventions, and to observe the behaviour of political actors within institutions.

The following sections outline a two-stage research design seeking to address these research questions and corresponding sub-questions. First, I explain how the cross-national survey of questioning mechanisms was developed and conducted. Next, I explain the case selection strategy for the comparative case study design. The subsequent sections detail the process of developing a coding scheme for content analysis on parliamentary debates for the case studies. Finally, I summarise how the empirical strategy helps to answer the research question and sub-questions.

### 3.1. Survey Stage. Cross-national survey of rules of procedure

As the variability of questioning mechanisms concerning prime ministers has not yet been investigated, a necessary first stage, building on Research Question 1, is to conduct a cross-national survey of the

mechanisms available in different parliaments. The survey aims to identify the relevant mechanisms in each country, and subsequently to describe and classify the ways in which rules, conventions and practice structure the dialogue between prime ministers and parliamentary actors. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, I define ‘questioning mechanism’ as a parliamentary mechanism that allows parliamentary actors to interact with and address questions to members of the executive - in this case mechanisms that specifically allow them to address question to prime ministers.

Considering the scarcity of data, a mix of deductive and inductive approaches was the most appropriate: starting from, and building upon existing literature, but also leaving room to identify theoretically relevant variables inductively through investigation of the data.

### 3.1.1. Survey dimensions and questions

The first step in designing the survey was to identify conceptual dimensions that are relevant for understanding how questioning mechanisms vary across systems. This meant identifying dimensions from previous research on questioning mechanisms generally, and on prime ministers, detailed in Chapter 2. These dimensions are listed in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, and the full list of survey questions is included in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.1. Survey dimensions from existing literature**

Dimension	Studies
Plenary or committee	Yamamoto 2008; Maffio 2002; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014
Collective or individualised	Not included in previous classifications of questioning mechanisms, but signalled as important in comparative case studies of the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Weller 1985)
Notice requirement for questions	Yamamoto 2008; Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1994; Wiberg 1995; Damgaard 1994; Rasch 1994; Mattson 1994; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014
Supplementary questions	Yamamoto 2008; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014
Duration	Wiberg and Koura 1994
Regularity	Yamamoto 2008
Time limits for questions	Wiberg and Koura 1994

**Table 3.2. Additional survey dimensions**

Dimension	Reason for inclusion
Attendance requirement	Determining whether the prime minister’s presence is required, and how often
Time limits for answers	Mapping of both answers and questions
Content restrictions for questions	Assess the extensiveness of rules with respect to language
Content restrictions for answers	Assess the extensiveness of rules with respect to language
Allocation method for questions	Assess how participation is regulated: who can ask questions?
Allocation criteria for questions	Assess how participation is regulated: what criteria are used when deciding how questions are allocated?



**Table 3.3. Survey Questions**

<p><b>Macro-level rules: Setting, focus, regularity and frequency</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What are the mechanisms that allow parliamentary actors to question prime ministers in this parliament?</li><li>2. What is the setting in which the questioning takes place: plenary or committee?</li><li>3. How is the prime minister questioned: individually, or together with other ministers?</li><li>4. Are there any requirements, either in written rules of procedure, or in conventions, regarding the attendance of the prime minister? To what extent are they required to attend procedures?</li><li>5. How often is the procedure convened?</li><li>6. What is the duration of the procedure?</li></ol> <p><b>Micro-level rules: Notice, follow-up, time and content</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. What are the rules regarding the participation of parliamentary actors?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7.1. What is the method for allocating questions?</li><li>7.2. What are the criteria for deciding question allocation?</li></ol></li><li>8. What are the rules regarding questions?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8.1. Are questions submitted in advance? If yes, how long in advance?</li><li>8.2. Are follow-up questions permitted? If yes, from whom?</li><li>8.3. Are spontaneous questions permitted?</li><li>8.4. Are there any restrictions regarding speaking time?</li><li>8.5. Are there any restrictions regarding the content of the question?</li></ol></li><li>9. What are the rules regarding answers and interventions by the prime minister?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>9.1. Are there any restrictions regarding speaking time?</li><li>9.2. Are there any restrictions regarding the content of the answer?</li></ol></li></ol>
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The first set of questions (1-6) focuses on macro-level indicators. An important dimension highlighted in the literature is the setting of the mechanism and the distinction between plenary and committee questioning mechanisms (Yamamoto 2008; Maffio 2002; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014). Considering the complex nature of accountability in a context of collective government and prime ministerial authority discussed in the literature review, the second dimension concerns the focus of questioning: whether prime ministers are questioned alone or together with other ministers. Inquiring about the regularity with which each mechanism is convened, and whether the prime minister is required to attend, seeks to evaluate the frequency of engagement between the prime minister and parliament. The duration of the procedure indicates the time that parliaments allocate for questioning the prime minister.

The second set of questions (7-9) concerns micro-level variables connected to how the interaction between parliamentary actors is configured. Previous classifications suggested that whether questions are submitted in advance, and whether spontaneous and follow-up questions are allowed, are important features for how the dialogue is configured (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1994; Wiberg 1995; Damgaard 1994; Rasch 1994; Mattson 1994; McGowan 2008). In order to investigate how participation is regulated and which actors get to question prime ministers, I inquire how questions are allocated and what criteria are used for deciding question allocation. The specific sub-categories of this variable were identified inductively, as explained in Chapter 4. I included restrictions regarding the time allowed for questions and answers in order to determine how much time actors have available to make their case and to respond. I included restrictions regarding the content of questions and answers in order to assess how different mechanisms regulate communication: this is particularly relevant for assessing whether

some issues or topics are out of scope, but also for assessing whether conflictual language is prohibited, and to what degree.

In order to test the survey questions, I first conducted a detailed examination of five countries: UK, Australia, Canada, Belgium and Germany. The results of this pilot survey suggested that, in order to meaningfully capture variation in functioning, data needed to be collected on three levels: 1) written rules of procedure; 2) convention; 3) practice. Rules of procedure alone offer varying levels of detail regarding the functioning of different mechanisms. I therefore decided that, in addition to analysing rules of procedure and associated documents, I would also contact parliamentary officials in each country, as detailed further below.

### **3.1.2. Sampling strategy**

The study focuses on democratic parliamentary systems in order to hold constant the delegation–accountability relationship between the legislative and the executive (Bergman et al. 2003; Laver and Shepsle 1999). The government’s authority is derived from the legislature, and it is in turn directly accountable to it. The sampling strategy aimed to include democratic parliamentary systems, at the same time ensuring geographic variation.

In order to be included in the sample, a country firstly needed to be classified as ‘parliamentary’ in the World Bank Democratic Political Institutions database (Beck et al. 2001), which is one of the most widely used databases classifying political institutions. The sample also includes systems classified in some political science studies as ‘semi-presidential’: a directly elected head of state with varying degrees of institutional power, and a head of government accountable to the legislature.<sup>2</sup> The latter feature warrants the inclusion of this set of countries in the sample. Secondly, it needed to be concomitantly classified as ‘democratic’ (score 6-10)<sup>3</sup> and ‘Free’ on the Polity IV and Freedom House (2017)<sup>4</sup> indices, which are also widely used and reliable databases classifying democratic systems. Countries that met these two criteria but are micro-states or smaller island states are excluded.<sup>5</sup> The final list of countries (Table 3.4) was compiled in June 2017, based on the 2017 Freedom in the World index.

The initial sample resulting from this analysis of databases comprised 34 countries, out of which three were excluded from the final analysis. Out of these, two posed significant missing data problems: data for Botswana was missing entirely, including the absence of a website for the legislature. The data included in the English version of the rules of procedure of the Indian Lok Sabha was not sufficient to produce answers to the questions in the survey, and to determine whether the prime minister attends Question Time. Switzerland was excluded due to the collegial nature of government, which made it less comparable to the other countries in the sample. Following this exclusion, the results presented in this thesis cover 31 countries (Table 3.4).

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<sup>2</sup> For summaries of the debate on the dynamic of the dual executive in such systems see Elgie (1999; 2005; 2008; 2010) and Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Scores range from -10 to 10: autocracies (-10 to -6), anocracies (-5 to 5), democracies (6-10).

<sup>4</sup> Ranks countries on two scales: political rights (1 – 7), civil liberties (1-7). The combined index is a scale of 1-7 (1= most free; 7=least free), and subsequent classification of ‘Free’, ‘Partly Free’, ‘Not Free’.

<sup>5</sup> For consistency, I followed the Polity IV definition of micro-states: countries with a population of fewer than 500.000 people.

**Table 3.4. Final list of countries**

1. Australia	10. France	19. Latvia	28. Slovenia
2. Austria	11. Germany	20. Luxembourg	29. Spain
3. Belgium	12. Greece	21. Macedonia	30. Sweden
4. Bulgaria	13. Hungary	22. Netherlands	31. UK
5. Canada	14. Iceland	23. New Zealand	
6. Croatia	15. Ireland	24. Norway	
7. Czech Republic	16. Israel	25. Portugal	
8. Denmark	17. Italy	26. Romania	
9. Finland	18. Japan	27. Slovakia	

### 3.1.3. Data collection

#### 1. Parliamentary rules of procedure and associated documents

After establishing the sample, I identified the relevant documents for extracting the data pertaining to the survey, starting with the parliamentary rules of procedure for each parliament. Initial scoping of the websites of parliaments suggested that the rules were available in languages I was familiar with. Some parliamentary websites also presented secondary literature useful for interpreting the rules of procedure, or offering additional detail on conventions.

Using these sources, I compiled a database of rules of procedure and any additional relevant secondary literature for each country, and then a database of answers to the survey questions. Throughout this stage, I kept a detailed log of missing data for each country, as well as of additional questions arising out of reading the rules of procedure. This provided a starting point for questions to address to officials in the next stage. In cases where the survey items were not immediately answerable through reading rules of procedure or other explanatory documents, I tried to verify the information by reading parliamentary debates. For example, if it was not clear from the rules of procedure whether the prime minister attends the questioning procedure, I checked transcripts of parliamentary debates to determine whether the prime minister was present. I then made a note to check with officials how frequently prime ministers attend, and whether there are any conventional patterns of attendance.

Reading rules of procedure led me to identify additional dimensions relevant for understanding questioning mechanisms: the categories regarding the method and criteria for allocating questions (questions 7.1. and 7.2. in Table 3.3). Rules of procedure in many parliaments in my sample mentioned a method for allocating questions, but also criteria for how questions are selected; as this was a recurring category across parliaments, I included it in the survey questions and proceeded to investigate the category across all cases. Having first listed all the criteria mentioned by different rules of procedure, I subsequently grouped them into broader categories, as detailed further in Chapter 4.

The dataset resulting from this analysis comprises 59 oral questioning mechanisms. The list of rules of procedure consulted for each parliament is available in **Appendix 1A**.

## 2. Contacting parliamentary officials

As the level of detail provided in parliamentary rules of procedure varies across countries (Muller and Sieberer 2014), the second stage involved contacting officials in 31 parliaments, in order to cover issues of missing data resulting from the first stage, and to document aspects of conventions and practice not covered in rules of procedure.<sup>6</sup> This stage was also essential for uncovering additional dimensions relevant for the practice of questioning, aside from the ones already derived deductively from the literature.

Using parliamentary websites, I compiled a list of parliamentary outreach, research, or information offices for each country in the sample. I sent each office an introductory email describing my project and asking whether they would be available to discuss a set of questions, as well as a summary document explaining my current findings for the country in question (an example is included in **Appendix 1B**). If the response was positive, I sent the relevant contact a questionnaire. I wrote a separate questionnaire document for each case study country.

As exemplified in **Appendix 1B**, the questions addressed to officials were divided into three categories: 1) inquiring about the accuracy of my initial findings – asking officials to confirm whether my interpretation of the rules of procedure for each country matched the practice as it is carried out; 2) inquiring about missing data – asking about specific data missing for each country, as documented during the first stage of the survey; 3) further questions not covered by rules of procedure. This included aspects such as the date when the practice of questioning prime ministers was established, whether there have been any procedural reforms in the intervening time, and whether there are other aspects of procedure not covered by the survey that would be relevant for describing questioning mechanisms.

The correspondence was carried out between December 2017 and April 2018. I received responses from 28 out of 31 countries. I followed up each reply with additional questions where clarifications were necessary. For example, if officials indicated that the prime minister may also be questioned by committees, and that was unclear from the standing orders, I asked them for examples of appearances of prime ministers before committees and topics that had been raised. This formed part of the inductive approach: realising that in some countries prime ministers may only occasionally be summoned by committees to be questioned prompted thinking about the routine/exceptional nature of mechanisms, and led to a classification of mechanisms based on this criterion, as detailed in Chapter 4.

This initial stage also proved crucially useful for the case study stage: once case selection was determined, I asked officials in Ireland, Canada and Australia whether they would be available to answer additional questions in a subsequent case study stage, and received positive responses. This correspondence was carried out in April 2018.

Beyond the core purposes set out above, corresponding with officials also proved to give a valuable sense of the place of each mechanism in the accountability processes in each country. For example, officials in Austria indicated that the collective questioning procedure is in fact perfunctory, and the real instrument of interest is that of urgent questions, which parliamentarians use for questioning the prime minister.

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<sup>6</sup> The list of offices contacted is included in **Appendix 1C**. Contact details of officials can be made available upon request. Offices in India and Switzerland were also contacted, but the lack of response from India, together with the scarce information provided in the Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure made it impossible to include this case further, while the response from Switzerland clarified that the collegial nature of the executive would make comparisons with other systems problematic.

This approach also served as a validation strategy: the first item in my questions to officials was whether my interpretation of the rules was correct. This ensured that my interpretation of the rules was, in 28 out of 31 cases, confirmed or corrected by a person with direct knowledge of the institution. However, there are some limitations to this approach. The level of detail provided by different respondents varied. Whilst some officials were eager to engage in an extended email conversation to clarify aspects of procedure, others sent brief replies, sometimes simply pointing me to a section in the rules of procedure. As I contacted a generic research office, the extensiveness of responses depended on the official who answered the email, as parliamentary research and outreach offices may vary in the degree to which they allocate time to such external queries.

In terms of data analysis, once all replies had been received, I summarised the data from both stages and began classifying countries on the different dimensions of the survey questions in order to develop descriptive typologies (George and Bennett 2005; Collier et al. 2009). This led ultimately to the descriptive typologies presented in Chapter 4.

### 3.2. Case Study Stage. Case studies of the practice of questioning

Following the completion of the survey and the development of the typology of questioning mechanisms, the next step was to analyse how different types of mechanisms function in practice, in order to answer the second research question and connected sub-questions:

To what extent do different types of questioning mechanisms fulfil an accountability function, and to what extent do they fulfil other functions?

- What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to the function of holding to account in different types of mechanisms? What are prime ministers held accountable for?
- What evidence can be observed of behaviour corresponding to other functions?

To investigate these questions, I built a comparative case study design that aims to observe patterns of behaviour displayed by parliamentary actors during their interactions with prime ministers, and to explore the potential association between different types of mechanisms and different types of behaviour. This stage involved selecting types of mechanisms in comparable political systems from the ones surveyed.

#### 3.2.1. Case selection strategy

The cases selected are meant to be exploratory and illustrative. The primary aim is to provide a comprehensive contextual and comparative description of how questioning mechanisms operate in each selected country.

The first criterion for case selection was exploring diversity: illustrating different types of questioning mechanisms and how they operate. The second criterion, closely connected to the first, was to find diverse comparators for the UK as a prominent empirical case. As shown in Chapter 2, the case of PMQs in the UK has already been researched in some detail and enjoys notoriety. It was important to understand what other types of questioning mechanisms exist and on which dimensions they differ from PMQs. The UK was therefore selected as a case first. To satisfy both criteria, I used the survey to situate PMQs among types of mechanisms operating in other countries.

The typology developed as a result of the survey (Chapter 4) suggested that the most frequent types of mechanisms are plenary mechanisms (41 out of the 59 procedures surveyed); out of these, mechanisms that allow routine questioning of prime ministers were also the most frequent (34 out of 59 procedures; 28 plenary procedures out of the 41). As routine questioning in the plenary was clearly the most frequent type of questioning across countries, illustrating *diversity among routine plenary mechanisms* was incorporated in the selection strategy following the completion of the survey.

PMQs is also set in the plenary, and allows routine questioning, as it is convened weekly. Consequently, in identifying comparator cases, the plenary and routine nature of the procedure is kept constant. To identify diverse comparable cases and keep PMQs as the anchor case, the next step was to identify the dimensions that make it distinctive, and to identify mechanisms in other countries that contrast with PMQs on these dimensions:

1. The **individualised** nature of the procedure: the exclusive focus on the prime minister is the main distinguishing feature of PMQs.
2. The **open** style of questioning: prior written notice is not required; members need only submit their names in order to be considered in the ballot; members may also attempt to intervene with spontaneous questions during the debate by 'catching the Speaker's eye'; supplementary questions are allowed from the initial questioner.

In order to examine different practices of routine questioning in the plenary, I aimed to build a set of **four cases**, to include:

1. Another individualised mechanism that was different from PMQs on the open/closed style of questioning;
2. Two collective mechanisms that were similar to PMQs on the open closed/dimension.

Considering the detailed reading of transcripts required to conduct the analysis, a practical aspect of case selection concerned whether parliamentary debates would be accessible in a language I was familiar with. Case selection was therefore restricted to English- or French-speaking countries.

The first step therefore in the case selection process was to identify a set of cases from the countries surveyed in Chapter 4 that would meet these criteria, and to explore the extent to which they were comparable, in order to then reduce this broader set to the final set of four. I initially compared seven cases of routine plenary mechanisms that varied on the individualised/collective and open/closed dimensions, and that also met the criterion of having English or French transcripts of debates available online. Besides the UK, I selected Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Belgium, and France and compared them across a range of macro-level political variables, as well as variables in connection to questioning (see **Appendix 2**). This involved background research on each political system, as well as research on the frequency of attendance of prime ministers. The latter was done by reading through parliamentary transcripts and logging the attendance of prime ministers, as well as the number of questions addressed to them in each questioning session.

Having established this preliminary set of comparable cases, I analysed them in pairs in order to find countries that were most similar, and that also had comparable premierships.

As an individualised procedure that differs on the degree of openness of questioning, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland provided a good comparator case for the UK. Holding the individualised dimension constant, it provided grounds for comparison on the second dimension: whereas PMQs in the UK allows spontaneous questioning to a large extent, at Oral Questions to the Taoiseach, members submit their question in writing in advance of the session, and all supplementary questions must be connected to the initial question.

In selecting collective procedures, I considered mechanisms in Canada, Australia, Belgium, and New Zealand. Whilst all options were potentially viable, Canada and Australia appeared to be the cases that were most compatible for being compared to each other, as well as for being compared with the UK. They are identical to each other on the notice dimension and similar to the UK: in neither case is prior notice required for questions. By contrast, Belgium and New Zealand are very different, in that written notice for questions is required. Consequently, the final case selection included the following types of mechanisms:

**Table 3.5. Final set of cases**

<b>Country and mechanism</b>	<b>Type of mechanism</b>	<b>Written notice required for questions</b>	<b>Follow-up questions</b>	<b>Frequency of questioning</b>
<b>UK:PMQs</b>	Individualised	No. Only name of questioner for initial ballot. Spontaneous questions at the discretion of the Speaker.	Initial questioner	Once a week
<b>Ireland: Oral Questions to the Taoiseach</b>	Individualised	Yes: written notice for questions	Initial questioner first, other members subsequently	Twice a week
<b>Australia: Question Time</b>	Collective	No	Any member present	Daily when the House is sitting
<b>Canada: Question Period</b>	Collective	No	Initial questioner first, other members subsequently	Daily when the House is sitting

### 3.2.2. Selecting prime ministerial terms in office

The comparative case study follows a cross-sectional design. For each country exemplifying one type of questioning mechanism, I sampled sessions of debates during one term in office of one prime minister, aiming to include premierships that were comparable between cases. The first aim of delimiting a prime minister's term in office as the time frame was to investigate patterns of behaviour under a set of specified conditions: a particular configuration of parties in parliament, a particular type of government, and also the personality and style of an individual prime minister. The second aim was to use a time unit that was comparable across cases.

The examination of countries detailed in the previous section also involved extensive background research on premierships, with the aim to find terms in office of comparable duration, with similar types of government, and with similar types of cabinet termination. I aimed to include terms in office terminated in normal circumstances (i.e. by an election), with the exception of Australia, where the pattern of prime ministers being ousted by leadership spills meant that all premierships considered for case selection ended with a resignation. In all cases, in order to be able to cover a full term in office from the beginning to termination, I excluded incumbent governments. The final set of cases is included in Table 3.6. The full set of options considered is listed in **Appendix 3A**.



**Table 3.6. Case selection: Terms in office**

Country	Term in office	Time in office	Duration (months)	Duration (years)	Prime minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
<b>Collective mechanisms</b>							
Canada	Stephen Harper I	2006-2008	32	2	Conservative	Minority	General election
Australia	Julia Gillard	2010-2013	36	3	Labor	Minority	Resignation
<b>Individualised mechanisms</b>							
UK	David Cameron I	2010-2015	59	5	Conservative	Coalition	General election
Ireland	Enda Kenny I	2011-2016	59	5	Fine Gael	Coalition	General election

**Sources:** Author's calculations based on Döring and Manow (2016) and Casal Bertoa (2016); Interparliamentary Union (2018)

As discussed above, duration was an essential criterion: the premierships of Stephen Harper and Julia Gillard were comparable in duration, as well as on the type of government. Whilst two single-party majority governments would have also made a good comparison, the third premiership of Stephen Harper was much longer than the premiership of Tony Abbott (See **Appendix 3A**).

In choosing premierships for the UK and Ireland, the most comparable terms in office out of those considered were the first term in office of David Cameron and the first term in office of Enda Kenny. All other options (detailed in **Appendix 3A**) were comparable in duration, but differed on the type of government, which would have introduced too much variation between individualised procedures, and between the individualised and collective procedures. **Appendix 3B** lists the distribution of parties in parliament for each case during the period analysed.

### 3.3. Content analysis using NVivo

Question 2 and the corresponding sub-questions focus on the behaviour of parliamentary actors in the process of questioning prime ministers. Firstly, these seek to investigate how prime ministers are questioned in different types of mechanisms by different actors: which actors participate in questioning? What kinds of questions do they ask? What are prime ministers questioned about? Second, they look at the association between types of behaviour displayed by actors and different functions: to what degree are questions used for performing accountability? To what degree are they used for other functions? These questions provide starting points for exploring connections between types of mechanisms and types of behaviour, and for contributing to the theoretical debates about functions of parliamentary questioning mechanisms and the functions of parliaments.

Investigating connections between the behaviour of actors and functions of parliamentary questioning mechanisms required analysis of text data: transcripts of parliamentary question time sessions. To this aim, content analysis represents a systematic approach to collecting and analysing text data (Neuendorf 2002; Krippendorf 2012; Schreier 2012), as well as an effective method for conducting research on the manifest and latent content of parliamentary debates applied extensively in legislative studies (Slapin and Proksch 2014). The project relied on content analysis using NVivo to analyse questioning sessions.

The research questions addressed in this project required two types of content analysis:

- 1) *Quantitative*: analysing the text to measure the frequency of questioning by different actors, but also in order to associate qualitative categories with types of actors.
- 2) *Qualitative*: analysing the text in order to capture the categories referring to the concepts central to the research question: accountability, conflict, support, and representation, as described in subsequent sections.

### 3.3.1. Sampling strategy

I constructed a random sample of questioning sessions, stratified by year, to cover the entire duration of each term in office. This approach allowed me to cover the full duration of the term in office systematically, ensuring that the sample included sessions from various time points in the term in office (e.g. just after election; during the term in office; before the next election). This approach maximized the representativeness of the sample: it allowed me to claim with a higher degree of confidence that the patterns of behaviour observed through coding were representative of the behaviour of actors during that period of time.

- The initial strategy involved selecting 40 sessions for each case, aiming to cover around 10 sessions per year for a term in office of 3-4 years.
- Using a random dates generator, I compiled a list of 40 dates for each case study. Where a date fell during parliamentary recess, I reran the random generator and included a new date. The dates generator allowed me to introduce the exact day of the week to be varied, corresponding to when the mechanism is convened: for example Wednesdays for the UK, when PMQs takes place, Tuesdays and Wednesdays for Ireland.
- To assess whether data collection was approaching saturation, I ran preliminary queries on the data after coding 10 sessions for each country (25% of the data) and then after 20 sessions for each country (50% of the data).
- Analyses done after covering 50% of the data indicated approach of saturation: the results seemed to add further evidence to the findings from previous analyses, but did not show any new patterns. For this reason, and for practical reasons of having time to write up results, I decided to only cover an additional set of 10 sessions for each country.
- By this point, from a longitudinal perspective, my analysis had covered sessions during the first half of each term in office. To ensure that my sample still covered the full duration of each term in office, the final set of 10 sessions examined for each country were spread out for the duration of the second half: so instead of covering the second half through 20 sessions, I instead covered it through 10.

The final sample thus comprised 120 sessions (30 per case study country, covering the full duration of each term in office). The final, full list of sessions is included in **Appendix 4**. I stored each questioning session as an individual text file, which was then uploaded to NVivo. To store information regarding each session, I created nodes in NVivo for:

1. Date of the session, e.g. 15.09.2012
2. Term in office to which the session belonged: Julia Gillard, Stephen Harper, David Cameron, Enda Kenny
3. Country: Australia, Canada, UK, Ireland
4. Questioning mechanism: Question Time, Question Period, Prime Minister's Questions, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach

All debate transcripts for the four case studies were sourced from:

- UK: House of Commons Hansard
- Canada: House of Commons Hansard
- Australia: House of Representatives Hansard
- Ireland: Dáil Debate Transcripts

To ensure standardisation of citation of parliamentary debates in the four cases, all the examples cited in the thesis include the name of the parliamentarian, title, constituency, and date of the question or answer.

### 3.3.2. Coding unit and sub-unit

Within the text, the **coding unit** (i.e. the portion of text to which codes are applied) is an intervention by a single actor: an intervention by an MP (an oral parliamentary question) or an intervention by the prime minister (an answer to an oral parliamentary question). Each intervention is evaluated individually to see if a code applies to it.

For some parts of the coding scheme detailed in Table 3.12, I use 'remark' as a **coding sub-unit** including a sentence or groups of sentences within an intervention, to identify instances of conflict and support and questions and answers, as detailed further below.

### 3.3.3. Coding scheme development

Having established the sample and the coding unit and sub-unit, the next step was to develop the coding scheme by identifying the relevant conceptual dimensions to look for in the data, and by operationalizing them in order to develop codes and definitions for each code. The coding scheme was built in two stages: a preliminary stage of consulting the literature and drawing an initial set of theoretically relevant categories, as well as an initial set of definitions for each code; and subsequent stages of consulting with the supervisory team, pilot coding, and inter-coder reliability testing to evaluate and improve validity and reliability. These stages involved adding coding categories to the initial set, removing coding categories, refining the definitions of the codes and finalising the coding scheme that would be used in the analysis. The process is summarised in Table 3.7:

**Table 3.7. Coding scheme development**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Preliminary coding scheme developed deductively from the literature.</li><li>2. First round of pilot coding: 4 sessions, randomly selected with the aim to test the validity of preliminary categories and to identify new categories inductively.</li><li>3. Second round of pilot coding: 16 sessions, 4 for each case study country, randomly selected. This ensured that the coding scheme was tested on and developed on the same premierships on which it was applied, but on dates which were subsequently excluded from the final data. A list of this test set is provided in Appendix 4.</li><li>4. Reliability testing with a second coder.</li><li>5. Final list of codes and definitions.</li></ol> |
|---|

Each round was followed by a discussion of coding categories and coding definitions with supervisors, and with the second coder following the reliability testing. Table 3.8 summarises the criteria used for assessing a coding scheme in studies using content analysis. In subsequent sections I explain how I sought to address each of these points.

<b>Table 3.8. Coding Scheme Evaluation Criteria</b>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
<p><b>Validity/Construct validity</b> The extent to which the coding categories capture the concept under study.</p>	<p>Pilot coding: assessing the degree to which codes capture the relevant sections of the material. Inter-coder assessment of definitions. Developing an extensive and exhaustive codebook of definitions and decision rules.</p>
<p><b>Face Validity</b> The extent to which a code or coding frame appears to cover the categories under study when it is applied.</p>	<p>Pilot coding. If many codes are assigned to the 'other' category, it means that the categories do not capture the material to a certain degree, and need to be reassessed.</p>
<p><b>Content Validity</b> The extent to which a code or coding frame captures all aspects of a concept.</p>	<p>Developing the coding categories as extensively as possible, building on theory and existing literature; developing the categories logically or adding new categories inductively to the coding scheme. Pilot coding, expert discussion and inter-coder assessment of definitions are used.</p>
<p><b>Criterion Validity</b> The relationship between the indicator used and other indicators of the same concept that have already been used in research.</p>	<p>Literature review: assessing previous indicators used to measure the same concept.</p>
<p><b>Reliability</b> The degree to which coding categories apply consistently across the material.</p>	<p>The standard approach to assess reliability is to train a second coder, and to calculate agreement between coders using percentage agreement and other indicators. For qualitative content analysis, quantitative indicators such as Cohen's Kappa or Krippendorff's Alpha should not be seen as 'cut-off points' (Schreier 2012) but instead as 'an opportunity to discuss the material and the coding frame. A lower indicator suggests the need to revise some categories and clarify their definitions.' (Schreier 2012, p.173). For qualitative content analysis, indicators should be corroborated with discussion between coders with respect to the reasons for disagreement.</p>

**Source:** Schreier (2012); Halperin and Heath (2012)

## **1. Deductive component: Conceptualising the functions of questioning mechanisms**

The first step in developing the coding scheme was deductive. In order to enhance construct validity, criterion validity and content validity, I sought to cover as many aspects of each concept as possible: by building categories drawing on the literature; logically developing additional categories; and by seeking to add more categories inductively.

The focus of research question 2 is to ascertain the functions of oral parliamentary questioning mechanisms. Following Pakenham (1970), I define 'functions of parliamentary questioning mechanisms' as the consequences of the behaviour displayed by parliamentary actors and prime ministers during their interactions through questioning mechanisms. This refers to intra-parliamentary consequences of behaviour: what is achieved by asking different types of questions and answering in different ways. As an empirical strategy, it proposes a way to measure the contribution of behaviour to functions such as accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation. Whilst acknowledging their relevance, it does not seek to measure potential extra-parliamentary consequences, such as impact on public opinion.

Drawing on the types of behaviour proposed in the literature, and using the functions of parliaments as organising conceptual categories, I expected to see evidence of the following functions: accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation.

### **Operationalisation: Observable features of functions**

Building on the discussion in Chapter 2, I propose to identify the functions of questioning mechanisms by analysing the **observable features of functions in parliamentary speech**: whether a question requests information or an explanation, demands action, contains a territorial reference or makes a critical or appreciative remark. Hence, the coding categories used in this study seek primarily to capture the manifest content of parliamentary speech, although some categories also touch on latent content. Manifest content refers to the explicit, surface-level content of communication, for example the occurrence of a phrase or types of phrases in speech, or the topic of communication (Halperin and Heath 2012; Schreier 2012). Latent content refers to 'meanings, motives and purposes embedded within the text' (Halperin and Heath 2012, p.319).

The types of behaviour proposed in the literature in connection to the functions of questioning mechanisms correspond to broader conceptual categories. Grouping them into such categories is a way of building a list of functions that is conceptually coherent and empirically testable: the observable features of individual questions and answers (e.g. asking for information, making a critical comment, referencing a territorial unit, etc.) can be linked categories such as accountability, conflict, and territorial representation. This approach is also compatible with inductive exploration of the data: by identifying the conceptual category to which different types of behaviour belong, we may identify similar types of behaviour in the data. The literature that discusses the functions of parliaments provides the basis for deriving these conceptual categories.

The codes are mutually exclusive: the coding scheme was developed so that, to the degree that qualitative content analysis allows, a request for information is distinct from a request for an explanation, and distinct from a demand for action; a criticism of the prime minister individually is distinct from a criticism of the government as a collective, or from a criticism of a minister. Given the nature of parliamentary speech, several codes may apply to the same coding unit: within an intervention there may be a request for information, as well as a demand for action. In a given intervention, an MP may make a critical remark towards the prime minister, as well as a critical remark towards the government.

## ➤ **Accountability**

As the baseline assumption is that questioning mechanisms are designed to facilitate accountability, the natural starting point is to explore how they perform this function. Drawing on the stages of accountability proposed by Mulgan (2003) and Bovens (2007; 2010), types of behaviour such as requesting information, demanding explanations and pressing for action (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993; Wiberg and Koura 1994) can be regarded as manifestations of accountability. Requesting a response to an accusation as a form of attributing responsibility (Chester and Bowring 1962; Seeberg 2013) is an additional dimension. Other categories were added inductively, as detailed below.

Having mapped types of behaviour associated with accountability in questions, I turn to conceptualising, operationalising and measuring prime ministerial accountability, as detailed further in Chapter 6. To do this, I looked at what prime ministers are questioned on and how they are addressed.

Firstly, I examined the extent to which prime ministers are questioned about their responsibilities, i.e. the **topics** of questions addressed to them. To investigate topics, I used the Comparative Agendas Codebook to code for topics and sub-topics of questions. The codebook provides extensive explanations of each topic and sub-topic, as well as examples.<sup>7</sup> It is a reliable, widely-used tool for coding policy topics. The codes that were applied to the analysis in this thesis are listed in **Appendix 6**. To investigate how questions map onto responsibilities, I conducted background research on prime ministerial responsibilities in each case study country, detailed in Chapter 6.

Secondly, I investigated the **form of address** in questions: whether prime ministers are asked to speak for their own actions and decisions (**individual accountability**, e.g. 'What is the prime minister's plan for this issue?'), or to explain the actions of ministers (e.g. Why did the Foreign Secretary make this statement?), of the government (e.g. 'What is the government doing to address this issue?'), or of the party (**collective accountability**). The definitions for each code, and examples, are provided in **Appendix 6**.

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed explanation of the codebook, and of the topics which fall within each 'topic' and 'sub-topic', is available at: <https://www.comparativeagendas.net/>. I used the codebooks for the UK, Canada and Australia to capture policy topic and sub-topics specific to each of these countries, for example 'Devolution' in the UK. For Ireland, I used the codebooks for the other countries for all general topics and sub-topics, and added specific topics inductively – for example, relations with Northern Ireland.

## ➤ Conflict and support

Next, I investigated what other functions are associated with questioning mechanisms. In line with the literature, this approach starts from the assumption that questioning mechanisms may perform multiple functions, and thus may perform additional functions alongside accountability.

As questioning procedures bring together government and opposition actors, we expect to see a significant degree of conflict and support. As discussed in the literature review, empirical studies focusing on conflict in questions have focused on identifying types of personal attacks (Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019; Harris 2001). The types of behaviour discussed in these studies imply that conflict is manifested through negative, conflictual interventions. Building on this, my approach proposes a strategy for measuring manifest conflict in questions in the form of explicit conflictual remarks. For the purpose of this study, I operationalised 'conflict' by considering all the potential targets of a conflictual remark: the prime minister, the government, a party, or policy. In comparison to previous approaches discussed in Chapter 2, which focused on identifying conflictual remarks inductively, this proposes a systematic categorisation of codes by focusing on the target of the attack. It is a strategy for measuring explicit manifestation of conflict. Moving beyond aspects of rhetoric, this approach looks at the aims of conflictual remarks, and the higher-level purposes of intra-parliamentary conflict: Who do different actors criticise? For what? In the analysis in Chapter 8 I distinguish between technical criticism of policy, and political forms of conflict referring to the prime minister, the government, or a political party.

Legislatures also offer an arena for parliamentarians to express support for policy proposals, for the government, for the prime minister, or for their own party. Building on previous studies detailed in the literature review that refer to forms of support in questions and answers (particularly Bates et al. 2014 and the notion of 'helpful questions'; Allen et al. 2013 and the notion of 'acclaim' in leadership debates), I set out to identify appreciative remarks in questions. By the same logic as the coding for conflict, an appreciative remark may target the prime minister, the government, a political party, or policy. This proposes a strategy for measuring explicit manifestation of support.

Due to the nature of parliamentary speech, each intervention (**coding unit**) from a questioner may contain one or more instances of conflict or support. For this purpose, I count 'conflictual remark' and 'appreciative remark' as a **coding sub-unit**. A remark is a sentence or group of sentences that represents a manifestation of conflict or support. Each coding unit may be assigned one or more codes from the conflict and support categories, depending on how many relevant sub-units it contains. For example, if a question contains a conflictual remark referring to the government and one referring to the prime minister, it will receive both codes. The same logic applies to coding for appreciative comments. Coding individual mentions of conflict and support allows me to analyse and measure conflict and support both at the level of questions and answers, and hence to establish whether a given question or answer displays conflict or support; and also at the level of individual mentions of conflict or support within questions and answers. The latter measure enables me to capture the diversity of conflict and support behaviours more fully and more qualitatively. For example, for the Leader of the Opposition, this allows me to count not only how many questions are conflictual, but also how many conflictual remarks they made overall, and of which type. At the sub-unit level, the codes are mutually exclusive.

### ➤ **Territorial representation**

As discussed in Chapter 2, representation, or linkage, is a key function of legislatures and an important part of the work of MPs. This thesis focuses on a particular facet of linkage: territorial representation, i.e. the extent to which MPs use oral questions to represent territorial interests. At the deductive stage, building on the measure proposed by Martin (2011b), I proposed to code a question as performing territorial representation if it included an explicit mention of a territorial unit: either an electoral constituency or a region.

Next, I evaluated what territorial references were linked to. What do MPs seek to do when they mention an explicit territorial reference? I separated purely local questions from questions linking local issues to national-level issues. This distinction is not always entirely clear-cut in practice, but its primary aim is to identify the aim of the question: whether the questioner focuses on an issue with nearly exclusive local relevance, or whether the local territorial reference is used for bringing up issues with broader national relevance. In the analysis in Chapter 9, this helps identify ‘purely local’ questions, and questions for which local references play a different role.

**Local:** the question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance.

**Local – National:** the question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance in connection to an issue with wider national relevance. The focus is on the national relevance of the local issue: the questioner may begin her intervention describing a local issue, but the intervention also contains references to broader, national-level policy issues. Following this discussion of local issues and references to national policy, the question either a) inquires about national policy in a way that is also relevant to the local issues described or; b) inquires about national policy exclusively.

### ➤ **Prime ministerial answers**

The final step in evaluating the functions of questioning mechanisms is to look at how prime ministers respond. Previous studies (Bates et al. 2014; McGowan 2008; Sealey and Bates 2016) mainly focused on responsiveness: the extent to which prime ministers offer comprehensive replies. Building on studies that looked at conflict in prime ministerial answers (Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019; Harris 2001), and on the rhetorical roles of political leaders (Grube 2016; Allen et al. 2013; Reid 2014), this study focuses on the **proactive** dimension of answers: whether prime ministers use their interventions for other purposes, aside from answering the question addressed to them. Given that questioning provides them with a public platform, we expect prime ministers to engage in the political game and to attack the opposition, and also to seek to acclaim their own side (Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019; Allen et al. 2013). The coding for prime ministerial answers on conflict and support is built on the same structure that for questions, as shown in Table 3.9 below.



Following this deductive stage, I developed a preliminary set of codes:

**Table 3.9. Preliminary list of deductive qualitative codes**

<i>Function</i>	<i>Deductive stage codes</i>	
Accountability	<b>Questions</b> Requesting information Requesting explanations Demanding action Requesting responses to an accusation Topic Form of address: individualised or collective	
	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Answers</b>
Conflict	Policy criticism Government criticism Prime minister criticism Party criticism	Policy criticism Personal criticism Party criticism
Support	Policy appreciation Government appreciation Prime minister appreciation Party appreciation	Policy appreciation Government appreciation Personal appreciation Party appreciation
Territorial representation	Local territorial reference Local-National territorial reference	

Although the deductive stage addresses content and construct validity, the next challenge is to assess face and content validity. Some of the categories may just capture semantic differences: for example the difference between government criticism and party criticism may just capture a semantic alternative of referring to the governing party. To enhance the validity of codes as far as qualitative content analysis of parliamentary speech allows, I proceeded to test and refine them through pilot coding and reliability testing.

## 2. Pilot Coding

To assess validity and intra-coder reliability, the preliminary, deductive coding scheme was tested through two rounds of pilot coding. The first round suggested that the coding scheme showed validity on several measures, but still required further refinement and testing before starting data collection. The coding scheme adequately identified the dimensions of different functions in the data. For example, it identified instances of information requests, demands for explanations and demands for action, thus demonstrating face and content validity. The pilot coding was also useful for identifying additional dimensions inductively:

<b>Function</b>	<b>Dimensions identified inductively</b>
<b>Accountability</b>	Requests for comments Requests for opinion Request for formal statement
<b>Conflict</b>	Criticism of previous government

On accountability, I observed recurring requests for comments and opinion in questions: prime ministers were asked to express views on a particular matter. This was a distinct category from those outlined in the literature. I also observed that they were recurrently asked to 'make a statement' on particular matters. On conflict, I observed recurring remarks from government backbenchers and from prime ministers criticising the previous government. This matches the expectation in the literature that

government actors would use these opportunities to distinguish themselves from the opposition, but also from previous governments.

Following further testing in the subsequent pilot coding exercise, these categories were included in the coding scheme, as evidence suggested they recurred both a) between the debates corresponding to a particular mechanism; b) across mechanisms.

The second round of pilot coding was more extensive, and involved 16 sessions, 4 for each case study country. This round allowed significantly more engagement with the type of data I was going to analyse. It allowed me to build the coding nodes in NVivo and to conduct some preliminary queries to observe patterns of behaviour. It also helped estimate how long it would take to finalise the research. The following descriptive coding categories were added to the quantitative categories:

- **Question addressee:** Having identified inductively that, in Australia, questioners conventionally name the addressee upon asking the question (e.g. 'My question is to the prime minister'), but that in Canada that does not occur, I added a code to identify the addressee of the question: prime minister; government minister; government generically. The final of the three applied to cases where the question was addressed to 'the government' and a minister or the prime minister replied.
- **Types of questions:** questions with notice; questions without notice; supplementary question. This helped to differentiate between the different types of questions allowed by the rules, in order to have an accurate count.

Next, reliability testing allowed me to further refine the coding categories and also to enhance validity by developing the definitions for codes. The process is summarised below, and a summary of the evaluation of codes is included in **Appendix 5**.

### 3. Reliability testing

A second coder was trained to conduct reliability testing by second coding sessions that had already been coded by the first coder in NVivo:

1. The first coder decided the list of codes that would be subject to second coding and sent the coding scheme and explanatory notes to the second coder.
2. The coders discussed the coding scheme in the abstract, without looking at any material or coded sessions. They agreed that the second coder would try the coding scheme on a test set of 4 sessions selected randomly, one for each case study country, and would code at least half of the questions in each session.
3. The second coder coded the test set.
4. The two coders discussed the outcome of the test set as well as disagreements on codes. They discussed the particular units that they disagreed on and how this reflected on the coding scheme.
5. The second coder coded the set for reliability testing (one session for each country, chosen randomly). This yielded an overall good kappa score for all nodes and codes, and high percentage agreement (see **Appendix 5** for full report).
6. The coders looked into the codes that scored 'poor' or 'fair' and discussed problematic units in order to determine:
  - a) How much disagreement was due to human error (i.e. one of the coders missing a code that was detectable in the data)
  - b) How much disagreement was due to low reliability (i.e. the same code applied differently by the two coders)
  - c) What this suggested about the coding scheme and how well it had performed
  - d) What this suggested in terms of changes to the coding scheme.
7. The overall conclusion was that a large proportion of the disagreement on the codes with 'poor' and 'fair' agreement was due to human error, and not to low reliability.
8. The outstanding reliability issues were discussed, and the following changes were agreed:

**Table 3.10. Reliability testing: Discussion**

<b>Code and issues</b>	<b>Suggested changes</b>
<p><b>Support in questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instances of manifest support are rare in the data, but overall the code is easy to detect when it appears.</li> <li>- There is a degree of ambiguity in some cases between a reference to government appreciation and a reference to party appreciation.</li> </ul>	<p>Definitions should specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government appreciation: the sentence must explicitly identify the government as the subject.</li> <li>- Party appreciation: the sentence must make explicit reference to the party/identify the party as the subject.</li> <li>- Where both are mentioned, or where there is ambiguity, the dominant code should apply. For example, if the sentence refers primarily to the government, it shall be coded as 'government appreciation'; if it refers primarily to a party, it shall be coded as 'party appreciation'.</li> <li>- As instances of manifest support are rare in the data, the categories could also be merged in the analysis if necessary.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Request for opinion/comment</b></p> <p>Sometimes the line between opinion and comment is not very clear, but overall whether a question contains a request for opinion or comment is easy to detect.</p>	<p>Request for comment and Request for opinion should be merged.</p>
<p><b>Linkage and representation</b></p> <p>There were very few instances of linkage and representation in the reliability testing set. The differences in coding were due to human error only.</p>	<p>No proposed changes.</p>

Testing for inter-coder reliability was useful both for assessing the coding scheme and for further refining the coding categories and definitions. The final coding scheme is summarised in Table 3.12, and the full codebook with definitions and examples is included in **Appendix 6**. Table 3.11 includes an overview of the database of coding units recorded for the total of 120 questioning sessions.

**Table 3.11. Total number of coding units (questions and corresponding answers)**

UK	879
Ireland	726
Canada	1067
Australia	540
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3212</b>

The main aim of this empirical strategy focusing on the manifest content of questions and answers was to create a systematic, replicable way of studying parliamentary speech in order to assess the functions of questions and answers. The process of developing the coding scheme described above was meant to ensure that, to the degree allowed by qualitative content analysis, these categories captured meaningful patterns in the data, and meaningful differences in behaviour among parliamentary actors.

Nonetheless, this approach only touches the surface of parliamentary communication. Some of the finer differences between categories may sometimes capture rhetoric, or the individual style of parliamentarians. Qualitative coding by a human coder, repeated rounds of pilot coding and refining definitions, and reliability testing, were meant to mitigate these limitations as much as possible. This study intends to provide a starting point for assessing the functions of questions to prime ministers. Future directions to extend this study and mitigate limitations are discussed in Chapter 10.

**Table 3.12. Coding scheme summary**

<b><u>Quantitative Codes</u></b> <b>Coding unit:</b> intervention (question or answer, as applicable)	<b><u>Qualitative Codes</u></b> <b>Coding unit:</b> intervention (question or answer, as applicable) <b>Coding sub-unit:</b> remark (applies to codes for conflict and support in questions and answers)	
<b>1. Type of question</b> Question with notice (submitted in writing) Question without notice Supplementary questions	<b>1. Accountability Questions</b> Request for information Request for explanation Request for a formal statement Demand for action Request for comment or opinion Request for response to an accusation	
	<b>2. Form of address</b> Individualised Collective	
<b>2. Question addressee</b> Prime Minister Minister Prime Minister (answered by Minister) Government (answered by Prime Minister)	<b>3. Conflict: Conflictual Remarks</b>	
	<b>Questions</b> Policy criticism Government criticism Prime minister criticism Party criticism	<b>Answers</b> Policy criticism Previous government criticism Personal criticism Party criticism
	<b>4. Support: Appreciative Remarks</b>	
	<b>Questions</b> Policy appreciation Government appreciation Prime minister appreciation Party appreciation	<b>Answers</b> Policy appreciation Government appreciation Personal appreciation Party appreciation Self-appreciation
<b>3. Type of actor</b> Prime Minister Leader of the Opposition Opposition Party Leader Opposition frontbencher Opposition backbencher Government backbencher Coalition party backbencher	<b>5. Linkage and Representation</b> Local territorial reference Local-National territorial reference	
	<b>6. Topic</b> Subtopic	

As presented in **Appendix 6**, the quantitative codes were assigned based on the information provided in the official transcript: all Hansard transcripts offer information about the party identity of questioners, which was used to assign code for government/opposition. I used the information provided on parliamentary websites for each parliament in order to assign backbench/frontbench status. The transcripts also provide information with respect to the type of question: notice or supplementary.

### **3.4. Qualitative analysis of examples: identifying sub-categories of questions**

Once all coding was completed, starting from the existing categories in the coding scheme, I sought to identify sub-categories through detailed, thematic and systematic reading of examples from each category. The aim of this approach was to further map how questions are used and to identify additional types of behaviour associated with accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation. It was not intended to offer further numeric information, but to systematise analysis of qualitative examples.

The first step was to determine the population of examples for each category. For example, in order to investigate sub-types of requests of information from Leaders of the Opposition (Chapter 7) or sub-types of conflictual or appreciative remarks from government backbenchers (Chapter 8), I looked at all the examples of questions coded at those categories by using coding queries in NVivo: all requests for information by Leaders of the Opposition; all conflictual remarks by government backbenchers. Next, I recorded the aim or object of each question. For example, in reading a request for information or a demand for action, the question I asked in reading the examples was 'What is the object of this request for information?' 'What is the object of this demand for action?'. In doing this analysis, I noted recurring themes in the form of questions with a similar object, for example:

Request for information about the prime minister's actions:

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether he had any conversations about phone hacking with Andy Coulson at the time of his resignation? (13.07.2011)

Demand for action to redress policy failure by previous government:

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): On the day when 200 people from Bombardier in Derby are here to hear whether we can change the arrangements for the Thameslink contract, can the Prime Minister give us some hope about future contracts and about changing the tender arrangements—the mess that we were left in by the previous Government? (7.09.2011)

Themes were recorded for each category for each country if they recurred in at least three examples within that category. For example, in the UK, a Leader would have to make at least three requests for information on the prime minister's actions for that to be recorded as a sub-category.

Having recorded an initial set of themes in each category in each country, I noted which seemed to recur across countries, and which seemed particular to some countries. Identifying sub-categories allowed me to explore the diversity of behaviours within each broader category. It helped uncover evidence of a) recurring types of behaviour across sessions; b) types of behaviour that are particular to each country. This analysis went further than the initial quantification of behaviour allowed by coding. It helped uncover further evidence about the types of behaviour corresponding to each function, and illustrated the diversity of behaviours of actors within cases, but also across cases. These analyses of qualitative examples are presented in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

### 3.5. Summary of Empirical Strategies for Chapters 4-9

This chapter has outlined the research design used in the thesis.

Data collected through the survey was used for the analyses in **Chapter 4**, which looks at the variation of questioning mechanisms across 31 countries.

Data collected and analysed through quantitative and qualitative analysis of parliamentary debates helped develop the empirical strategies in the chapters based on the four case studies.

**Chapter 5** investigates the rules of questioning and patterns of participation across all four case studies. This relied on data collected through the survey as well as on correspondence with officials and secondary literature; the descriptive analyses of the frequency of questioning relied on data collected through quantitative content analysis.

**Chapters 6 and 7** investigate the practice of **accountability** in questioning prime ministers. **Chapter 6** draws on content analysis regarding the topics on which prime ministers and ministers were asked questions and the form of address used in questioning prime ministers, complemented with research on prime ministerial responsibilities in each case study. **Chapter 7** draws on coding of types of accountability displayed in questions by different actors: whether they used questions to request information, to ask for explanations, to demand action or to ask for responses to accusations. It also draws on the systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

**Chapter 8** investigates the practice of **conflict** and **support** in questioning prime ministers. It draws on the coding of behaviour connected to conflict and support in questions and answers, as well as on research on the rules of procedure regarding language and topics of questions and answers of each case study. It also draws on an analysis of the frequency of interventions by the Speaker to police conflict during questioning sessions in the time period analysed in each country. Finally, it draws on the systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

**Chapter 9** investigates the practice of **territorial representation** in questioning prime ministers as a form of performing linkage and representation. It builds on the coding of behaviour in connection to territorial representation: explicit mentions of territorial references, and how these references are used. It also draws on systematic analysis of qualitative examples.

## **Chapter 4. Questioning Rules and Practices in 31 Parliamentary Democracies**

This chapter presents findings from the first cross-national survey of parliamentary mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question prime ministers. As discussed so far, whether or not parliaments provide a mechanism for parliamentary actors to question the head of government is an essential aspect of executive-legislative relations, yet one which remains severely undocumented. Considering the scarcity of information on this topic, the survey constitutes the essential first step in mapping the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments in parliamentary democracies. This chapter draws on a systematic examination of rules of procedure, followed by a consultation with practitioners and parliamentary officials to uncover aspects of practice and convention in the conduct of questioning.

Building on debates in the literature, the first section proposes a set of classifications of questioning mechanisms, exploring dimensions such as the collective or individualised nature of procedures, the extent to which procedures allow a more scripted or spontaneous dialogue, as well as the degree of probing to which prime ministers are subjected. The subsequent sections present empirical findings. The final section sets out conclusions and discusses the next steps in investigating questioning mechanisms further.

### **4.1. Towards a typology of questioning mechanisms: dimensions for classification and implications for questioning**

As discussed in Chapter 2, questioning mechanisms comprise procedures that allow parliamentary actors to interact with and address questions to members of the executive. The literature provides several classifications of executive oversight mechanisms, and of questioning mechanisms in general, but there has been no equivalent effort to identify and classify the specific mechanisms that include prime ministers. In investigating questioning mechanisms generally, previous classifications have identified variables that produce effects on the dialogue between questioners and ministers. Building on these insights, this section seeks to extend this conversation by identifying other variables that could potentially produce effects on how questioning is conducted. These variables are then used to map the variation of questioning mechanisms by classifying them and building descriptive typologies.

#### **1. What is the setting? Plenary or committee**

An important dimension highlighted in the literature on oral questions is the distinction between plenary and committee questioning mechanisms (Yamamoto 2008; Maffio 2002; Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014). The setting in which questioning takes place is likely to be significant for the dynamics of questioning prime ministers. Firstly, plenary mechanisms potentially allow a wider participation from parliamentarians, while committees involve a select participation. This means that a more diverse and varied range of members in both backbench and leadership roles gets to question the prime minister in the plenary, whilst in committee they may be questioned by a set of more experienced, specialised parliamentarians. Depending on this difference of setting, parliamentarians may assume different roles. As less partisan environments (Andeweg 2013), committees may facilitate more cross-party work, and more focus on scrutiny of the prime minister. In the open setting of the plenary, parliamentarians may be more eager to adopt a 'party member' role, aiming to attack the opposite side and defend their own side, or a 'constituency member' role, raising issues with local relevance. With respect to the topics that can be covered, questioning in the plenary may potentially allow scrutiny on a wide range of topics, and may take a general, topical form. Questioning in committees potentially allows more specialised questioning, focusing on a few specific topics.

## 2. What is the focus? Collective or individualised questioning

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous classifications have not identified systematically which members of the executive are targeted by different mechanisms: whether a given mechanism includes one or several ministers, and whether they also include prime ministers. Considering the tension between prime ministerial authority, collective government authority and individual ministerial authority discussed in Chapter 2, whether or not heads of government are questioned individually or together with ministers who are responsible for specific policy areas is likely to have an important effect on the types of questions that parliamentarians ask them, or on how prime ministers assume their role in answering questions. A first step, therefore, in evaluating how prime ministers are questioned about their different responsibilities, is to distinguish conceptually between collective and individualised questioning mechanisms.

## 3. Regularity: Routine or exceptional

In addition to the setting (plenary or committee) and focus of the mechanism (collective or individualised) another salient issue is that of **regularity**: How regularly are prime ministers questioned? Do the mechanisms require prime ministers to be present on a regular basis for questioning? Do they allow parliamentarians to question them on an exceptional basis? The regularity of questioning leads to a distinction between *routine* and *exceptional* questioning. The first implies that prime ministers are questioned recurrently. The second implies that MPs may summon prime ministers to parliament to answer questions when a significant event or fault occurs in the political system. This raises further questions about the types of issues that may be covered in such sessions: topical, current affairs in routine questioning; exceptional, urgent issues in exceptional questioning.

## 4. Frequency: How often are prime ministers questioned?

Within routine questioning there may be varying degrees of **frequency**: prime ministers may be questioned more, or less often. They may be summoned to parliament several times within the same week, every week, once a month, or less often than once a month. This again may have an impact on the types of topics that are discussed: frequent questioning may be associated with topical, current affairs; less frequent questioning may involve a periodic round-up of a few key topics, as well as more long-term policy issues. Frequent engagement creates a habitual dialogue with the prime minister. Less frequent engagement means that the sessions must maximize the opportunity, and may involve a more careful selection of issues to be discussed.

## 5. Question allocation: Who gets to ask questions?

Having established the setting, focus regularity and frequency of questioning, the next step is to investigate how participation is regulated: who gets to ask questions? I argue that before looking at notice requirements and permission for supplementary questions, **question allocation** should be considered first: regardless of whether advance notice is required for questions, a selection mechanism is necessary for deciding which members get to ask questions. A selection mechanism for question allocation comprises:

- The question **allocation method**, which specifies the decision rule for allocating questions among members;
- The question **allocation principle**, which specifies the criteria according to which the decision is made.

Whilst these dimensions refer in the first instance to formal rules, informal mechanisms may also affect participation. As Rasch (2011) suggests, the involvement of parties in selecting members who may ask questions is also relevant, as parties may act in various ways as gate-keepers to the questioning process. Considering the lack of previous studies on question allocation, the categories for each variable were



identified inductively from the rules of procedure of the parliaments investigated, as detailed in this chapter.

## 6. How is the interaction configured?

### Type of dialogue

Next, I include variables that produce effects on the dialogue between parliamentarians and prime ministers. One such variable is the **type of dialogue** configured through questioning. This refers to the requirement to give notice for questions. A procedure is defined as requiring notice if members must submit questions **in writing** before the oral questions session. Previous studies have also highlighted this dimension (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Yamamoto 2008; Salmond 2014; Russo and Wiberg 2011). Whether or not the prime minister knows the question in advance potentially has important consequences for the type of dialogue that ensues.

- If the question is known, the dialogue is at least partially **scripted**, as the prime minister will have prepared an answer and would be aware of potential follow-ups.
- If the question is not known, the dialogue is mainly **spontaneous**, as the prime minister could be aware of potential topics of questions, given topical issues at the time of questioning, but would not know what the questions are.

### Potential for probing

Another variable concerning dialogue is the degree to which follow-up questions are allowed, and from whom. For the purpose of classifying procedures, I define follow-up or supplementary questions as a subsequent question asked in connection to an initial question. The role of supplementary questions is to allow the initial questioner to ask a further, clarifying question, or to allow other members to intervene on a particular topic. This variable is important for assessing the potential for probing allowed by each mechanism - the extent to which procedures could facilitate a sustained line of questioning on each particular topic, and from whom. Previous studies have also classified whether questioning mechanisms allow other parliamentarians to intervene after an initial question, but only included this as a dichotomous variable: supplementary questions allowed or not (Russo and Wiberg 2011; Salmond 2014). I argue that an additional level is needed: whether supplementary questions are allowed, and *from whom*. The latter is important for determining exactly how participation is configured and whether probing on a given topic may be done by a single member or by several.

- If supplementary questions are not permitted, the dialogue is restricted to single exchanges between the prime minister and the questioner, and there is no further probing on a given question.
- Permitting supplementary questions potentially allows more engagement with a particular issue. If only the initial questioner is allowed to ask a supplementary question, the dialogue allows more probing, but it is still restricted to an exchange between the prime minister and the initial questioner, albeit a more extended exchange. If subsequent to the initial questioner other members may also intervene to ask supplementary questions, the questioning mechanism facilitates a broader participation on each topic, and more varied probing.

## 7. Time restrictions in questions and answers

This dimension concerns whether a given mechanism imposes speaking time limits for questions and/or for answers. This dimension is likely to affect how the dialogue proceeds, as it concerns the amount of time that questioners have available to make their case and pose a question, and the amount of time that prime ministers have to reply. The following effects may be plausible:

- If time limits for questions are short (perhaps, under a minute), questioners may only have time to ask a question, and not make any further remarks. Interventions are likely to focus on asking a

straight question, and less on making collateral remarks that may correspond to other functions, such as conflict or support. However, questioners may not have time to go into much depth on a particular issue. This effect may be mitigated if the mechanism allows supplementary questions.

- If time limits for questions are longer (for example, over 1 minute), questioners may have time to go into more depth on any particular issue, but they may also digress and use their speaking time to make additional remarks, corresponding to functions such as conflict or support.
- If time limits for answers are short (for example under a minute), prime ministers are constrained to give a brief reply, forcing them to be on point and not to digress. However, this may leave little time for the prime minister to go into depth on a particular issue.
- If time limits for answers are longer (for example, over 3 minutes), prime ministers may have time to go into greater detail on questions. On the other hand, this implies that they may use the extended speaking time for other purposes, such as to score political points.

As will be discussed in section 4.2.6, these effects can only be observed by analysing the practice of questioning in different countries.

## **8. Content restrictions in questions and answers**

This dimension concerns whether a given mechanism specifies content restrictions for questions and/or answers, and the degree to which they limit the topics that can be asked in questions, as well as the language that may be used in questions and answers. A given mechanism may have more or less restrictive rules with respect to what language is acceptable. We might expect that more restrictive rules are associated with less conflictual language in questions and answers, but this also depends on the extent to which the rules are enforced by the Speaker. Moreover, this is likely to be linked more closely to institutional culture. The effects of time and content limits can only be adequately observed by analysing speeches, and will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 8.

**Table 4.1. Typology of questioning mechanisms**

Feature	Categories	Implications for questioning
Setting of the mechanism	Plenary Committee	<p><b>Participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A plenary environment allows a wider participation in questioning</li> <li>➤ A committee environment involves a select participation in questioning</li> </ul> <p><b>Remit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Questioning in the plenary takes a more general form, potentially covering many topics</li> <li>➤ Questioning in committee is specialised, covering fewer topics</li> </ul>
Focus of the mechanism	Individualised Collective	<p>The <b>number of questions</b> addressed to the prime minister in a questioning session: The prime minister may be questioned less, on average, in a collective question than in an individualised session.</p> <p>The <b>types of questions</b> that prime ministers are asked and whether they are asked to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Give account for their own actions and decisions</li> <li>➤ Give account for the actions and decisions of the government or of individual ministers</li> </ul>
Regularity	Routine  Exceptional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Questions cover topical, current affairs, but may also include wider long-term policy planning</li> <li>➤ Questions cover topical or urgent affairs</li> </ul>
Frequency	Frequent engagement  Less frequent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Questions cover topical, current affairs</li> <li>➤ Questions cover a round-up of key topics and long-term policy planning</li> </ul>
Type of dialogue	<b>Scripted:</b> notice required  <b>Spontaneous:</b> notice not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The prime minister will have prepared an answer and would be aware of potential follow-ups. This may facilitate more provision of information.</li> <li>➤ The prime minister could be aware of potential topics of questions, but would not know what the questions are. This may facilitate less provision of information, but the prime minister is more put on the spot.</li> </ul>
Potential for probing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No probing</li> <li>- Probing from initial questioner only</li> <li>- Probing from initial questioner initially, other members subsequently</li> <li>- Probing from any members present</li> </ul>	Whether or not the mechanism allows supplementary questions, and from whom, determines the extent to which the prime minister is subject to more or less probing on each particular topic.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Implications for questioning</b>
Time limits for questions	Short time limits (0-1 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Brief, straight questions focused mainly on accountability, less on other functions.</li> <li>➤ Questioners cannot address issues in depth.</li> </ul>
	Long time limits (>1 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ More in-depth questions.</li> <li>➤ Questioners may digress and use questions for other functions.</li> </ul>
Time limits for answers	Short time limits (0-2 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Brief, straight replies, focused on answering the question, less on other functions.</li> <li>➤ Not enough time to answer in depth.</li> </ul>
	Longer time limits (>2 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Longer replies, going into greater depth on the question.</li> <li>➤ Using replies for other functions in addition to answering the question.</li> </ul>
Content restrictions for questions and answers	<p><b>Permissive rules:</b> fewer specifications about language and issues that are not permissible in questions and answers;</p> <p><b>Restrictive rules:</b> extensive specifications about language and issues that are not permitted in questions and answers</p>	The degree to which more permissive or restrictive rules affect the practice of questioning, e.g. display of conflictual language, may depend primarily on the degree to which the rules are enforced by the Speaker.

Table 4.1. lists all the features that describe the dynamics of questioning mechanisms. The following sections present empirical findings and discuss how they map onto these dimensions.

## 4.2. Survey findings

This section presents and discusses the survey findings, and maps the variation of questioning mechanisms on the dimensions discussed in section 4.1.

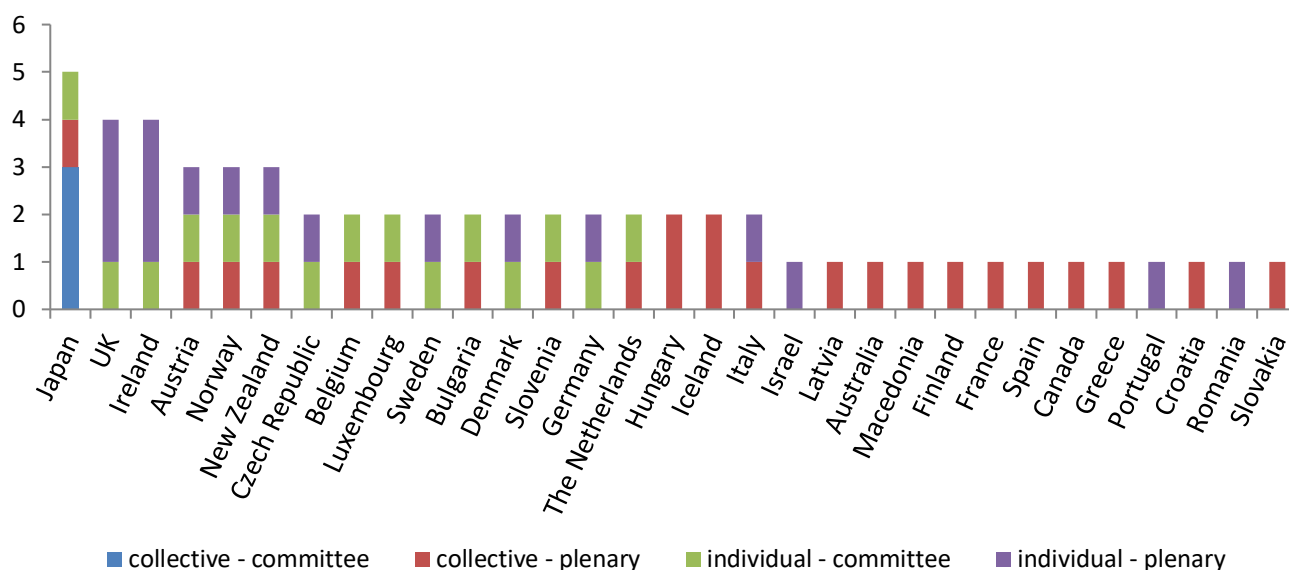
### 1. Setting and Focus: Committee or plenary/Individualised or collective

Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1 present all the oral questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers available in the lower chamber in every country in the sample, according to whether they are set in the plenary or in committee, and whether they allow collective or individualised questioning. As discussed in Chapter 3, the survey identified 59 such mechanisms across the 31 countries surveyed.

**Table 4.2. Setting and focus of mechanisms (N = number of mechanisms)**

	<b>Collective</b>	<b>Individualised</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Committee</b>	3	15	18
<b>Plenary</b>	24	17	41
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>59</b>

**Figure 4.1. Setting and focus of mechanisms (N = 59)**



Every country in the sample presents at least one mechanism for questioning the prime minister. This demonstrates the fact that providing parliamentarians with such a mechanism is an essential component of the institutional relationships between prime ministers and parliaments. Among these countries, there is a clear preference for collective questioning: prime ministers are questioned together with ministers in 22 out of 31 countries. The data also suggests a clear preference for questioning prime ministers in the plenary: 41 out of 59 procedures are plenary procedures, and all the countries in the sample have a plenary procedure that allows MPs to question prime ministers. Linking to the dimensions of the typology, this suggests that the preferred form of questioning prime ministers is one that allows wider participation in the public, visible setting of the plenary, and potentially a focus on a broader range of topics.

Individualised plenary procedures are less frequent: 13 countries have a distinct plenary mechanism for questioning the prime minister individually. Out of these, the mechanisms in Italy, New Zealand and Austria are urgent questioning mechanisms, which require the presence of the prime minister only if MPs submit a question that requires them to answer personally. Hence only ten countries in the sample allow routine questioning of the prime minister in an individualised setting. Thus, while individual questioning of the prime minister, as the UK's PMQs, is not exceptional, nor is it common. Opting for a collective procedure may have historical reasons: given the development of the office of prime minister as a 'first among equals' in most parliamentary democracies, with little elevation above the other ministers initially, an individualised procedure may not have been considered necessary at the time when parliaments introduced a questioning procedure. Even in the case of the UK, which is notorious for its individualised procedure, questioning in the House of Commons was collective until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kelly 2015). Given the pressures on plenary time in legislatures, it may have been preferable for parliaments to provide one questioning opportunity for the government as a whole, and not to offer a separate one for the prime minister. Linking to the typology, the preference for collective mechanisms raises questions about the type of questioning they allow, and how prime ministers are questioned compared to ministers.

The countries towards the left side of Figure 4.1 present an exceptional variety of questioning mechanisms. In the UK and Ireland MPs may question prime ministers through multiple plenary mechanisms on a weekly basis: aside from Oral Questions to the Taoiseach, the Irish Dáil allows party leaders to question the Prime Minister at Leaders' Questions, and to inquire about the parliamentary agenda at Business Questions. Aside from the weekly PMQs, the UK Prime Minister may also be questioned after giving statements in the House of Commons, and may be addressed urgent questions. Both countries also allow questioning by committees, as detailed in subsequent sections. Japan is the only country in the sample where the questioning of prime ministers takes place mainly in committees, as discussed further below.

## 2. Regularity and frequency of questioning

Considering the importance of the relationship between prime ministers and legislatures, two significant dimensions in classifying mechanisms are the regularity and frequency with which they are convened: are prime ministers questioned regularly? If yes, how often? This relates to the type of questioning permitted by different mechanisms: some mechanisms allow a regular, routine questioning of the prime minister, with varying degrees of frequency, whilst others allow occasional, exceptional questioning; this is particularly the case of committee procedures.

**Table 4.3. Regularity and frequency of questioning**

Regularity and frequency	Plenary	Committee	N
<b>Routine</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>
Every sitting day	3	-	3
At least once a week	14	-	14
At least once a month	9	3	12
At least once a year	2	3	5
<b>Exceptional<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>59</b>

Firstly, the analysis of regularity presented in Table 4.3. and Figure 4.2. suggests that a considerable number of parliaments (25) provide a routine procedure: regular contact with the prime minister is seen as necessary. Mechanisms that allow routine questioning of prime ministers take place mostly in the plenary: 26 procedures allow questioning of prime ministers at least once a week or at least once a month, and 23 of these are plenary procedures.

In the case of individualised procedures, the presence of the prime minister is required by definition, although in some cases other ministers may occasionally deputise. For example, in the UK, another senior minister deputises for the Prime Minister when s/he has engagements abroad (Kelly 2015). In the case of collective procedures, prime ministers attend together with ministers, and may not attend on every occasion. Australia, Canada and New Zealand are the only three cases where prime ministers are expected to attend every daily sitting of Question Time unless they have other engagements. Similar deputising conventions apply, with other senior ministers standing in as the lead answerers for the government. In Norway and Sweden the questioning mechanism is usually collective: a few government ministers attend

<sup>8</sup> This includes both procedures classified as 'as and when', which may request the presence of the prime minister and do so with a degree of frequency, as well as procedures classified as 'infrequent', which may request the presence of the prime minister but rarely do so in practice. For example, the Information Service of the German Bundestag indicated that, although committees may request the presence of the Chancellor, this rarely happens in practice, and there are no recent examples.

Question Time every week, and there is a special monthly individualised session where only the prime minister is questioned.

Some mechanisms are convened exceptionally. In the case of plenary procedures, this refers to urgent question mechanisms that require the presence of the prime minister as and when a question is addressed to them, as well as collective questioning procedures where prime ministers attend infrequently, such as Question Time in Austria and Spain. The nature of questioning in exceptional mechanisms is different: they allow parliamentarians to request the prime minister’s presence in parliament to answer specific questions, rather than to discuss routine, topical affairs. Sometimes this type of exceptional interaction is the preferred form of interaction with the prime minister in a particular parliament. For example, in the Austrian parliament, the Chancellor rarely attends the collective Question Time – sometimes less than once a year. Correspondence with officials indicated that this mechanism is seen by parliamentarians as perfunctory; instead, they use urgent questions to summon the Chancellor to answer questions on specific issues. In the case of committees, this category includes cases where the rules of procedure allow committees, or certain committees, to question the prime minister, but this is done infrequently or as and when the committee considers that a matter requires the presence of the prime minister.

**Figure 4.2. Mechanisms that allow routine questioning (N=34)**

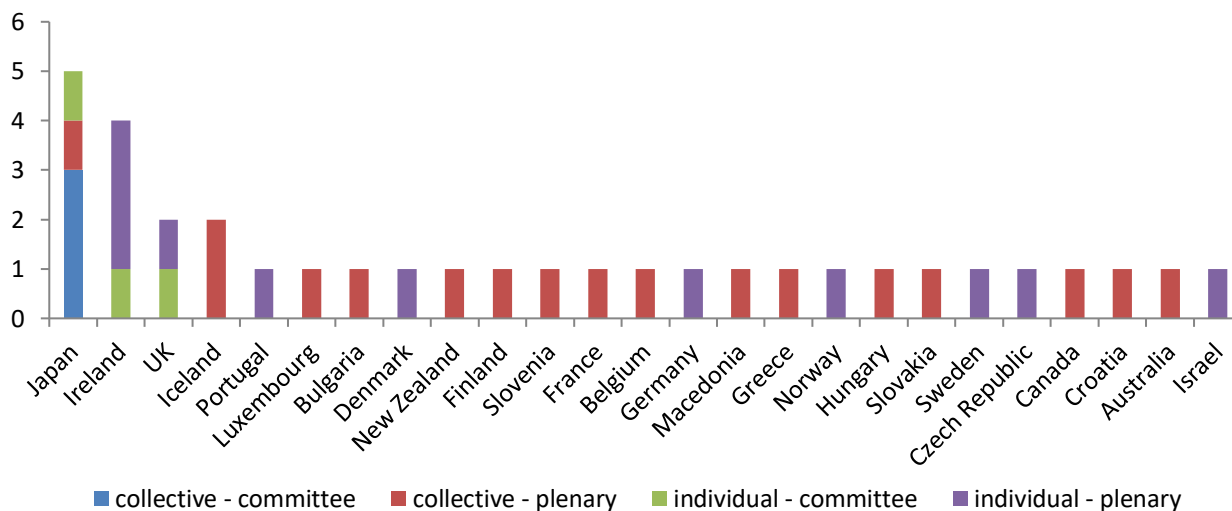


Table 4.3. and Figure 4.2. further illustrate the fact that the most frequent type of mechanism for routine questioning of prime ministers is the collective plenary mechanism.

Routine committee questioning is exceptional among the countries surveyed. The only two countries in the sample that hold routine committee questioning with prime ministers are Japan and the UK. The UK Liaison Committee comprises the Chairs of Select Committees, and has held hearings with the Prime Minister two or three times a year since 2002. Japan is an exceptional case among those surveyed here, given the predominant focus on questioning the Prime Minister in committees.<sup>9</sup> Aside from the Joint Meeting of the Committees on Fundamental National Policies, which is convened several times a year, the Prime Minister is also questioned by the Committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration, the Committee on Audit, and the Budget Committee. The Prime Minister also attends oral questions in the plenary, but this is seen as less important than questioning in committee. The frequency of committee questioning has even led to claims that committee questioning takes up too much of the Japanese Prime

<sup>9</sup> The description of procedures in Japan is based on the consultation with parliamentary officials in the Japanese Diet.

Minister's time. The Joint Meeting of the Committees on Fundamental National Policies is a distinct outlier among the procedures surveyed in this study. The committee comprises members of both houses, and allows party leaders to question prime ministers. It is the only bicameral committee in the sample. It was ostensibly inspired by the UK PMQs, but in practice it is a joint committee meeting that only allows questioning from party leaders.

A third case of routine committee questioning that has developed recently is Ireland. The recent round of reforms to the Standing Orders of the Irish Dáil in 2016, first considered by the Irish Constitutional Convention in 2014, introduced a requirement for the Taoiseach to appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairmen twice in a year, to be questioned on matters related to public policy. The format of the session was modelled on the Liaison Committee in the UK Parliament. The Working Group held its first ever hearing with the Taoiseach in May 2018, and a second meeting took place in May 2019.<sup>10</sup>

Other parliaments that allow committees to question prime ministers do so on an exceptional, rather than routine basis. In Sweden, committees do not generally hold hearings with the Prime Minister, but they may be occasionally questioned by the Constitution Committee, which examines compliance of ministerial behaviour with constitutional provisions. Similarly, the Prime Minister is not questioned routinely by committees in Norway, but their presence may occasionally be requested, particularly by the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs. In Finland it is customary for the Prime Minister to appear before the EU Affairs Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee ahead of EU Council meetings. As the Prime Minister represents Finland at the EU Council, s/he must inform the committees about the agenda for the upcoming Council meeting. The Finnish Prime Minister has also occasionally been questioned by the Audit Committee, which debates the Annual Government Report.

In other cases, such as New Zealand, Denmark, Germany or the Netherlands, correspondence with officials indicated that committees may in theory have the power to summon prime ministers for questioning, but this rarely happens in practice.

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<sup>10</sup> 10 and 30 May 2019 (Houses of the Oireachtas Debates 2018)  
<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/32/wgcc/debates-2/> Accessed 23/07/2019



### 3. Who gets to ask questions?

In investigating how questioning mechanisms structure the interaction between parliamentarians and prime ministers, another relevant aspect is who gets to ask questions and how participation is regulated: the *method* or decision rule used for allocating questions, and the *criteria* according to which this allocation is done. The categories included in the analysis were derived inductively from the rules of procedure of the parliaments in the sample. The analysis includes all routine plenary mechanisms, which are the only mechanisms that specified question allocation.

**Table 4.4. Question allocation method in routine plenary mechanisms**

Question allocation method	N=28
Allocation by the Speaker*	12
Allocation in the order of submission	7
Allocation within parliamentary party groups	3
Allocation by ballot	3
The order of interventions for each party group is specified in the rules of procedure	2
Allocation by the Business Committee	1
*Macedonia: the President/Speaker in consultation with leaders of parliamentary groups; Austria: The President/Speaker, in consultation with the President's Conference; Spain: The President/Speaker in consultation with the Board of Spokesmen	

In the case of mechanisms that require notice, questions may be taken in the order of submission, or they may be subject to different selection methods and criteria, as detailed in Table 4.4. above and Table 4.5. below. The second category in Table 4.4. assumes that questions are mainly taken in the order of submission, but includes some exceptions. In Ireland, the rules specify that questions submitted for Oral Questions to the Taoiseach may be grouped by topic by the Taoiseach, instead of being taken in the order of submission. A similar principle applies in Belgium, where questions are grouped by topic, and the Prime Minister answers questions in sets. In Latvia, the Speaker may change the order of questions submitted; in the Czech Republic, members signal the priority of their question upon submission by assigning them either number one (high priority) or two (lower priority). The questions are then printed on the order paper based on their assigned priority.

A majority of routine plenary mechanisms allow the Speaker or President of the chamber to decide the order in which questions are taken. This is particularly the case if notice is not required for questions: the Speaker is responsible for allocating questions, but there are often conventions or principles regarding exactly how that should be done. These conventions either concern the principle of alternating between groups, or of giving priority to the opposition, as detailed in Table 4.5. For example, in France, the Presiding Officer allocates questions alternately to the government and to the opposition. In Israel, the Speaker determines the order of questioning, but must ensure that at least three quarters of questions come from opposition parties.

In some cases rules of procedure formally recognise parties as part of the question allocation method. In Macedonia, Austria and Spain, the Speaker formally consults with leaders of parliamentary parties to decide the allocation of questions. In Greece and Hungary, the rules specify that the president of each parliamentary party group decides how questions are allocated within the group; a similar method is recognised as a matter of practice in Canada, where parties decide a list of questioners for Question Period (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Parties are also involved informally in question allocation, as detailed further below. Questioning mechanisms in the UK (PMQs), Croatia (Morning Question Time) and Slovakia (Question Time) use a random shuffle procedure to select questioners. In the case of the UK and Croatia, only notice of the name of the questioner is required for the ballot; in Slovakia, written notice of the

question is required. In New Zealand, the Business Committee meets weekly to decide the allocation of questions for each party group, proportional to their seat allocation in the House.

An important aspect not captured in written rules is the extent to which parties have an informal role in the selection of questioners and questions. The parliamentary officials contacted for the survey indicated that there is a degree of involvement of parties in the case of mechanisms that do not require notice, such as the oral questioning mechanisms in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, but also in Finland and the Netherlands. Party groups have internal mechanisms for determining their questioning strategy. The degree of involvement varies across systems, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5. In Australia, Canada and the Netherlands, parties have internal committees to manage the strategy of questioning. In Australia, the party tactics committee in effect decides the questioning strategy and vets the members who will ask questions. In Canada, a similar committee decides the list of questioners for Question Period. Correspondence with parliamentary officials indicated that party groups are also involved in question allocation in Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Norway. In the UK, Hazerika and Hamilton (2018) documented the fact that party involvement in the preparation of PMQs mainly concerns preparing the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. Government backbenchers are sometimes handed 'helpful questions' by party whips, which are meant to help the Prime Minister to present the strengths of government policy, but also to attack the opposition on vulnerable points (Chester and Bowring 1962; Bates et al. 2014). A similar practice exists in Australia, where such questions are termed 'Dorothy Dixers' (McGowan 2008; Larkin 2012). However, in the case of the UK, members must submit their names in a ballot to make it on the order paper. Subsequently, it depends on the Speaker to call members to ask questions. The degree to which parties can coordinate access to questioning under these circumstances is limited.

Table 4.5. shows that the criteria underpinning question allocation are generally group-focused: most mechanisms specify that questions must be either allocated proportionally to party groups or that there is an alternation between government and opposition groups. Where formal allocation criteria are individual-focused, this usually involves giving speaking rights to party spokespersons and leaders. In Australia, the Speaker must alternate between government and opposition, and must give priority to the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Wright and Fowler 2012). In Canada the Leader of the Opposition is allocated three questions, followed by questioners from the other parties in opposition, depending on the number of seats held (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Government backbenchers are conventionally called less frequently than opposition members during Question Period. In the UK, the Leader of the Opposition is allocated six questions during PMQs, followed by two questions from the leader of the second party in opposition (Kelly 2015). After the exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, the Speaker calls backbenchers from the government and from the opposition alternately.

**Table 4.5. Question allocation criteria in routine plenary mechanisms**

<b>Allocation criteria</b>	<b>Countries and mechanisms</b>	<b>N = 28*</b>
<b>Pre-determined order of questions</b>		<b>16</b>
<i>Order of submission</i>	Bulgaria (Oral questions) Norway (Ordinary Question Time) Czech Republic (Verbal interpellations)** Italy (Oral questions) Ireland (Oral Questions to the Taoiseach)	5
<i>Random allocation</i>	Slovakia (Question Time) UK (Prime Minister's Questions) Croatia (Morning Question Time)	3
<i>Proportionality</i>		
Proportionality, priority given to opposition parties	Portugal (Prime Ministerial debates) Romania (Prime Minister's Hour) Hungary (Oral Questions)	3
Proportionality	Greece (Current Questions) New Zealand (Oral questions) Spain (Oral questions) Japan (Oral Questions) Ireland (Leaders' Questions)***	5
<b>Order determined during questioning</b>		<b>13</b>
<i>Alternation between government and opposition</i>	Austria (Question Time) Belgium (Question Time) France (Questions to the Government) Luxembourg (Question Hour)	4
<i>Alternation between government and opposition, and rights given to individual actors</i>	Australia (Question Time) Canada (Question Period) UK (Prime Minister's Questions)	3
<i>Explicit priority for the opposition</i>	Israel (Question Hour) Slovenia (Oral questions)	2
<i>Allocation decided by the Speaker: no criteria specified</i>	Norway (Oral Questions) The Netherlands (Question Time) Finland (Question Time) Denmark (Prime Minister's Question Hour)	4

\*PMQs is included twice in this table, but only counted once. At PMQs, question allocation is partly pre-determined before the session (by random allocation through the ballot), and partly determined during the questioning session when the Speaker alternates between government and opposition as members rise to 'catch the Speaker's eye'.

\*\*The order is based on the priority indicated by members when submitting the question.

\*\*\*Participation is restricted to party leaders, who are called by the Speaker according to a rota system.

The regulation of participation is important for how questioning is conducted. It determines whether prime ministers mainly interact with the opposition, and whether government backbenchers are also involved. It also determines whether they interact with parliamentarians in leadership positions, and the balance between the participation of leaders and that of backbenchers. Considering their institutional roles, different actors may perform different types of scrutiny.

#### 4. Type of dialogue and probing

As discussed in section 4.1., the requirement to give advance notice for questions and the permission to ask supplementary questions potentially have important implications for how the dialogue is configured. If parliamentarians must give written notice for questions, the topic is known in advance, and the dialogue has less spontaneity. If questions do not require notice, the topic is not known in advance, and the degree of spontaneity and of exposing the prime minister to unknown questions is higher. The categories in the column classify the dynamics of probing, as explained in section 4.1.6: whether supplementary questions are allowed, and from whom. Table 4.6. summarises the distribution of all plenary mechanisms according to these categories.

**Table 4.6. Written notice and supplementary questions**

	<b>No probing</b>	<b>On each question, probing may come from initial questioner only</b>	<b>On each question, probing may come from initial questioner initially, other members subsequently</b>	<b>On each question, probing may come from any members present</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Notice required</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b> (Oral Questions) <b>Croatia</b> (Morning Question Time) <b>Italy</b> (Oral questions) <b>Italy</b> (Urgent Questions) <b>Luxembourg</b> (Question Hour) <b>Hungary</b> (Oral Questions) <b>Hungary</b> (Prompt Question Hour)	<b>Austria</b> (Urgent Questions) <b>Belgium</b> (Question Time) <b>Czech Republic</b> (Verbal interpellations) <b>Greece</b> (Current Questions) <b>Macedonia</b> (Oral Questions) <b>New Zealand</b> (Urgent Questions) <b>Slovakia</b> (Question Time) <b>Slovenia</b> (Oral Questions) <b>Spain</b> (Oral Questions) <b>Norway</b> (Ordinary Question Time) <b>Portugal</b> (Prime Ministerial debates) <b>Japan</b> (Oral questions)	<b>Austria</b> (Question Time) <b>Germany</b> (Questions to the Federal Chancellor) <b>Ireland</b> (Oral questions to the Taoiseach) <b>The Netherlands</b> (Question Time) <b>Norway</b> (Oral Question Time) <b>Romania</b> (Prime Ministerial Debates) <b>UK</b> (Urgent Questions) <b>Iceland</b> (Oral questions with notice) <b>Latvia</b> (Oral Questions)	<b>New Zealand</b> (Oral Questions)	<b>29</b>
<b>Notice not required</b>	<b>France</b> (Questions to the Government) <b>Finland</b> (Question Time) <b>Ireland</b> (Business Questions to the Taoiseach) <b>Israel</b> (Question Hour)	<b>Canada</b> (Question Period) <b>Ireland</b> (Leaders' Questions) <b>Sweden</b> (Question Time) <b>Iceland</b> (Oral Questions without notice) <b>UK</b> (PMQs)	-	<b>Australia</b> (Question Time) <b>Denmark</b> (Prime Minister's Question Hour) <b>UK</b> (Prime Ministerial statements)	<b>12</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>41</b>

A majority of questioning mechanisms require notice for questions (29 out of 41) and allow supplementary questions to different degrees (30 out of 41). In mechanisms that do not allow follow-ups, the dialogue is restricted to single exchanges between the prime minister and parliamentarians, either on a question submitted in advance, as in Bulgaria, Greece and Hungary, or on a question asked spontaneously, as in France, Israel, Finland and Sweden. Given that only such brief Q-and-A exchanges are allowed, this type of mechanism may allow more questions during a single session, but limits probing on each particular topic to an exchange between the prime minister and the initial questioner.

As discussed in section 4.1.6, 'notice' refers to the fact that questions must be submitted *in writing* before questioning takes place. The UK PMQs is an exception to this definition: members need only submit their name and a generic question regarding the prime minister's engagements in order to be included in the shuffle; it is not mandatory for members to submit a full question in writing, although sometimes they choose to do so (Kelly 2015). Moreover, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the second party in opposition are allocated a set number of questions, and are not required to give notice for their questions. The Speaker also calls members who rise during PMQs to ask spontaneous questions. Since notice is only required in order for the initial set of questioners to be included in the shuffle, PMQs is classified as *not* requiring notice.

As discussed in section 4.1.6, 'supplementary questions' refer to subsequent questions asked in connection to an initial question. Permitting supplementary questions potentially allows more time for engagement with a particular issue. The dialogue is still restricted to an exchange between the prime minister and the initial questioner for countries in the second column. In the UK, the member who poses a question is entitled to ask a supplementary, particularly if they have submitted a substantive question in the shuffle (Kelly 2015). In practice, the Leader of the Opposition is allowed six supplementary questions, and the leader of the second opposition party is allowed two, but the Q-and-A exchanges between the Prime Minister and backbenchers very rarely involve a supplementary question. Probing takes place in single Q-and-A exchanges between the Prime Minister and the questioner – hence the inclusion of PMQs in the second column. By allowing other members to intervene after the initial supplementary, mechanisms in columns three and four extend the potential for probing on each topic raised through a question. The rules corresponding to mechanisms in the third column specify that the member who asks a question is the first who is recognised to ask a follow-up, and other members may be recognised subsequently. In most cases this provision is enforced strictly: in Ireland, the member who has submitted a written question on a particular topic is the first recognised by the Speaker to ask a supplementary question. Other members may intervene thereafter. In Australia, supplementary questions are, according to the Standing Orders, permitted from any member present. In practice, they are indeed requested by any member present - not just by the initial questioner. But they are requested very rarely. These patterns, which reveal the importance of conventions and practice in the operation of parliamentary mechanisms, will be detailed further in Chapter 5. In order to dig further into the effects of variables on the type of questioning that they allow, the next section discusses how notice requirements and the potential for probing combine to create more or less exposure of the prime minister.

## 5. Questioning exposure

The type of dialogue and the degree of probing allowed by different mechanisms each produce effects on how questioning is conducted, but what is the combined effect of these variables? How is the prime minister questioned in mechanisms with combinations of a) more or less spontaneous questions; b) more or less probing from parliamentarians? An additional relevant variable is the frequency with which the procedure is convened. The operation of these variables described above points to a measure of **questioning exposure**. I define questioning exposure as the degree to which prime ministers are subject to a frequent questioning exercise that requires them to respond unscripted, on the spot, and with extended participation from parliamentarians.

Measuring **questioning exposure** in regularised plenary procedures thus comprises the following dimensions:

1. Type of dialogue and potential for probing
  - the degree to which the dialogue is scripted (notice is required) or spontaneous (notice is not required)
  - whether supplementary questions are allowed or not
  - who is allowed to ask supplementary questions
2. Frequency of questioning.
  - We would expect the prime minister to be less exposed in a scripted questioning procedure, where they are aware of topics, as opposed to a spontaneous questioning procedure. We would also expect the degree of exposure to be lower if supplementary questions are not allowed, and to increase as more members are allowed to intervene and probe.
  - We would expect that a mechanism convened more frequently provides higher exposure than one convened less frequently.

**Table 4.7. Exposure through questioning: building the categories**

	Supplementary questions	
	Not allowed	Allowed
<b>Notice required</b>	<i>Low exposure</i>	<i>Moderate exposure</i>
<b>Notice not required</b>	<i>Moderate exposure</i>	<i>High exposure</i>

**Table 4.8. Questioning exposure and frequency**

Frequency	Questioning exposure			N
	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>At least once a year</b>	-	Germany Israel	-	<b>2</b>
<b>At least once a month</b>	-	Belgium Japan Macedonia Norway Portugal Slovakia Slovenia	Denmark Sweden	<b>9</b>
<b>At least once a week</b>	Bulgaria Luxembourg Hungary Croatia	Czech Republic Greece Iceland (Oral questions with notice) Ireland (Oral Questions to the Taoiseach) France Finland Ireland (Business Questions)	Iceland (Oral questions without notice) Ireland (Leaders' Questions) UK (PMQs)	<b>14</b>
<b>Every sitting day</b>	-	New Zealand	Canada Australia	<b>3</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>

Most mechanisms subject prime ministers to a moderate level of exposure, and this is distributed relatively evenly between less frequent, but still regularised questioning at least once a month, and frequent questioning at least once a week. The distribution of mechanisms based on frequency and the type of questioning they allow raises questions about the role of the mechanism in the political system, and whether different mechanisms play different functions.

Mechanisms with high exposure and frequent questioning such as those in Canada, Australia, the UK, and Iceland, may be designed to facilitate dialogue on topical, current affairs. In these mechanisms the prime minister is subject to spontaneous questions from members on a weekly or daily basis – questions are therefore likely to refer primarily to current, topical affairs. These are the mechanisms that are the most likely to put the prime minister on the spot on current affairs – they are ‘routine check-up’ mechanisms. Mechanisms with high exposure but lower frequency, such as those in Denmark and Sweden, may have the role to create a ‘monthly round-up’ of topical affairs.

Procedures with moderate exposure but convened frequently may also allow some more long-term issues to be raised, and may go beyond topical current affairs, given that members are required to submit questions in writing. Their role may be to create a more structured weekly or monthly dialogue between the prime minister and parliamentarians, whilst also allowing room for topical affairs to be discussed. In the case of moderate exposure and monthly questioning, these mechanisms may play a similar ‘monthly round-up’ role, but given that some mechanisms require notice for questions, the prime minister has more time to prepare answers on specific issues.

The potential roles of low exposure, frequent mechanisms, are less clear based simply on this classification. Questions that require written notice but allow no follow-ups, each week, may lead to scripted, closed exchanges, which allow very little engagement between the prime minister and parliamentarians.

This measure refers to exposure through each particular questioning mechanism. But prime ministers may also be more or less exposed to questioning at the system level: in countries such as Ireland, the UK and Japan, where they are questioned through multiple plenary and committee mechanisms, prime ministers are arguably more exposed to questioning than in countries where there is only one mechanism, such as Canada or Australia.

## 6. Time restrictions for questions and answers

As discussed in section 4.1., time restrictions potentially produce effects on how the dialogue is structured, in terms of the depth of scrutiny permitted, but also in terms of whether a parliamentarian or the prime minister may use their speaking time to perform other functions aside from asking or answering a question. Time constraints are generally an issue for the plenary, where more actors need to be accommodated to speak. This is why it is primarily plenary mechanisms that specify time limits for both questions and answers.

**Table 4.9. Time restrictions in questions and answers**

Setting of procedure	N	Time restrictions	
		Questions	Answers
Plenary	41	33	27
Committee	18	1	0
<b>N</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>

The distribution of time limits for questions is the following:

**Table 4.10. Distribution of time limits for questions and answers**

Time limits for questions	N	Time limits for answers	N
No limits specified	25	No limits specified	32
Short: 0-1 minutes	10	Short: 0-2 minutes	11
Moderate: 1-2 minutes	14	Extended: 2-5 minutes	15
Extended: >2 minutes	7	Other rules	1
Other rules	3	<b>N</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>59</b>		

Some mechanisms only allow short time limits for questions. The shortest time limits in the sample correspond to the mechanisms in Australia (30 seconds) and Canada (35 seconds). Most mechanisms allow a moderate time limit of 2 minutes, which may permit both focus on formulating a straight question, but also time to go into sufficient depth on a particular issue. Given its frequency among cases, this category was included as a distinct item in the table, and classified as moderate. Mechanisms in this group include collective procedures in Belgium, Bulgaria and Croatia, as well as the individualised procedures in Norway, Israel and Denmark. Some procedures allow particularly long time limits for questions, for example Greece (4 minutes), Belgium and Romania (5 minutes), and Macedonia (10 minutes). We would expect questioning in these procedures to take a more debating-type format than in other procedures. Some procedures (classified in the table as ‘other rules’) only specify the total amount of time allocated for both the question and the answer: 15 minutes for each Q-and-A exchange in the case of Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland, and 5 minutes in Spain. In Portugal, the time allocated to each party group to ask questions depends on the number of seats held in the Assembly – the timings for each legislature are included in an Annexe to the rules of procedure. Opposition parties speak first, in descending order of their proportion of seats.

In the case of answers, most mechanisms that specify a time limit allow the respondent a longer time to reply to questions. In case of short time limits, Canada appears again exceptional by only allowing 35 seconds for a reply. The other mechanism that allows very brief answers is Business Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland (1 minute). The remaining 9 mechanisms in the second row allow 2 minutes for answers. The collective mechanisms in Croatia, Latvia and Luxembourg allow the Prime Minister 5 minutes to respond to the question, as do the individualised mechanisms in the Czech Republic and Romania.

The interaction between the duration of questions and the duration of answers may also have an effect on the type of dialogue that ensues. Most mechanisms in the sample allow similar durations for questions and answers, i.e. the duration for questions is proportional or roughly equal to the duration for answers, but there are some exceptions. Australia presents the highest contrast, with very short time limits for questions (30 seconds) but longer time limits for answers (3 minutes). The effects of this discrepancy will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The other notable exception is the Czech Republic, where questions may take up to 2 minutes, whilst 5 minutes are allowed for answers.



## 7. Content restrictions for questions and answers

Table 4.11. Content restrictions for questions and answers

Setting of procedure	N	Content restrictions	
		Questions	Answers
Plenary	41	27	4
Committee	18	1	0
<b>N</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>4</b>

A considerable number of plenary mechanisms specify some content restrictions for questions, and many fewer specify limits for answers. These restrictions mainly refer to the topics that may be addressed in questions, but also to the language that may be used. With respect to topic, parliamentary rules in New Zealand, Canada, Iceland, Ireland and Norway explicitly require that questions relate to the remit of the minister or Prime Minister. Language restrictions are meant to limit conflictual exchanges by disallowing insults, imputations, 'subjective evaluations' (for example in Germany and Latvia), accusations, but also to keep the discussion on point by disallowing hypothetical questions (for example in Australia, Canada and Israel). This distribution suggests that some parliaments sought to limit exchanges to questioning and to avoid the occasion turning into debate. For example, the rules in Greece, Iceland and Germany specify that questions must be brief and topical, while those in Macedonia say they should be 'short and precise'. Some mechanisms also explicitly specify that the Speaker will judge the admissibility of questions.

Where procedures explicitly limit the content of answers, in Ireland, Australia, the UK and New Zealand, this refers to requirements that answers must relate to the original question. None of these four mechanisms mention restrictions with respect to the language used in answers, though general rules regarding the rules of language in parliamentary debates also apply to questioning mechanisms. The degree to which rules are more restrictive or permissive, and the degree to which they are enforced, as well as their effects on questioning, will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

### **4.3. Chapter conclusions**

This chapter surveyed questioning mechanisms across parliamentary democracies and identified variables that are likely to affect aspects of the interaction between parliamentarians and prime ministers. These variables were then used to classify questioning mechanisms, and to build descriptive typologies. The wide variation among countries suggests that there are different ways to configure the relationship between the prime minister and parliament through questioning mechanisms.

#### **Setting, focus and regularity**

The survey shows that all 31 parliaments included in the study provide a mechanism for routine questioning of the prime minister, confirming that this relationship is a key component of the politics of parliamentary democracies. I also found that a majority of routine questioning procedures are set in the plenary, and among these, collective plenary procedures are the most frequent: 22 countries question prime ministers together with ministers, whilst only 13 use individualised plenary mechanisms. Routine questioning in committee remains exceptional, with only four countries - the UK, Ireland and Japan, as well as Finland on the occasion of EU Council meetings - organising regular committee hearings with prime ministers. Some parliaments also provide 'fire alarm' mechanisms in the form of urgent questions, to allow parliamentarians to summon prime ministers in parliament to answer particular questions.

The fact that a majority of mechanisms are set in the plenary suggests a preference for questioning the prime minister in the open forum of the chamber, with a wider participation from parliamentarians and a focus on general, topical affairs. With respect to the higher incidence of collective plenary mechanisms compared to individualised mechanisms, I posited that the reasons for this institutional choice may be historical, and may have to do with the issue of allocating plenary time, as well as with the ambiguity of the status of the prime minister at the time when parliaments introduced questioning procedures: a 'first among equals' minister may not have required a separate questioning mechanism. Whether prime ministers are questioned alone or together with ministers may produce further consequences for the conduct of questioning. Firstly, a collective mechanism may limit the time and number of questions dedicated to the prime minister. Secondly, this raises questions about which type may be conducive to more or less focus on the prime minister's actions and decisions. Will prime ministers be asked more about their own responsibilities and decisions in a collective forum, where ministers can answer for their own portfolios? Will they also be asked to speak for the government when they are questioned individually, or would this lead to exclusive focus on their actions and decisions? These issues will be explored in Chapter 6.

#### **Participation: who gets to ask questions?**

The second set of features concerns how plenary mechanisms regulate participation. As plenary time is scarce, accommodating members to speak requires some regulation. I firstly singled out question selection method and criteria as the key variables, and inductively identified categories for each by examining the rules of procedure. Again, this issue touched on a fundamental problem of time allocation in the plenary: how can time be managed to allow more actors to intervene to question the prime minister? How should questions be allocated? On which criteria? The regulation of participation determines who gets to question prime ministers, and whether the questioning mechanism is mainly an interaction between the prime minister and the opposition, or whether government backbenchers are also involved. It also determines whether they interact with other parliamentarians in leadership positions, and what the balance is between the participation of leaders and that of backbenchers. Considering their institutional roles, different actors may perform different types of scrutiny. We may expect to see different types of interactions in mechanisms that privilege leaders, compared to those where backbenchers are also allowed to participate. We may also observe differences between

mechanisms that privilege the opposition and those where there is a balance between government and opposition participation. These issues will be explored further in the next chapters. Chapter 5 will document how four different plenary mechanisms organise participation.

### **Type of dialogue, probing and exposure**

The third set of variables concerned the type of dialogue allowed, and the potential for probing. I found that most mechanisms require notice for questions, and allow supplementary questions to a degree. I also asked how these features combine to create more or less exposure of the prime minister during questioning, and how questioning exposure combines with frequency. I found that most mechanisms allow moderate exposure of the prime minister during questioning. This classification in turn raised questions about the roles of different mechanisms in the political system: some may be meant to facilitate an intense, routine-check up on topical, current affairs; others may be used for a periodic round-up of topical affairs. The effects of these features on the type of questioning that ensues will be explored in subsequent chapters.

### **Time and content restrictions**

I also found that many plenary procedures mention time restrictions for questions and answers: most of them allow short or moderate time limits for questions; a majority of those who require limits for answers allow longer time limits. Linking to the hypothesised effects in the typology, the next issue to investigate is whether time limits produce observable effects on the types of questions that get asked. Are shorter questions associated with straight accountability questions? In the case of answers, longer time limits could either be associated with more detailed, straight answers connected to the question, or may allow prime ministers to use their speaking time as a platform to attack the opposition or to support their own side. Analysis of practice is essential for exploring these issues, which will be taken up in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

### **Geographic variation**

A common question in comparative politics is whether countries differ along geographic lines, or depending on historical heritage. This chapter suggests that there do not appear to be distinguishable patterns of difference between countries with different heritages. Some commonalities among Anglophone countries point to similar practices in Westminster parliaments, but there is no clearly distinguishable 'Anglophone' or 'European' cluster. Canada and Australia remain similar in allowing collective, spontaneous questioning of the prime minister in the plenary on every sitting day. New Zealand also retains a collective style of questioning, but it differs from Canada and Australia in regulating the plenary interaction in a stricter way by requiring notice for questions and assigning question selection to the Business Committee. The UK famously developed an individualised mechanism, as did Ireland, but even between the two there are notable procedural differences. The main difference between most continental European countries and Anglophone democracies is the provision for an 'interpellation' mechanism, which allows a debate with the prime minister, and which may or may not end with a vote of no confidence. Interpellations are 'fire alarm' mechanisms and are structured as a debate, rather than as a question-and-answer exchange. As these mechanisms are meant to facilitate debate, and not questioning, they fall outside the scope of this study.

In Europe, the sample does not suggest any macro-level differences between countries from the former communist bloc and Western European democracies. In fact, countries appear dissimilar within each cluster. The Czech Republic has an individualised plenary mechanism, whilst Slovakia opted for collective questioning of the prime minister. Collective plenary questioning is also a feature of questioning in Hungary and Bulgaria. Romania opted for an individualised plenary mechanism in 2015, but analysis of parliamentary proceedings suggested that it is in fact rarely used – even though it is supposed to be

convened once a month, practice suggests it did not meet more than once a year since its introduction. One notable pattern among Western European countries is the disposition of Nordic countries towards individualised questioning – Norway, Sweden and Denmark all allow individualised questioning of the Prime Minister. These mechanisms are fairly recent: Denmark introduced Prime Minister’s Question Hour on 2013, Sweden in 2005, and Norway in 1996. Further research could seek to unpack differences between countries further, and to trace what drives them.

### **Combinations of types**

Some countries, for example Canada and Australia, but also Greece, Spain and France only provide for the Prime Minister to be questioned through one mechanism. Other countries organise questioning through multiple mechanisms. Some countries, notably Ireland and the UK, present an exceptional variety of questioning mechanisms. In the UK, the Liaison Committee was introduced specifically in order to facilitate a different type of questioning to the plenary PMQs (Kelso et al. 2016). In Ireland, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, Leaders’ Question was introduced to allow more spontaneous, topical questioning than Oral Questions to the Taoiseach (MacCarthaig 2005). As questioning may take different forms under different types of mechanisms, this raises questions about the roles of different mechanisms in the political system, and about which configuration of mechanisms would increase the degree to which the prime minister is held to account. Is one mechanisms sufficient, or would multiple mechanisms of different types be more suitable?

Intuitively, the second option would appear more appropriate. The various aspects of prime ministerial responsibilities would need to be covered from different angles: by allowing parliamentarians an opportunity for routine, topical questions; by providing a forum, either in the plenary or in committee, for more long-term, strategic policy issues; and by providing mechanisms which allow parliamentarians to summon prime ministers to parliament in the case of exceptional events. This also raises a question of saturation: how many different mechanisms are needed for prime ministers to be adequately held to account, i.e. for parliamentarians to be able to target various aspects of their activities? How many mechanisms are needed in order not to leave ‘accountability gaps’? For example, exclusive focus on routine issues might hinder the extent to which prime ministers, as leaders of governments, are questioned on long-term strategic issues. Having the prime minister present constantly to be questioned in the chamber might deviate the procedure towards an opportunity for point-scoring and more political interaction, rather than scrutiny of what the prime minister is actually responsible for. Subsequent chapters will address these issues, and discuss how different types of mechanisms may be associated with different types of questioning.

### **Moving forward: Case studies**

The classifications and the empirical exploration in this chapter provide theoretical and empirical grounds for selecting cases in order to further investigate the practice of questioning prime ministers. As detailed in Chapter 3, my selection strategy aimed to illustrate diversity of types, but also to identify contrasting comparator cases for the notorious UK PMQs.

The frequency of routine plenary mechanisms across countries prompted further investigation into how this type of questioning takes place. Next, considering the mission to identify comparator cases for the UK, and the salience of the individualised/collective dimension suggested by the survey, I selected another individualised plenary procedure (Ireland: Oral Questions to the Taoiseach) and two collective plenary procedures (Canada and Australia). In selecting these cases I also sought to vary the type of dialogue and the degree of probing allowed. I selected cases that offer varying degrees of spontaneity in questioning: Ireland, which requires written notice for questions; the UK, which only requires notice for the name of the questioners at PMQs; and Canada and Australia, where no notice is required. On the

exposure dimension, this compares three high exposure mechanisms (the UK, Australia and Canada) with a moderate exposure mechanism (Ireland). Having charted rules of procedure at the macro-level, the next chapter looks at these variables in more detail in four countries, and begins to discuss how rules affect practice.

## Chapter 5. Questioning Prime Ministers: Rules, Conventions and Practice

Having surveyed questioning mechanisms across 31 parliamentary democracies, the next step is to investigate in more depth how different types of mechanisms operate and what functions they play in different political systems. For this purpose, the next five chapters draw on analysis of rules and practice in four cases. Focusing on the variables identified in earlier chapters, the aim of this first chapter in the sequence is to introduce the case studies (Canada, Australia, the UK and Ireland) by providing a detailed examination of rules and conventions in each case, as well as an overview of the patterns of participation by different actors, thus providing a basis for the next four chapters to explore the content of questions and answers and the functions of questioning sessions.

First, in section 5.1, I describe the status and history of questioning mechanisms, in order to situate them in the political landscape of each case study country. In section 5.2 I look at the rules that govern them, and discuss the roles of written rules and conventions. Next, to begin investigating how mechanisms operate in practice, in section 5.3 I examine and compare the frequency and volume of questioning in collective and individualised mechanisms. This gives us a first glimpse into the type of interaction between prime ministers and parliaments allowed by these mechanisms. It asks:

- How often are prime ministers questioned in collective and individualised procedures?
- How many questions are they asked in collective and individualised procedures?

Having established how frequently prime ministers are questioned, and how much, in section 5.4 I turn to explore the actors they interact with and how they participate in questioning:

- How do rules and conventions configure participation in questioning?
- Which parliamentary actors participate?
- To what extent do political parties control participation?

To do this, section 5.4 first discusses the types of parliamentary actors in each legislature. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, looking at the interaction between prime ministers and parliaments requires a disaggregation of parliaments into the actors that comprise them. The literature emphasises the importance of government/opposition and leadership/backbench status for the behaviour of parliamentary actors. Building on this discussion, it is important to understand the sets of actors with whom prime ministers interact, and how the rules configure their participation. Hence, I look at how access to questioning is configured: the process of question selection and the involvement of political parties in deciding which members get to ask questions. Next, I look at the degree to which follow-up questions are allowed, and map the interactions that are possible within the rules. Building on this, in section 5.5 I present data on the patterns of participation of different actors, and discuss how they relate to the operation of rules and conventions. In section 5.6 I review time restrictions for questions and answers and discuss their implications. In the concluding section I discuss the questions raised by the operation of rules and conventions and how they will be explored in subsequent chapters.

## 5.1. History and Status of Mechanisms

### Canada: Question Period in the House of Commons

Question Period in the Canadian House of Commons is convened every day when the House is sitting. It is a prominent occasion of the parliamentary week, and has always taken up a significant proportion of the media coverage of parliament (Franks 1985; Docherty 2014). Oral questions were introduced in the House of Commons towards the end of the 19th century, but the rules regarding the conduct of questioning were not fully codified until 1967, and continued to develop based on practice and precedent (O'Brien and Bosc 2017).

Question Period has always operated as a collective procedure: the Prime Minister answers questions together with ministers, and there is no rota system for ministers to answer on different days. It is recognised as an essential part of the Canadian Prime Minister's interaction with parliament (Weller 1985; Crimmins and Nesbitt-Larking 1996). As will be discussed in subsequent sections, the behaviour of MPs at Question Period has long been seen as adversarial and controlled by parties (Franks 1985).

As noted in Chapter 4, some countries that have a collective questioning mechanism have introduced an individualised procedure that would allow exclusive questioning of the prime minister. Recently, the Liberal Party proposed a Wednesday slot for questioning the Prime Minister in its platform for the 2015 general election.<sup>11</sup> Although this has not yet been codified as a rule, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau began answering all questions for the government on some Wednesdays from 5 April 2017.<sup>12</sup>

### Australia: Question Time in the House of Representatives

Question Time in the House of Representatives is also convened every day when the House is sitting. It attracts considerable media attention, and it is a key moment in the interaction between government and opposition, as well as a testing opportunity for the Prime Minister (Weller 1985; Fenna et al. 2013; Parliament of Australia 2019c).

Oral questions have been permitted in the House of Representatives since the sitting of Australia's first parliament in 1901, but the procedure was not codified in Standing Orders or included as an item of business until 1950 (Wright and Fowler 2012). The rules of Question Time, in particular those regarding restrictions of content for questions and answers, developed over time as a result of practice and issues on which Speakers made rulings. Similarly to Canada, Question Time has always operated as a collective procedure, with ministers and the Prime Minister attending together, and no separate questioning occasions for individual ministers or for the Prime Minister.

Question Time is seen as spontaneous and theatrical, but also controlled to a significant degree by parties, as will be discussed in subsequent sections. The most recent significant reform, the effects of which will be discussed in Chapter 8, has been a change in the Standing Orders requiring the Speaker to call ministers or the Prime Minister to order if they are not answering with relevance to the question. Although there have been debates about changing aspects of Question Time, there have not been initiatives to overhaul procedures significantly or to introduce an individualised procedure.

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<sup>11</sup> CBC News (2015) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-question-period-changes-1.3355531> (Accessed 30/07/2019)

<sup>12</sup> The date was provided upon request by the parliamentary clerk with whom I corresponded.

## **UK: Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons**

Prime Minister's Questions is convened every Wednesday when the House of Commons is sitting. It is one of the highlights of the parliamentary week, and attracts substantial media attention. The main focus is the encounter between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, which is often reported on as a match, with media offering verdicts about the winner and loser of a particular session. It is a significant test of leadership for both sides, with careful preparation being undertaken by their teams ahead of each PMQs (Hazerika and Hamilton 2018).

Historically, the British Prime Minister answered questions together with other ministers; questions to the Prime Minister were first grouped at the end of the 19th century (Kelly 2015). The current format, which involves having a fixed slot dedicated exclusively to questions to the Prime Minister, was introduced in 1961.

The procedure gradually became more individualised over time. Initially, the Prime Minister deferred some of the questions to ministers, but the practice subsided under Margaret Thatcher, who started to answer more questions herself (Bates et al. 2014; Hazerika and Hamilton 2018). Whilst initially there were two slots for questioning the Prime Minister for 15 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, this practice changed at the start of Tony Blair's premiership, when the Wednesday 30-minute slot was introduced.

Prime Minister's Questions has frequently been criticised for its adversarial and theatrical character. It is also seen as having some degree of party control over questions, particularly in the case of government backbenchers, who receive 'planted' questions from whips (Franklin and Norton 1993; Bates et al. 2014). However, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, evidence suggests that behaviour at PMQs is less controlled by parties than is the case in equivalent procedures in Canada and Australia. PMQs is often subject to suggestions for reform. So far, the most significant change in the ways in which the UK Prime Minister is questioned by parliament has been the introduction of Liaison Committee questioning sessions as a parallel mechanism in 2002.

## **Ireland: Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in the Dáil**

Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is convened twice a week when the Dáil is sitting, currently on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. It is seen as 'the liveliest part of the Dáil's schedule' (Gallagher 2010, p.178) and attracts some publicity and media coverage. In contrast with procedures in other countries, the majority of questions come from party leaders and frontbenchers (MacCarthaig 2005; Barrett 2012).

Historically, there has always been a division between time allocated for questions to the Taoiseach and time allocated for questions to ministers. The main reforms of oral questions have concerned the distribution of questioning slots during the parliamentary week and their duration (MacCarthaig 2005). The practice of questioning the Taoiseach within two formal slots on Tuesdays and Wednesdays was introduced as part of a wider package of Dáil reforms in 1985 (Elgie and Stapleton 2004). Before 1996, questions to the Taoiseach occupied two 25-minute slots; this was changed to two 45-minute slots thereafter.

Accounts of the character of Oral Questions to the Taoiseach are mixed. As discussed in subsequent sections, the procedure requires advance notice of the topics for questions, and any supplementary questions are only permitted in connection to the questions submitted in writing. On one hand, questions are seen as having a political role, aside from their scrutiny function (Gallagher 2010). On the other hand, reforms of the ways in which the Taoiseach is questioned in the Dáil were introduced in part to allow more spontaneity in questioning. The parallel mechanism of Leaders' Questions, which allows party



leaders to ask the Taoiseach questions without notice, was introduced in 2002 to allow the opposition to raise topical issues without the constraints of advance notice; allegedly, the Speaker also considered that parliamentary questions were often 'sterile' (MacCarthaig 2005, p.125) and needed reform. Both Oral Questions to the Taoiseach and Leaders' Questions restrict participation primarily to party leaders, which constitutes an exception to the norm that plenary mechanisms allow a wider participation.

## **5.2. What governs the functioning of questioning mechanisms?**

The operation of parliaments with origins in the UK's Westminster parliament, such as those examined here, is governed by a combination of codified rules and conventions. The Standing Orders of each parliament provide the main corpus of written rules. In addition to the Standing Orders, there are also other sources which are considered authoritative for describing the operation of rules.

In the UK, Canada and Australia, a set of key texts explain how the rules in the Standing Orders apply, as well as other conventions not mentioned in Standing Orders: *Erskine May* in the UK, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in Canada, and *House of Representatives Practice* in Australia.<sup>13</sup> These treatises on parliamentary procedure are written by parliamentary clerks and updated editions are published periodically to reflect procedural developments.

Conventions are unwritten rules and established ways in which the rules are applied. For example, the allocation of the call during Question Period in Canada is not described in the Standing Orders; it is conventional, and explained by the treatise on procedure. Given the interaction between written rules and established conventions, one of the roles of these treatises is to explain the current state of the accumulated body of practice and precedents – they are the authoritative source on matters of precedent (Wright and Fowler 2012; Marleau and Monpetit 2000). The treatises also record Speakers' rulings, which are judgements made by Speakers about the application of rules in unprecedented circumstances (UK Parliament 2018c).

In Ireland, the Constitution and the Standing Orders of the Dáil are the authoritative sources on rules. There is no equivalent treatise on parliamentary procedure similar to the ones developed in the UK, Canada and Australia.

The role of the Speaker in the conduct of questioning is crucial. In all four parliaments, Speakers are officially required to be impartial. Their level of actual neutrality varies: Speakers remain party members in all cases except in the UK, where the Speaker must resign from their party once elected. In Canada and Australia, it is recognised that the office of Speaker is generally filled by a member of the governing party, although there have been occasions when the Speaker was from an opposition party (Wright and Fowler 2012; O'Brien and Bosc 2017). In all four countries, the Speaker decides whether questions comply with the rules, calls members to ask questions, and maintains order during proceedings. They have a role in ensuring that the rules are enforced, and also have discretion in calling members to ask questions. As discussed below, the discretion of the Speaker is limited by conventional recognition protocols, which specify which actors must be called with priority, as well as the order in which they must be called. They are also limited by the role of political parties in determining which backbench members may ask questions.

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<sup>13</sup> I use the 24<sup>th</sup> edition of Erskine May throughout this thesis, as that was the edition that applied for the period studied for the UK (2010-2015).

### 5.3. Frequency of questioning

The first aspects to consider in investigating how prime ministers are questioned through these different mechanisms are regularity and frequency. Questioning mechanisms in all four cases allow a regular dialogue between parliamentarians and the head of government.

**Table 5.1. Frequency and volume of questioning**

	Sessions in a year*	Frequency of procedure	Sessions attended by the prime minister	% of sessions attended by the prime minister	Questions addressed to the prime minister per session (mean)	Questions prime ministers receive in a year
<b>Individualised</b>						
UK	33	Weekly	30	91%	29	870
Ireland	34	Twice weekly	34	100%	24	816
<b>Collective</b>						
Canada	114	Daily when the House is sitting	70	61%	12	840
Australia	61	Daily when the House is sitting	60	98%	8	494

\*Out of the periods analysed for each country outlined in Chapter 3, the years investigated were 2014 (UK); 2007 (Canada); 2011 (Australia); 2012 (Ireland).

The regularity with which mechanisms are convened is set out in the rules of procedure. If questioning is collective, as in Canada and Australia, this raises the issue of whether the rules require the Prime Minister to attend questioning sessions or whether it is simply conventional for them to attend, and how often they attend in practice. In order to determine the frequency of questioning of the prime minister, I counted how many sessions took place and were attended by the prime minister during one year of their term in office.

There is no formal requirement in the rules of procedure in either Canada or Australia for the Prime Minister to attend Question Period/Time, but it is conventional that they will attend on every occasion if they are not engaged in other business. In Canada, there were 117 sitting days in 2007, and Question Time was held on 114 days. The Prime Minister attended on 70 occasions. In 2011 Julia Gillard attended 60 of the 61 sessions of Question Time.

In the UK and in Ireland Prime Ministers are questioned individually. As discussed, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is normally convened twice weekly. In the case of Enda Kenny's premiership, the Taoiseach was questioned once a week during 2011-16. Hence there were 34 sessions in 2012, and the Taoiseach attended all of them. In the UK, PMQs takes place weekly, every Wednesday when the House of Commons is sitting. In 2014 David Cameron attended 30 of the 33 PMQs sessions. In the UK, if the Prime Minister cannot attend PMQs the Deputy Prime Minister or a senior minister stands in (Kelly 2005). A similar convention operates in Australia, where the Deputy Prime Minister stands in for the Prime Minister if he/she is absent from Question Time.

A further aspect in investigating the differences between collective and individualised procedures is the volume of questioning: How many questions are prime ministers addressed per questioning session, on average? How many questions are they addressed, on average, in a year? Table 5.1 shows a clear difference between individualised and collective procedures. The Prime Minister received more questions per questioning session in individualised procedures in the UK and in Ireland in the period analysed: each session involved an extended questioning exercise, comprising between 24 and 29 questions, compared to 8–12 questions in Australia and Canada. In the case of Canada, this difference evens out throughout the year due to the frequency with which Question Period is convened and the habitual attendance of the Prime Minister: they are addressed around 840 questions each year, which is directly comparable with the volume of questions in the UK and in Ireland.

This analysis is supplemented in Table 5.2 by comparing the number of questions addressed to prime ministers with the number of questions addressed to ministers during the period investigated in the two collective procedures.

**Table 5.2. Who are questions addressed to in collective procedures?**

Question addressee	Australia	%Australia	Canada	%Canada
Government (answered by the prime minister)	0	0%	33	3%
Government (answered by minister)	0	0%	191	18%
Minister	293	54%	488	46%
Prime Minister	247	46%	175	16%
Prime Minister (answered by minister)	0	0%	180	17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5.2 draws on 30 coded sessions for each case study country, and illustrates the ways in which questions are addressed in collective procedures, where parliamentarians have the option to direct their question to the prime minister or to ministers.

In Australia, members explicitly indicate the addressee before asking a question. This is not required by the rules, but appears to have become a conventional formula. For example, in order to address the Prime Minister, a member starts the question by saying ‘My question is to the Prime Minister’. Ministers received slightly more questions: the Prime Minister was asked an average of 8 questions per session, and ministers were addressed on average 10; overall, 54% of questions were addressed to a minister, and 46% to the Prime Minister.

By contrast, in Canada there are different styles of addressing questions: to the government generically, to a government minister, or to the Prime Minister. This also leads to differences in who the respondent is. For example, 21% of questions were addressed generically to the government: of these, 15% (3% of all questions) were answered by the Prime Minister, while 85% were answered by a minister. Members addressed 46% of questions directly to a minister, which tended to be answered directly by the minister. They addressed 33% of questions to the Prime Minister, of which around half were answered by the Prime Minister personally and half by a government minister. On average, 12 questions were addressed per session to the Prime Minister directly and 24 to ministers – this includes questions addressed to the government in general and answered by the Prime Minister.

In practice, as illustrated below, questioning is not so open: members do not have an absolute freedom to decide whom to address their questions to. The conventions regarding the order in which parliamentarians intervene restrict the types of exchanges that are possible.

## **5.4. Who gets to ask questions?**

### **5.4.1. Government and opposition: Roles and status of actors**

The four parliaments share many similarities with respect to the status and roles of various actors. They all operate similar configurations of government and opposition roles, and similar divisions between frontbench and backbench roles. The largest party in opposition is recognised as the Official Opposition, and its leader holds the office of ‘Leader of the Opposition’.<sup>14</sup> This party also forms a Shadow Cabinet, with members holding portfolios as the alternative government. In Canada, members of the Shadow Cabinet are called ‘Opposition critics’.

Aside from the main opposition party, other parties are recognised and given speaking rights based on the number of seats they hold. In Canada, a party must have at least 12 members in order to be recognised for the purpose of parliamentary proceedings; in Australia and Ireland a party is recognised if it holds at least five seats.<sup>15</sup> In the UK, parties are recognised if they secured either two seats or one seat and more than 150,000 votes at the previous General Election (Kelly 2018). Leaders of smaller opposition parties are also recognised in parliamentary rules and given speaking rights. As discussed below, in the UK and in Canada leaders of smaller parties are allotted a number of questions in oral questions procedures.

### **5.4.2. Notice requirements and party involvement in question selection**

Having identified the actors, the next step is to investigate how rules and conventions configure their participation. Firstly, this refers to whether there is a selection process for questions and how this selection operates. Who gets to ask questions? Are political parties involved in deciding? Secondly, it addresses the issue of whether members are required to give written notice of their questions, or whether questions are asked spontaneously.

Parliamentary party groups often have internal mechanisms to manage their strategy in parliament. As discussed in Chapter 4, and as the literature also suggests (for example Wiberg 1994; Rasch 2011), party groups are often involved in managing participation during questioning procedures. However, parliamentary questions are seen as an activity that is less constrained by directives imposed by the party leadership (Martin 2011a). These two propositions raise questions about how these mechanisms operate, whether parties devise strategies for Question Time, and the degree to which they impose these strategies on backbench members.

At the intra-parliamentary level, a good performance from leaders contributes to backbench morale (Bates et al. 2018; Hazerika and Hamilton 2018). At the extra-parliamentary level, given the high levels of media attention, both the government and the opposition have an incentive to appear as having ‘won’ against the other side. This suggests that both sides have incentives to coordinate and to control the topics of questions in order to ensure an effective attack strategy, in the case of the opposition, and to demonstrate a convincing defence in the case of the government.

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<sup>14</sup> In the UK and in Canada, the official term for the main opposition party is ‘Her Majesty’s Official Opposition’, to express the fact that it opposes the government, but remains loyal to the Crown. The term is also used in Australia, but rarely.

<sup>15</sup> Before the changes in the Standing Orders in 2016, a party had to have seven members to be recognised as a ‘technical group’ and given speaking rights in the Dáil.

There is evidence that parties are involved in deciding who gets to ask questions as well as the topics of questions to a large extent in Canada and Australia, and to a smaller extent in the UK as well. This primarily applies to the opposition, but the government side also ensures coordination between leaders and backbenchers. In the case of Ireland, questioning is performed primarily by party leaders, so it is their role to act as spokespersons and carry out their party's strategy.

On paper, questioning mechanisms in Australia and Canada encourage spontaneous interactions: members are not required to give written notice for their questions before the session. However, questioning mechanisms in both countries involve an informal selection process regarding which MPs will get to ask questions, and sometimes regarding the content of questions as well. In Canada, according to the treatise on procedure, party whips compile lists of members who will ask questions at Question Period and provide them to the Speaker, who then uses these lists as guidance in recognising members to ask questions (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Each opposition party has a Question Period committee which usually includes the party leader and whip, as well as the Leader of the House or Deputy Leader of the House (Docherty 2014; Maas 1998). It also often includes other senior MPs, as well as political advisers. The role of the committee is to decide the party's strategy for Question Period in reaction to events. Consequently, participation at Question Period is managed to a large extent by parties and by the whips, though the treatise on procedure claims that authority to select members to ask questions ultimately rests with the Speaker (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Observers of Question Period have noted that the use of party lists in fact limits the Speaker's authority to a significant degree: questions and supplementary questions are assigned to members on the list, limiting spontaneity, and also limiting the degree to which supplementary questions are in fact granted as follow-up questions arising from the need to clarify an answer (Ryan 2009).

In Australia, specialised party committees meet daily to decide the strategy for Question Time. Each opposition party has a Leadership Group charged with managing the party's parliamentary strategies, including Question Time tactics (the group is informally known as the 'tactics committee'). The group usually includes the party leader and deputy leader, as well as the leader and deputy from the Senate; meetings are also attended by managers of opposition business and advisers from the Leader of the Opposition's office (Bateman 2008). The leadership group approves the questions that will be put at Question Time, usually by 1pm each day before the 2pm start of Question Time (Bateman 2008).

Given this high degree of coordination from the opposition in Canada and Australia, it seems logical that the government should try to respond on a par, and to marshal its backbenchers to act supportively. Government backbenchers in Australia are known for asking 'helpful' questions, also known as 'Dorothy Dixers' (McGowan 2008; Larkin 2012). The 'helpful' questions appear as a logical strategy of counteracting the opposition's attack.

The rules of Prime Minister's Questions in the UK are also quite open: questions do not require written notice. According to the MPs' Guide to Procedure (House of Commons 2018a), Members who wish to ask a question submit their names for a ballot by Thursday during the week preceding PMQs. If they are successful, their names are printed on the Order Paper, but there is no formal requirement to submit notice for the actual questions, though members occasionally opt to submit a substantive question. Fifteen questions are selected through the ballot every week. Parties have a degree of involvement in the process of deciding questions that get asked at PMQs, but this primarily refers to preparing the Leader of the Opposition for their interaction with the Prime Minister.

The involvement of parties is qualitatively different to that in Canada and Australia: it mainly refers to preparing leaders, and much less to coordinating the behaviour of backbenchers. Hazerika and Hamilton

(2018) document the extensive preparation for PMQs that happens on both government and opposition sides, and the involvement of the party machinery in managing questioning and responding strategies. The preparation that the Leader of the Opposition undertakes is integrated in the PMQs strategy of the main opposition party: party whips ensure that opposition backbenchers will raise questions that have been left out of the Leader's prepared set. Similarly, on the government side, whips ask backbenchers to intervene with strategic questions that prompt the Prime Minister to present government policies in a favourable light or to attack the opposition (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993; Bates et al. 2014; Bates et al. 2018). These practices facilitate the support and conflict functions of questions, which will be discussed in later chapters. The relatively smaller degree of party control on backbench members suggests that backbenchers in the UK may be much freer to ask their own questions than their counterparts in Canada or Australia.

Questioning in Ireland is less open: members must submit questions in writing at least four days in advance. Questions are listed on the Order Paper in the order in which they have been submitted. The selection process is managed by Speaker, who examines all parliamentary questions to ensure that they conform to Standing Orders; the Speaker may also amend a question to make it compliant with Standing Orders, or may rule it out of order if it is found not to be compliant. Subsequently, the Taoiseach has the discretion to group questions and to decide the order in which they are answered during the session. The questions submitted in writing also set the topics for the rest of the session, as discussed further below.

#### **5.4.3. Recognition protocols and patterns, supplementary questions and tactical use of questions**

Having discussed whether questions require notice and the degree of party involvement in regulating participation, this section further explores how participation is regulated and what a typical questioning session looks like in terms of the patterns of intervention by different actors. To do this, I discuss the conventional patterns of recognition, as well as the degree to which supplementary questions are allowed and how they are allocated by the Speaker and used by members. For each case, I then discuss how members use their speaking rights within these rules, and whether there is evidence of tactical use of questions.

In addition to the formal rules and party involvement described in the previous section, questioning is also governed by conventions. The treatises on parliamentary procedure in the UK, Canada and Australia all describe conventional protocols of recognition during questioning that indicate which actors are called with priority, and the order in which they ought to be called. Conventions regarding the order of recognition prioritise questions from the Leader of the Opposition, and subsequently from other party leaders. These protocols restrict the interactions that are possible and impose a fixed structure, conferring a degree of predictability in terms of the sequence of interactions that take place during the session.

Another important aspect of how questioning is conducted is whether members are allowed to ask additional or 'supplementary' questions once they have intervened to ask an initial question. I defined supplementary questions in Chapter 4 as questions asked in connection to an initial question.

This can be either:

- a) a question raised by a member in addition to their initial question, on the same topic or on a different topic; or
- b) a question raised by a second member on the same topic as an initial question from another member.

Based on this definition, all four mechanisms allow members to ask supplementary questions. The main commonality among them is the discretion ostensibly allowed to the Speaker in selecting members, but in practice supplementary question allocation is subject to restrictions, as discussed further below.

Second, and in connection to this, is the extent to which different actors use their allotted questions strategically. The extent to which actors may adopt tactics of questioning depends in part on how many questions they are allowed to ask – whether they have a fixed number of questions allotted to them, as is the case for leaders, and whether they are allowed to ask supplementary questions.

**Table 5.3. Types of questions to prime ministers and ministers\***

Type of question	Australia	Canada	Ireland	UK
Questions with written notice	0	0	475	6
Questions without notice	499	637	0	725
Supplementary questions	41	430	251	148
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>879</b>
<b>AVERAGE PER SESSION</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>29.3</b>

\*Includes the period covered through coding for each case study country: Australia 2010–2013; Canada 2006–2008; Ireland 2011–2016; UK 2010–2015.

## Australia

According to the treatise on procedure, in Australia supplementary questions are allowed from any member, at the discretion of the Speaker, but it is not customary for them to be allowed frequently (Wright and Fowler 2012). Table 5.3 shows that Australia had the lowest number of supplementary questions. The aim of the supplementary question is to clarify an answer:

‘[A] supplementary question must arise out of, and refer to, the answer just given; it can neither introduce new material nor contain any preamble.’ (Wright and Fowler 2012).

The Australian treatise on parliamentary procedure does not specify a fixed number of questions allocated to the Leader of the Opposition, but it does state that the Speaker first allocates the call to an opposition member, and priority is given to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Wright and Fowler 2012). The first questions in the session are always addressed to the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister continues in practice to be addressed questions throughout the session.

Following the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition, members are usually called to ask one question without notice, and the treatise mentions that the allocation of the call is done by alternating between government and opposition members. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they must *explicitly* request this from the Speaker, who then decides whether to allow it or not. In practice, supplementary questions are usually requested by the same member who asked an initial question, or by a member from the same side, hence on rare occasions the Prime Minister is asked two questions in sequence by a member from the same side.

My analysis of Question Time sessions indicated that members also use another procedural artifice to call on the Speaker to require the minister or the Prime Minister to return to the question and expand their answer: they ask for a point of order, suggesting that the minister or the Prime Minister is not answering with relevance to the question (see **Appendix 7**, Section 1 for examples). From a procedural perspective, these instances are points of order, not questions, so they are not counted as supplementary questions for the purpose of this analysis.

Members might use supplementary questions tactically in different ways depending on the position they occupy.

The exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition encompassed between one and three questions per session in the period analysed. Given that they are recognised for more than one question, Leaders may choose to address the Prime Minister and subsequently to address ministers. They may also choose to ask questions on different topics, or to probe further on one topic. The Australian Leader of the Opposition mainly addressed the Prime Minister in the period analysed, and only addressed ministers on two occasions. The first was a question in October 2010 addressed to the Minister for Transport. The question referred to an incident regarding Qantas Airlines, which dominated the entire questioning session. Within the same session the Leader of the Opposition had addressed questions on the topic to the Prime Minister. The second question, also in October 2010, referred to another issue that was prominent in debates at the time – the administration of the Murray Darling Basin Authority, and was addressed to the Minister for the Environment. These examples show that, on prominent, high-profile issues that are within the competence of a particular minister, the Leader might use their questions to address the minister as well as the Prime Minister. In general, the Leader of the Opposition addressed questions on different topics. On two occasions the Leader of the Opposition requested from the Speaker two supplementary questions in order to probe further on a single topic. Both occasions, in August and October 2012, referred to the Gillard government's carbon pricing scheme, which was a hotly debated issue in Australia at the time.

Opposition frontbenchers were the second largest group to request supplementary questions from the Speaker during the period analysed, after the Leader of the Opposition, and they predominantly addressed their questions to ministers.

Opposition backbenchers contributed to concerted attacks on the government, showcasing the degree of coordinated behaviour during Question Time. Given that supplementary questions are used very rarely, and only on explicit request, an alternative strategy for probing on a particular topic involved members of the opposition repeating the same question several times in the same session. An example of this was the concerted call for an election in connection with the carbon tax in 2011. The Leader of the Opposition, an opposition frontbencher and an opposition backbencher repeated the same call for an election in questions to the Prime Minister (**Appendix 7**, Section 3).

Government backbenchers addressed questions predominantly to ministers, but they were also involved in questioning the Prime Minister. A distinct practice was for government backbenchers to request supplementary questions in order to allow the minister to make their case more fully. There were 10 instances (see **Appendix 7**, Section 2 for examples) of such 'helpful supplementaries' from government backbenchers in the period analysed, but all of them were in questions addressed to ministers.



## Canada

According to the rules, in Canada, members are allowed to ask their initial question, followed by a supplementary question (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Unlike Australia, where the default is that members only ask one question unless they *explicitly* request permission from the Speaker to ask a supplementary question, in Canada it is assumed that they will also be recognised for a supplementary question. In contrast to the Australian practice, there is no requirement for the supplementary question to be strictly connected to the initial question. The treatise mentions that:

'[I]n current practice, an additional question need not be supplementary to the main question. This proviso allows a Member to pose a question on a different topic to a different Minister or allows a party to split a round of questioning between two Members, with each one asking a different question to a different Minister.' (O'Brien and Bosc 2017).

In Canada, the questioning session usually begins with the Leader of the Opposition asking a round of three questions. A second member from the main opposition party is subsequently recognised to ask two questions. Next, two members from the second opposition party are recognised for two questions each; finally, a representative from the third party in opposition is recognised to ask three questions (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Questions to the Prime Minister tended to be clustered at the beginning of the session: his main exchanges were with the Leader of the Opposition and with representatives from opposition parties. This indicates that the conventional recognition protocols restrict the exchanges that are possible within a session.

During the period studied, if the Prime Minister was present at Question Period, the Leader of the Opposition mainly used his allotted questions to address the Prime Minister. The Leader either used all three questions to inquire about one topic, or addressed two questions to the Prime Minister and one to a minister, usually on the same topic (examples in **Appendix 7**, Section 4).

Next, two representatives from each opposition party are each allocated two questions. This usually results in a pattern of questioning that involves two questions from the party leader and two subsequent questions from an opposition backbencher. Party leaders and backbench members may direct their questions either to the Prime Minister or to ministers. One example of this pattern is a party leader addressing their two allotted questions to the Prime Minister and the backbench member addressing questions to a minister, both pursuing the same topic (example 1 in **Appendix 7**, Section 5). These patterns where members split their questioning rounds to target different members of the executive exemplify the impact of intra-party coordination. As discussed further below, these patterns that involve multiple members intervening on an issue are also facilitated by the short time limits for questions and answers: both questions and answers are kept brief, which allows more interventions.

Following this initial set of exchanges that primarily involves MPs in leadership positions, the Speaker recognises opposition backbenchers with priority (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). Members are usually recognised to ask a question and a supplementary question, so these exchanges usually encompass at least two questions. As noted in the previous section, the use of party lists significantly reduces the authority of the Speaker to decide on supplementary questions.

Similar to the tactic used in Australia, opposition members sometimes used questions to probe both the Prime Minister and ministers on a high profile topic in an extensive 'questioning campaign' involving both leaders and backbenchers. One example of this tactic was the session held on 29 January 2008, when the opposition held an extensive questioning exercise in connection to the war in Afghanistan. On this occasion, the Prime Minister was addressed three questions from the Leader of the Opposition, four

questions in sequence from opposition party leaders, and a further two questions from opposition backbenchers on the same topic. This tactic shows coordinated strategic behaviour within parties, and the collective context also facilitates this type of alternate probing of ministers and the Prime Minister.

Government backbenchers are also recognised to ask questions, but much less often than members of the opposition, as I show in the next section. The analysis of practice shows that questions from government backbenchers in Canada were usually addressed directly to a minister by specifically naming the minister. There is only one example in the entire sample of a question addressed by a government backbencher to the Prime Minister. Some observers of Question Period and reform advocates have noted that this lack of participation from government backbenchers diminishes the scrutiny function of Question Period: given that they are allowed very little time, and given that party discipline is strict, government backbenchers are not incentivised to perform scrutiny, and instead act as mere 'cheerleaders' for the government (Ryan 2009).

## UK

In the UK, the typical questioning pattern involves an extended exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, followed by exchanges with backbenchers. The Leader of the Opposition is recognised near the start of the session to ask six questions, and the leader of the second opposition party is recognised to ask two questions (House of Commons 2018).

The Leader of the Opposition may use his allotted questions in various ways: they can either be used to probe the Prime Minister on a single topic, or to raise multiple topics. Leaders of the Opposition usually ask their full set of questions at the beginning of the session, but may occasionally split their set and intervene later in the session. The majority of sessions analysed in this study involved the Leader of the Opposition asking all six questions in sequence.

The conventional recognition pattern also allows a brief exchange with the leader of the second opposition party. Prior to 2010, this usually involved an exchange with the leader of the Liberal Democrats, which was usually the third party in the House of Commons (Thompson 2018). For the period analysed here the Liberal Democrats were part of the government coalition together with the Conservative Party, and the leader of the Liberal Democrats was Deputy Prime Minister. With eight seats, the Democratic Unionist Party was the second largest opposition party after Labour, but this did not grant them full 'third party' rights.

Aside from the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the second party, two categories of members are recognised by the Speaker during PMQs:

- a) Backbench members who have submitted their names in the ballot and who have been successful in the shuffle;
- b) Backbench members who rise to 'catch the Speaker's eye' during questioning; Sometimes this is described as a 'supplementary question' (for example in Kelly 2015), in the sense that it is additional to the questions asked by members who are listed on the Order Paper. For the purpose of the analysis presented in Table 5.3, and as discussed in Chapter 4, such questions are counted as questions without notice. As specified above, a 'supplementary question' needs to be additional to a previous question. Similar to Australia, the Speaker allocates the call alternatively between government and opposition members.

Backbench members may be recognised for an additional question aside from their initial question, but this is not very frequent. Aside from the more extended dialogue with the Leader of the Opposition, exchanges at PMQs are short-fire Q&As on individual topics raised by members.

## **Ireland**

In Ireland, participation is restricted to the set of members who have submitted a question in writing, and party spokespersons have priority (MacCarthaig 2005). This makes Oral Questions to the Taoiseach an unusual case as a plenary mechanism: whereas generally, as discussed in Chapter 4, plenary mechanisms are more open in allowing participation from more parliamentarians, OQT primarily features party leaders.

According to the Standing Orders of the Dáil, supplementary questions 'may be put only for the further elucidation of the information requested' (S.O. No. 44). Consequently, supplementary questions asked in the session must relate to the original questions: the Speaker calls members who have already submitted a question to ask additional questions. The Speaker may allow supplementary questions either from the initial questioner or from other members in whose name a question has been tabled; questioning is not open to the floor. Members tend to submit several questions on different topics, which allows them a broader scope for supplementary questions. The questions submitted in writing are grouped and answered by the Taoiseach in an initial long reply that sometimes combines up to 20 questions.

Exchanges often take the form of long speeches, both from questioners and from the Prime Minister. Given that questioning is restricted to the topics on which members have submitted written questions, and that members are called out of order if they ask questions on other topics, questioning is quite focused; long speeches and a restricted number of topics allow extended scrutiny on particular topics. The analysis of questioning sessions shows that the Speaker warns members when a question is considered not to be connected to the question submitted in writing, so the connection between the initial question and the supplementary is enforced.

Table 5.4 summarises the sequence and patterns of intervention as determined by rules and conventions in each case:

**Table 5.4. Sequence and patterns of intervention during questioning**

<b>UK</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>Ireland</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The ‘engagements’ question from a backbencher.</li> <li>○ Leader of the Opposition: six questions.</li> <li>○ The leader of the second party in opposition: three questions.</li> <li>○ The Speaker alternately calls the 15 opposition and government backbenchers listed on the Order Paper.</li> <li>○ The Speaker recognises other backbench members who rise to ‘catch the Speaker’s eye’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leader of the Opposition: three questions.</li> <li>○ Leaders of the second and third opposition parties: two questions each. A second member of each opposition party: two questions each.</li> <li>○ The Speaker calls backbenchers – predominantly from the opposition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leader of the Opposition: 2-3 questions.</li> <li>○ The Speaker calls members from the government and the opposition alternately. This includes opposition frontbenchers and backbenchers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leader of the Opposition and the other opposition party leaders are called by the Speaker to ask questions in connection to their questions submitted in writing. The Leader of the Opposition intervenes first.</li> </ul>

Table 5.4 indicates that the sequence of interventions is potentially important for the types of interactions that take place. MPs in leadership positions are always the first to intervene; backbench members intervene subsequently.<sup>16</sup>

For example, the Canadian Prime Minister is potentially almost never questioned by government backbenchers; if we think about the role of government backbenchers in performing support, the Canadian Prime Minister does not have helpful backbench questions to fall back on. By contrast, in Australia, the alternate call of members from the government and from the opposition means that the Prime Minister alternates between an opposition and a government backbench question, with the latter potentially being less challenging.

Given these roles assigned in questioning procedures, and building on the literature on government and opposition backbench leadership roles, we might expect different actors to assume different strategies of questioning, as the next chapter will detail. Having mapped the roles and sequence of interventions, the next step is to assess the degree of participation by each category of actor.

<sup>16</sup> The first question in a PMQs session, the conventional ‘engagements’ question, normally comes from a backbencher (Kelly 2015; Bates et al. 2018). The member may ask a supplementary question subsequently.

## 5.5. Participation: who asks questions?

The previous sections having mapped the rules and conventions that govern participation, Table 5.5 describes the participation of different types of actors in the sample of sessions coded for each case study country. Previous sections have detailed patterns of participation in questions to both ministers and prime ministers. This section focuses on questions addressed to prime ministers, in order to compare patterns of participation in the direct interactions with prime ministers in the four cases.

**Table 5.5. Actors participating in questioning the prime minister**

Actors	Australia	%	Canada	%	Ireland	%	UK	%
Junior coalition party backbencher	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%	66	8%
Senior coalition party backbencher/ Government party backbencher*	41	17%	1	0%	11	2%	302	34%
Independent	10	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Leader of the Opposition	62	25%	81	23%	302	42%	179	20%
Opposition frontbencher**	84	34%	1	0%	1	0%	0	0%
Opposition backbencher	42	17%	159	45%	15	2%	319	36%
Opposition party leader	9	4%	113	32%	395	54%	13	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*In Canada and Australia, where there was a single party in government, this category refers to the government party backbenchers.

\*\*Members of opposition parties who have shadow government roles. This refers primarily to the main opposition party's 'Shadow Ministry', but also to opposition frontbench roles in smaller parties where that role was indicated in Hansard/Official Transcript.

In the UK, Canada and Australia, the patterns of participation of the Leader of the Opposition showcase the importance of the conventional recognition protocols. In the UK the Leader of the Opposition, who is conventionally assigned six questions, accounts for 20% of all questions asked to the Prime Minister. The Leader of the Opposition accounts for 25% of questions in Australia and 23% in Canada, also as a result of the fact that they are conventionally allowed to ask several questions at the beginning of the questioning session. The Leader also features prominently in Ireland. There are no procedural or conventional provisions in Ireland for the order in which members are called, but given that the procedure mainly involves the participation of party leaders, the Leader of the Opposition has ample room to intervene.

Opposition frontbenchers participate in questioning in both Canada and Australia, but they feature much more prominently in Australia (34%). Members of the main opposition party's Shadow Cabinet do not participate in questioning in the UK. The participation of opposition frontbenchers in Canada and Australia, and their absence in the case of the UK, is a matter of practice which is not reflected in the rules of procedure. In part, this is to do with the fact that Question Time in Australia and Canada is collective: opposition shadow ministers ask questions of their counterparts in government. In the UK, where PMQs is individualised, the Prime Minister is addressed questions by the Leader of the Opposition. Opposition frontbenchers participate in Departmental Question Time, where they question members of the government department that they shadow. In the UK the small number of questions from opposition party leaders is due to the fact that the traditional second party in opposition (the Liberal Democrats) was in coalition during the period investigated, and, as explained on page 97 in this chapter, the DUP was not assigned the PMQs speaking rights normally granted to the second party in opposition.

Backbench participation patterns present stark differences among countries, but also reflect important effects of rules of procedure. Government backbenchers ask a significant number of questions in the UK compared to all other cases, accounting for 34% of questions. Government backbenchers in Australia also have a degree of access in questioning the Prime Minister, accounting for 17% of questions. This is in stark contrast to Canada, where out of the total of 77 questions asked by government backbenchers in the period analysed, *only one* was addressed to the Prime Minister.

Whilst in the UK and in Australia Question Time is an opportunity for both government and opposition to ask questions, in Canada and Ireland it is mainly an opportunity for the opposition. In Canada, the fact that the Speaker mainly calls members of the opposition is recognised as a convention in the treatise on procedure (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). This is reflected in the participation of opposition backbenchers, who ask 45% of the questions to the Prime Minister, compared to 36% in the UK and 17% in Australia. In the UK and in Australia, the similar distribution of time between backbenchers reflects the convention that the Speaker must call members alternately from each side. In Ireland the only members who participate are those who have submitted a question in writing, which largely restricts participation to opposition party leaders, and only occasionally backbenchers.

Overall, the patterns of participation in questioning reflect the rules and conventions regarding which actors may intervene, and which are recognised with priority, but also how actors use their allocated speaking rights within these rules.

## 5.6. Time restrictions

Whether the rules specify time restrictions with respect to questions and answers determines the time that questioners have at their disposal to make their case, as well as the time that is available to prime ministers to provide an answer. It is also crucial in the preparation of answers: the prime minister's or the minister's staff know they have to prepare answers that fit the prescribed duration, and in the case of short time limits, knowing how to use time effectively is crucial (Docherty 2014). Together with the rules regarding supplementary questions, time allocation affects the structure of interactions on each topic, as signalled in Chapter 4.

**Table 5.6. Time limits for questions and answers**

	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Answers</b>
<b>Australia</b>	Government/Opposition member: 30 seconds Independent members: 45 seconds	3 minutes
<b>Canada</b>	35 seconds	35 seconds
<b>UK</b>	Not specified	1 minute*
<b>Ireland</b>	Not specified. The entire duration of Oral Questions may not exceed 45 minutes, and not more than 15 minutes must be spent on each group of questions.	3 minutes 90 seconds for supplementary questions

\* Erskine May offers recommendations regarding questions to ministers: 'In respect of a minister's reply to the first topical question, the Speaker has indicated that this should normally take no more than one minute, and also indicated that the use of this reply to make important announcements provides the opposition with less opportunity to ask questions.' (24<sup>th</sup> edition, 2011, p.366). There are no examples of a reply being called out of order for taking too much time.

In the case of Australia, there is a visible impact of having a short time limit on questions but more time allowed for answers. Questions are very brief, and answers tend to take the form of short speeches.

Strict time limits in Canada mean that both questions and answers are kept very brief. This leaves room for more questions to be asked in each session: as Table 5.3 illustrates, Canada has the highest average

number of questions asked in a session (36). The short time limits allow more questions to be asked on each individual topic. In practice, this procedural feature has been criticised by advocates of reform of Question Period. In their view, short time limits incentivise members to ask brief questions intended to score political points and to provide a media soundbite, rather than to scrutinise (Ryan 2009; Chong 2008). Similarly, short time limits for answers do not allow comprehensive replies from the Prime Minister or from the minister (Chong 2008). This also runs contrary to the effect of short time limits hypothesised in Chapter 4, namely that they will always lead to straight questions. The effects of short time limits on the content of questions and answers will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The UK rules of procedure do not specify time limits for questions. Erskine May provides guidance with respect to the length of answers in oral questions to ministers, but there are no specifications regarding questions to the Prime Minister. The only time restrictions in the UK are in connection with the number of members admitted in the shuffle (15) and the conventional duration of PMQs (30 minutes). In practice, given the conventional number of questions from the Leader of the Opposition as well as the fact that the Speaker recognises other members during PMQs to ask questions, it is often extended beyond 30 minutes (Kelly 2015).

The rules of procedure in Ireland do not specify a time limit for questions. The rules specify a limit of 3 minutes per answer and 90 seconds for answers to supplementary questions. The entire duration of Oral Questions to the Taoiseach may not exceed 45 minutes, and not more than 15 minutes must be spent on each group of questions. As already indicated, in practice sessions contain predominantly longer, speech-length exchanges based on supplementary questions asked by members in connection to their first questions.

## 5.7. Chapter conclusions

This chapter introduced the rules and conventions governing questioning mechanisms in each case study country, and discussed how rules and conventions affect the practice of questioning.

Firstly, all four mechanisms are well-established points of engagement between the Prime Minister and parliament, and Prime Ministers face regular and relatively extensive questioning. The four cases illustrate different ways to configure this interaction: through a daily exercise of collective questioning together with ministers, featuring 8–12 questions to the Prime Minister, as in Canada and Australia; or through a weekly or twice-weekly, more extended, individualised questioning exercise, featuring around 24–29 questions in the UK and Ireland. Yet this does not reveal much about the content and quality of interactions. For example, even though the Australian Question Time requires the Prime Minister to attend daily, and we have seen that Julia Gillard attended almost every session during the period investigated, observers of the Australian parliament have noted that '[i]t is not well designed to perform as an accountability forum and it was never really intended to perform that role' (Uhr 1998, p. 199). Frequent and extensive questioning may certainly create scope for accountability, but does not necessarily mean effective questioning that facilitates a productive exchange of information with the Prime Minister. The mission of the next chapters will be to explore the content of questions in order to observe the degree to which they are used for holding prime ministers to account, for what, and how.

Secondly, rules of procedure and conventional recognition patterns determine which actors may intervene, and how. The four countries present different patterns of participation, and consequently different forms of interaction with prime ministers. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature notes that the behaviour of parliamentarians is conditioned to a large degree by their backbench/leadership and government/opposition status (Andeweg 2013; King 1976; Alderman 1992; Salmond 2014; Uhr 2009; Russell and Cowley 2018). Understanding which actors get to question prime ministers is therefore crucial for beginning to understand the types of questions they may face. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, different actors may perform different types of accountability; and they may also be involved to different degrees in conflict and support, and in performing territorial representation.

The exchange between the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister is the centrepiece of questioning in all four countries, and Leaders are the 'first movers' in questioning the Prime Minister. Questioning is configured to allow a heated exchange between political leaders. All four mechanisms also allow speaking rights to other party leaders, particularly in Ireland and in Canada, and to a lesser degree in Australia. In the UK, the leader of the third party is conventionally also assigned rights in questioning the Prime Minister, but in the period considered here this convention did not apply. Frontbenchers intervene in questioning in Canada and Australia, but mainly to question their opposite numbers in government.

The degree to which backbenchers are involved in questioning varies: they play a prominent role in questioning in the UK and in Australia, but in Canada backbench participation primarily implies that opposition and government backbenchers have a much more limited role. With respect to questioning prime ministers, the UK presents by far the highest level of participation, allowing ample backbench interaction with the Prime Minister. Sequence also matters: the Canadian Prime Minister almost never interacts with government backbenchers, whereas in the UK and in Australia the Speaker alternates between opposition and government members. This gives Prime Ministers in the latter two countries a question from their own side to fall back on after a question from the opposition.

Analysing rules alone does not tell the full story of how participation is regulated. Even in cases where questioning is ostensibly open, parties have internal mechanisms to coordinate members, and the public



and visible nature of oral questions certainly provides an incentive for them do so. This raises the question of the degree to which the behaviour of members during questioning is in fact controlled by the party, and the degree to which they may act independently. We observed some evidence of coordinated behaviour in the form of tactical use of supplementary questions in Canada and Australia, with questions and topics split between leaders and backbenchers to conduct coordinated attacks against the government.

The final section raised questions about the implications of time limits. In the Canadian case, some observers noted that short time limits for questions and answers are conducive to more partisan, adversarial behaviour. This runs contrary to the expectation presented in Chapter 4, that shorter time limits for questions may lead to brief, straight questions, and to on-point replies, with the only negative effect being that neither party is able to go into much depth. This dimension clearly matters for the design of a questioning mechanism – an important task of the following chapters will be to discuss potential connections between observed patterns of behaviour and procedural features.

This chapter began to construct the image of how questioning mechanisms operate – it told us how often Prime Ministers were questioned, by whom, and according to what rules. The mission of the next chapters will be to analyse the content of interactions in order to understand what functions questions and answers perform.

## Chapter 6. The Practice of Accountability in Questioning Prime Ministers

This chapter describes the practice of holding prime ministers to account in the four case study countries, under different types of questioning mechanisms. As heads of government, prime ministers derive their authority from parliament, and must in turn give account to parliament for their actions and decisions, as well as for the actions and decisions of the government. Holding the government to account is one of the main functions of legislatures, and allowing parliamentarians to question prime ministers contributes to this function. As indicated in Chapter 2, accountability is defined by the academic literature as a deliberative (Olsen 2013), multi-stage process (Mulgan 2003; Bovens 2007; Akirav 2011) that involves information being given by the responsible actor to the forum that requests it; the forum can then react to the information provided (Bovens 2007; 2010). In this case, the prime minister is the responsible actor, and parliament is the forum.

This process of request and provision of information also entails different types of accountability: 'role accountability', which is carried out by an individual on behalf of a collective body, in this case by the prime minister on behalf of the government; and 'personal accountability', which refers to the responsibilities held by an individual (Mulgan 2003), in this case by the prime minister for their own responsibilities, actions and decisions. Gauging the extent of these different types of accountability requires analysis of what topics prime ministers are questioned on. But, as discussed in Chapter 2, little is known about how this process of request and provision of information plays out in different political systems. As the prime minister is the leader of the government, we would expect them to be questioned on a varied range of issues that have to do with government activity. This requirement for the leader of the government to engage publicly with various topics is, doubtless, a way of ensuring that they are challenged to justify government decisions, and that they are aware of what is happening across government departments. But to what degree are they questioned about matters for which they are personally responsible? Do different mechanisms provide adequate scrutiny of prime ministerial responsibilities, or are there accountability gaps? Understanding how this process of accountability plays out in parliament is important for several reasons: above all, the extent to which political leaders are held to account for their actions and decisions is a crucial component of democratic politics; and political scientists studying parliamentary institutions, as well as practitioners looking at executive scrutiny, have long held an interest in the quality and effectiveness of accountability processes.

This chapter explores how prime ministers are held to account. First, it examines the topics they are questioned on: the extent to which they are questioned on matters for which they are personally responsible, or jointly responsible with a minister, compared to matters for which a minister is responsible. This constitutes a first step towards mapping the quality and effectiveness of prime ministerial accountability in the four case study countries: to what degree do questioning mechanisms achieve the aim of scrutinising the prime minister for their responsibilities? If they do not achieve this aim, are there alternative venues in the political system?

Second, the chapter explores the ways in which prime ministers are addressed: whether they are asked to speak for their own actions and decisions and matters that are attributed to them, or to explain the actions and decisions of particular ministers or of the government as a whole. This is an important distinction for evaluating the practice of accountability in the case study countries, and, building on the distinction proposed by Mulgan (2003), it allows us to assess the degree to which accountability is individualised, with issues attributed to the prime minister, or collective, with issues attributed to the government, but for which prime ministers are asked to give account.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Part 6.1 outlines the main concepts and measurements used to investigate prime ministerial accountability under different mechanisms. Part 6.2 looks at the roles and responsibilities of prime ministers in Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the UK. Part 6.3 evaluates the practice of accountability in collective and individualised procedures comparatively, by reviewing the topics on which prime ministers were asked questions, the extent to which they were questioned about issues for which they are personally responsible, and whether they were asked to give account in a personal or collective capacity. Finally, I discuss conclusions on the practice of accountability in the four cases.

## 6.1. Prime ministerial accountability: concepts and measurements

This chapter primarily investigates the extent to which there is evidence of more or less focus on *personal prime ministerial accountability* in different types of mechanisms: in collective mechanisms, where prime ministers are questioned together with ministers, or in individualised mechanisms, where they are questioned individually. This aims to provide insights into the types of questioning that are facilitated by different types of mechanisms, and into the quality of accountability in the case study countries.

To this aim, focus on *personal prime ministerial accountability* measures the frequency of questions on topics that are within the prime minister's responsibility, as well as the frequency of questions inquiring about the prime minister's actions or decisions. The first of these refers to the topic of the question, e.g. questions on appointments or on foreign affairs; the second refers to the form of address, e.g. asking 'What is the prime minister's plan for this issue?' rather than 'Why did the Foreign Secretary make this statement?' or 'What is the government doing to address this issue?'.<sup>17</sup> Assessing focus on personal prime ministerial accountability thus has two components:

1. The **topics** on which prime ministers are questioned, and whether they refer to a) matters for which prime ministers are personally responsible; b) matters for which they share responsibility with a minister; c) matters that are within the remit of a minister.
2. The **form of address** in questions: whether the prime minister is asked to answer for their own actions and decisions **as the individual head of government** (individualised or personal accountability) or for the actions and decisions of the **government as a whole** or of another minister (collective or role accountability). The codes and coding definitions for forms of address are included in **Appendix 6**, as mentioned in the Methodology chapter.

The aim of individualised language may be either genuinely to ask the prime minister to explain their own actions or decisions, or to attribute blame and to put them on the spot on embarrassing policy issues. The point of collective language may be to ask them to speak about the government's actions or decisions, or of those of an individual minister, in order to test them publicly either about the directions the government is taking or about decisions their ministers are taking.

Looking at the form of address thus offers additional evidence on how accountability is performed, centred on the attribution of responsibility. In parliamentary systems, where there is a tension between prime ministerial authority and collective authority, who is seen as responsible, and who blame is attributed to, is an important dimension of accountability.

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<sup>17</sup> There is no indication that forms of address are a consequence of rules of procedure. Aside from the rule of addressing other members through the Speaker, which applies in all four parliaments, there are no other rules that would either: a) prescribe that members may only address the prime minister in an individualised way, and not ask questions about the government or about another minister; b) prescribe that members may only address the prime minister to ask about government actions or decisions, and not about their own actions.

Looking at topics and forms of address seeks to answer the following question: under which conditions do we observe that actors focus more on the prime minister?

- When the prime minister is questioned together with ministers, as is the case in Canada and Australia?
- When the prime minister is questioned individually, and parliamentarians have separate opportunities to question ministers through departmental question time procedures, as is the case in the UK and in Ireland?

Focus on personal prime ministerial accountability means evidence of:

1. More questions on topics within their responsibilities, rather than on responsibilities that are the attribute of another minister, and/or
2. More questions inquiring about their actions or decisions, rather than those of the government or of another minister.

The topics on which prime ministers are asked questions in a particular procedure may also depend on whether parliamentary actors have other venues in which they may question the prime minister, and on the degree to which these other venues facilitate a different type of questioning. In the UK, the Prime Minister is also questioned two or three times each year by the Liaison Committee, which was introduced to facilitate more in-depth scrutiny and complement PMQs (Kelso et al. 2016). However, given that PMQs is convened much more frequently, it is unlikely that questions on direct prime ministerial responsibilities, such as appointments, would be left entirely to Liaison Committee sessions. The Prime Minister also gives statements to the House of Commons after international events and summits, so questions on foreign affairs may be addressed in more detail on these occasions. Given that statements are made as-and-when an event occurs, we would expect foreign affairs questions to also come up at PMQs. As discussed in the previous chapter, Leaders' Questions was introduced in the Dáil to complement Oral Questions to the Taoiseach by facilitating more spontaneous questioning. It is likely that topical, current affairs issues mainly occur during Leaders' Questions, whilst Oral Questions covers issues connected more closely to the prime minister's actions. The Irish Prime Minister is also questioned at Business Questions, so matters regarding legislation may come up less or not at all during Oral Questions. In both the UK and in Ireland, there are also separate questioning opportunities for ministers. In Canada and Australia<sup>18</sup>, parliamentarians do not have other opportunities to address oral questions to the Prime Minister, aside from Question Time. There are also no separate questioning opportunities for ministers.<sup>19</sup>

A great onus is therefore placed on Question Time/Period in Australia and Canada to cover prime ministerial responsibilities as well as other topical matters. The range of parliamentary questioning mechanisms in all parliaments considered here is detailed in the **Table 1, Appendix 8**.

In order to evaluate the extent to which topics that come up in questions refer to prime ministerial responsibilities, the following section maps the responsibilities of prime ministers in the case study countries.

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<sup>18</sup> In Australia, parliamentarians may submit written questions to the Prime Minister, but aside from Question Time there are no other opportunities for oral questions.

<sup>19</sup> Another issue to consider is whether procedural rules restrict the topics that can be addressed in questions. As discussed in the next chapter, rules of procedure offer some restrictions of topics. The only set of rules that apply directly to prime ministerial responsibilities is set out in Erskine May (2011, p.360) for the UK case: 'It has been ruled that the Prime Minister cannot be interrogated as to the advice that he may have given to the Sovereign with regard to the grant of honours, the ecclesiastical patronage of the Crown, the appointment and dismissal of Privy Counsellors, the dissolution of Parliament, or, in certain circumstances, the exercise of the prerogative of mercy'.

## 6.2. Prime ministerial responsibilities

Investigating accountability firstly requires understanding the relationship between the institution responsible for holding to account, i.e. the legislature, and the actor that is responsible for giving account, in this case the head of government.

The degree to which the role of prime minister and the relationship between the prime minister, the head of state and the legislature are defined varies among the case study countries. In all the systems investigated here, the prime minister is the head of government and holds this position by virtue of leading the party that commands the confidence of parliament. Given this confidence relationship, they derive their authority from parliament, and must, as a consequence, give account to parliament. In Ireland, these institutional relationships are described in the Constitution. In the UK and in Canada, the mechanics of the relationship between the head of state, the head of government and parliament are a matter of convention; they are not described in statute. Some of these conventions are described in other official documents, such as the Cabinet Manual in the UK (2011) or the Open and Accountable Government (2015) document in Canada. The development of the office of Prime Minister in Australia also relied on convention and practice; it is famously not mentioned in the Australian Constitution (Weller 2007). In addition to the formal governmental responsibilities described here, prime ministers are also party leaders in all four countries.

This section summarises the roles and responsibilities that apply to prime ministers across the four cases and also singles out roles and responsibilities that are particular to some cases. The distribution of roles in each country is described in detail in **Table 2, Appendix 8**.

### *Appointments*

**Government appointments:** Prime ministers are the legal heads of government. They appoint ministers, junior ministers, and nominate a deputy prime minister where applicable. The power to make appointments ultimately rests with the head of state: the official formula is that prime ministers advise the head of state (represented by the Governor General in the case of Canada and Australia) on appointments (House of Commons 2017; Parliament of Australia 2019a). They may also dismiss and may require the resignation of individual ministers, and this is an important attribute of prime ministerial power across systems (Hennessy 2001; Weller 1985; King and Allen 2010).

Prime ministers need to balance various interests in making appointments, and in some cases they must consult with others – for example, with the deputy prime minister in the case of a coalition government; so their power is not unfettered (Hennessy 2001). But they are solely responsible for appointments.

**Other appointments:** Prime ministers are responsible for a range of other appointments, including nominations for the headships of security and intelligence services (UK), for top judicial appointments (Canada and Australia) and for the attorney general (Ireland); as well as nominations for the upper chamber of parliament (UK, Canada and Ireland). In Canada and Australia, the Prime Minister is also involved in the process of selecting the new Governor General (Parliament of Australia 2019b; House of Commons 2017).

### *Managing and coordinating the machinery of government*

In all four cases, prime ministers are responsible for the set up and configuration of the machinery of government; they are responsible for allocating ministerial portfolios, but also for establishing the remit of ministers and of their departments (Hennessy 2001; Weller 2007; Canadian House of Commons 2017;

Government of Ireland 2018). Managing the machinery of government is an area of responsibility exclusive to prime ministers in these systems.

### ***Leadership and coordination of the cabinet***

In all four cases, prime ministers call and chair meetings of the cabinet, and determine the cabinet agenda. They also decide the composition and remit of cabinet committees. Prime ministers may also decide when, and on which issues, the cabinet is allowed to opt out of collective responsibility. As leaders of the government, this is their exclusive responsibility.

### ***Coordination of government policy***

As head of government, the prime minister oversees the work of government, sets the general directions of government policy, and is the most senior public spokesperson for government policy. They may take personal interest in particular areas of policy, but they are also seen as the public face of the government, generally responsible for government decisions and actions (Hennessy 2001; Parliament of Australia 2019b; Weller 2007).

### ***Foreign policy***

In all four cases, the prime minister represents the country at the international level and in bilateral relations. They are personally responsible for some activities, such as international summits and, in the cases of the UK and Ireland, EU Council meetings, but the policy area is shared with a minister in all cases. Still, the prime minister is the spokesperson for the country, so they hold significant personal responsibility for relations with other heads of government.

### ***National security***

The prime minister is responsible for and is usually involved in all matters that relate to national security. In the UK, the Prime Minister chairs the weekly meetings of the National Security Council, oversees the production and implementation of the National Security Strategy and also oversees counter-terrorist policy (Hennessy 2001). Similarly, in Australia the Prime Minister is the chair of the National Security Committee. In Ireland, the National Security Committee is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government, but the Taoiseach chairs the Government Security Committee, which is designed as a crisis management committee. Aside from these direct personal responsibilities and their role in the policy area, prime ministers share authority for this policy area with a minister.

### ***Intergovernmental relations***

The Prime Minister assumes the role of coordinating relations between the state and federal levels in Canada and Australia, and of coordinating intergovernmental relations with the devolved administrations in the UK (Cabinet Manual 2011; Parliament of Australia 2019a; Open and Accountable Government 2015). In Ireland, the Prime Minister is seen as having a particular responsibility for managing the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the UK in matters that concern Northern Ireland, including the intergovernmental institutions that overarch these relationships, such as the North South Ministerial Council or the British Irish Council (Coakley and Gallagher 2009).

## ***Budget and government spending***

Prime ministers are seen as responsible to parliament for the government's spending decisions, particularly in Canada, Australia and in the UK (Hennessy 2001; Brodie 2018). But this is primarily the responsibility of the Finance Minister in Canada, and of the Treasurer and Chancellor of the Exchequer in Australia and the UK, and finance ministers are important government figures in all four systems. The degree to which the prime minister is responsible for the economy is an obvious area of dispute: as leaders of government, they are responsible for all major government decisions, and economic policy is at the core of government policy. For the purpose of the analysis in this chapter, macroeconomics as a general topic is analysed as the finance minister's responsibility, but budget and spending are discussed as close to the prime minister's remit.<sup>20</sup>

## ***Dissolution of parliament and calling an election***

In Australia, the Prime Minister retains the full prerogative to advise the Governor General about the dissolution of parliament and calling an election (Parliament of Australia 2019b). Similarly, in Ireland the Prime Minister advises the President on dissolution and summoning the Dáil. In Canada, elections are on a fixed-term basis (every four years), but the Prime Minister may still advise the Governor General about the dissolution of Parliament.<sup>21</sup> In the UK, the Prime Minister can no longer exercise the prerogative power to dissolve parliament and to call an early election; this has been regulated under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. Prior to this, the Prime Minister exercised the prerogative power to dissolve parliament on behalf of the sovereign.

## ***Managing the relationship with parliament***

Prime ministers are responsible for the government's legislative programme before parliament (together with the Leader of the House in the UK, Australia and Canada). They also manage the relationship between the government and parliament. In Ireland, the Prime Minister announces the Order of Business at the commencement of the sitting of the Dáil on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and may be asked questions on this at Business Questions.

## **Summary: Personal prime ministerial responsibility**

This section has identified areas of exclusive or shared prime ministerial responsibilities in the four countries. As noted in the literature, direct prime ministerial involvement in policy and direct exercise of responsibilities is not at all straightforward to trace (Weller 1991, 2014; Mayntz 1982; Rose 1982). Additionally, given their steering role as leaders of the government, many issues may be pinned on the prime minister even though they are not directly responsible for them. I expect to see that prime ministers are questioned on a wide range of topics, in their capacity as leaders of the government. But I primarily aim to observe the degree to which they are questioned for exclusive or shared responsibilities, on matters such as appointments and the operation of government machinery, foreign affairs, or defence. In terms of tracing direct prime ministerial decision-making, this measure offers the closest proxy for evaluating what prime ministers do, as well as the degree to which they are questioned for it. It also traces whether prime ministers are held to account for their *personal* responsibilities, rather for their *role* as head of government. As noted in Chapter 2, this crucial aspect of the scope of action of prime ministers

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<sup>20</sup> In the Comparative Agendas Project, 'Macroeconomics' is the topic referring to all aspects of economic policy, and 'Budget and Spending' is a subtopic.

<sup>21</sup> Canada Elections Act contains a provision for reserving the power of the Governor General to dissolve parliament (Part 5, 56(1) 1 <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-2.01/page-9.html#h-26>)

remains virtually undocumented, and it is undoubtedly an important aspect of the operation of the executive.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the topics and subtopics of questions were coded using the codebook of the Comparative Agendas Project.<sup>22</sup> The labels for topics included in charts are the same as the codes for topics from this source. The correspondence between topics and subtopics in the Comparative Agendas Project and prime ministerial responsibilities is summarised in Table 6.1. Based on the codebook, the ‘Government Operations’ topic and associated sub-topics comprised the majority of issues seen as within the remit of prime ministers. This analysis is meant to offer an overview of how prime ministerial accountability was carried out in the period analysed, offering some analysis on the context in each country. The distribution of topics presented in the results naturally also reflects the issues that were salient at the time in each country.

**Table 6.1. Prime Ministerial responsibilities and Comparative Agendas Codebook topics and subtopics**

<b>Prime Ministerial responsibility</b>	<b>Code topic and subtopic</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government appointments</b></li> <li>• <b>Other appointments</b></li> <li>• <b>Managing and coordinating the machinery of government</b></li> <li>• <b>Leadership and coordination of the cabinet</b></li> <li>• <b>Managing the relationship with parliament</b></li> <li>• <b>Coordination of government policy</b></li> <li>• <b>Intergovernmental relations</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Government operations</b></p> <p>Appointments and nominations</p> <p>Appointments and nominations</p> <p>Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight</p> <p>Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight</p> <p>Scandals and resignations</p> <p>Executive–legislative relations</p> <p>Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight</p> <p>Intergovernmental relations</p>
<b>Foreign policy</b>	<b>International Affairs</b>
<b>National security</b>	<b>Defence</b>
<b>Budget and government spending</b>	<p><b>Macroeconomics</b></p> <p>National budget and debt</p>

<sup>22</sup> See Bibliography for references to the codebook, and **Appendix 6** for the full list of codes applied in this thesis.



### 6.3. Accountability in collective and individualised questioning mechanisms

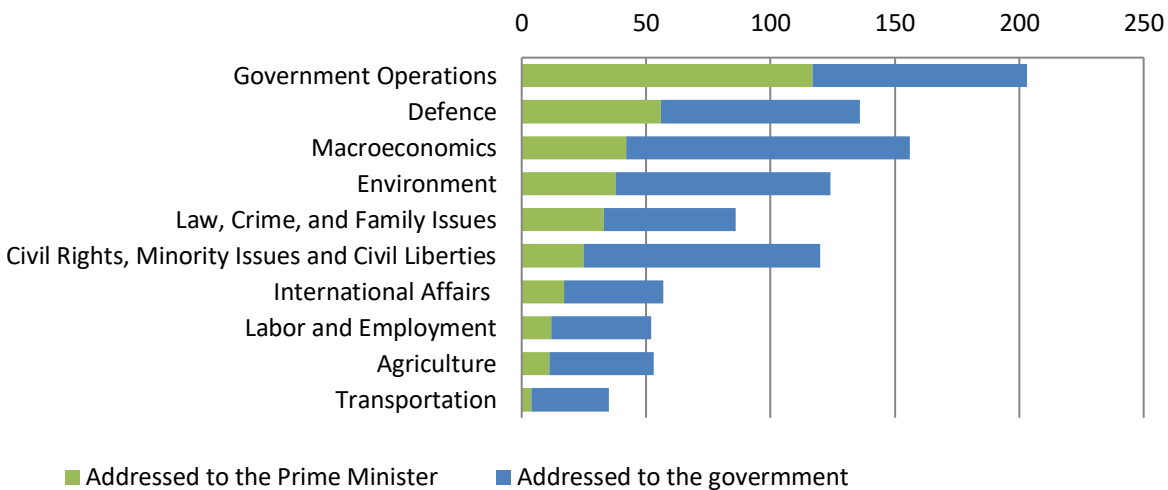
This section first investigates the practice of questioning in Canada and Australia, where prime ministers are questioned together with ministers, and subsequently in the UK and Ireland, where prime ministers are questioned individually. Each sub-section addressing each case starts by exploring the topics on which prime ministers and ministers are asked questions. Drawing on section 6.2, it discusses the extent to which prime ministers are questioned about issues for which they are personally responsible. It also discusses forms of address: the extent to which prime ministers are asked to speak for their own actions and decisions, and the extent to which they are asked to speak for a minister or for the government generically.

#### 6.3.1. Collective questioning mechanisms: Canada and Australia

##### Canada

Figure 6.1 presents the top 10 topics that came up in questions to the Prime Minister and to ministers, ordered by topics on which the Prime Minister received the most questions. It illustrates the number of questions addressed directly to the Prime Minister, versus the number of questions addressed to ministers or to the government generically.

**Figure 6.1. Canada: Top 10 topics in questions to the prime minister and to ministers (N)**



During Stephen Harper’s premiership, questions targeted prime ministerial responsibilities, either exclusive or shared, to a significant degree, and covered diverse issues: a total of 66% of questions addressed to Harper concerned prime ministerial responsibilities. The top two topics on which he was asked questions are matters for which the Canadian Prime Minister is directly responsible (government operations and machinery), or for which they have an important degree of responsibility but share responsibility with a minister (defence).

Stephen Harper received 117 questions on government operations, amounting to 33% of all the 355 questions addressed to him. He was asked 56 questions on defence (16%), but only 17 questions (5%) on foreign affairs, which ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among the top 10. He also received 42 questions on the budget (12%), which is an area for which the Canadian Prime Minister is seen as responsible (Brodie 2018), and captured in the Macroeconomics category.

Table 6.2 shows that, on government operations, most questions referred to scandals and controversies related to the operation of government. The second most frequently mentioned subtopic was appointments.

<b>Table 6.2. Subtopics in questions to the Prime Minister in Canada:</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Government operations</b>	
Prime Ministerial and ministerial scandals and resignations	56
Nominations and Appointments	28
Regulation of political parties, donations and campaigns	13
Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight	10
Executive-legislative relations	10
<b>N</b>	<b>117</b>

Stephen Harper was asked 28 questions on appointments, spanning a broad range of issues. One recurring question concerned the appointment of a Minister of Foreign Affairs and security concerns in connection to the minister's partner. Another example concerned the decision to appoint the Chair of the Aboriginal Affairs Committee in the House of Commons, in light of evidence of his misconduct; this is another example of a coordinated questioning strategy similar to the ones discussed in Chapter 5, with a question from the Leader of the Opposition and a question from a member of the same party (the Canadian Liberal Party) in sequence during Question Period on 10 May 2006. Some of the questions related to the Prime Minister's role in judicial appointments. Stephen Harper was criticized for undue involvement in the process. For example, on 20 February 2007, the Leader of Bloc Québécois and a second member of the same party asked the following questions:

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, over the past few days, three current and former Supreme Court judges have publicly criticized the Prime Minister's interference in the judicial appointments process. Yet the Prime Minister stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that his interventions with respect to appointing members of the judicial advisory committee are threatening judicial independence. Why is the Prime Minister insisting on getting involved in the judicial appointments process when everyone—judges, lawyers and bar associations—is asking him to reconsider?

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ):** [...] Could the Prime Minister stop fiddling with the selection committees by trying to select judges based on his political ideology and instead ask the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to review the judicial appointment process?

Many of the questions on appointments accused the Prime Minister of patronage and party political appointments. Through two questions in sequence on 1 February 2007 from a member of the Bloc Québécois, Stephen Harper was accused of making a partisan appointment to Citizenship Judges.<sup>23</sup> He also received questions about the close ties that the Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island had with the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party of Canada:

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after promising Canadians they would be squeaky clean, the government has been anything but. Provincial Conservative operatives seem free to belly up to the patronage trough. The regional minister's office is rife with party insiders. However, the Prime Minister's partisan fingerprints are all over the appointment of the lieutenant governor, the wife of an influential party insider. The post represents the Queen, not a reward for political services. How can the Prime Minister explain this growing list of partisan political appointments?

<sup>23</sup> Members of the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada government agency.

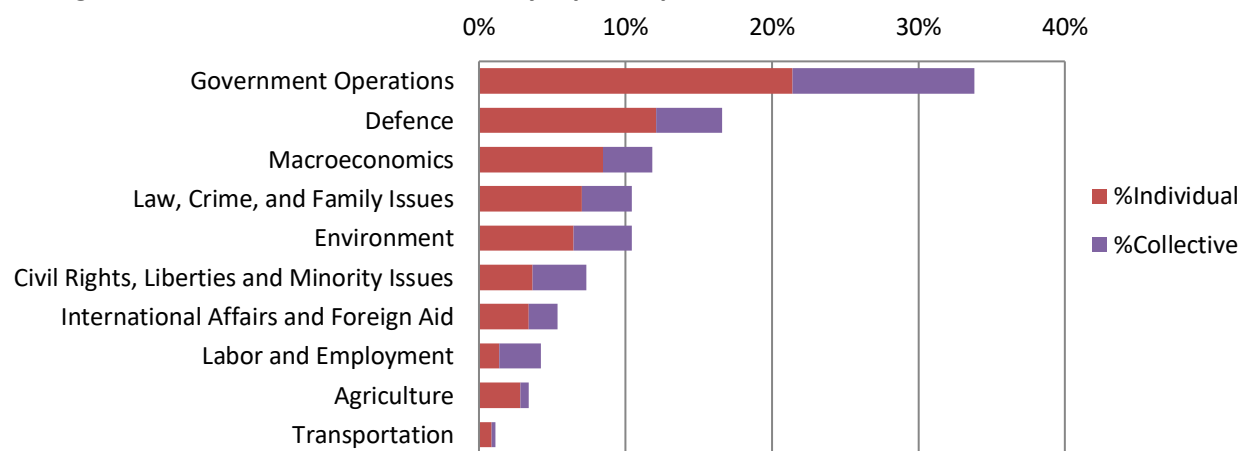
These examples suggest that the Canadian Prime Minister was scrutinised extensively for his role in government appointments but also other appointments in the political system, which is an exclusive prime ministerial responsibility.

Turning to shared matters, on defence, a majority of questions concerned Canada’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan. A sequence of questions on 25 April 2007 referenced a report regarding human rights concerns about Afghan detainees. The Prime Minister was questioned both on decisions taken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and by the Defence Minister, but also on his own involvement and the degree to which he was aware that a report had been produced. Another theme concerned Canada’s commitment in Afghanistan and how long the Canadian mission was set to continue, which came up in questions on 8 and 10 May 2007.

Stephen Harper was only asked 17 questions on foreign affairs, on a relatively diverse range of topics. For example, on 10 April 2008 he was asked to increase Canada’s contribution to the UN food aid programme, as well as a further question on increasing Canada’s budget allocation for international aid. On 18 September 2009, the Prime Minister was criticised for giving a speech on his foreign policy objectives to the UN General Assembly, rather than making a statement in the House of Commons. On 10 May 2006 Stephen Harper was asked why Canada had not taken an active role in peacekeeping in Darfur, and the questioner demanded that the Prime Minister should decide to do so.

Building on the measure of focus discussed in section 6.1, Figure 6.2 explores the extent to which questions were phrased such that Stephen Harper was asked to account personally, or to speak for other ministers or for the government as a whole, in questions addressed directly to him.

**Figure 6.2. Canada: Forms of address by topic in questions to the Prime Minister\***



\*Expressed as the percentage of individualised or collective questions on each topic, out of the total number of questions addressed to the prime minister (N= 355 questions).

Figure 6.2 shows considerable evidence of individualised address in questions to the Prime Minister: Stephen Harper was asked to explain his own actions and decisions more often than he was asked to explain actions and decisions of the government. Overall, 67% of questions were individualised and 31% collective. This appears to be correlated with two topics for which prime ministers have exclusive or shared responsibility: government operations and defence. But there is evidence of individualised address on other topics as well: macroeconomics, law and crime matters, and the environment. Some of these questions asked Stephen Harper about his direct involvement in policy steering decisions, but most questions were meant to attribute responsibility to him.

Asking the Prime Minister to speak for the government or for ministers is meant to put them on the spot and to test their knowledge about government policy and about the activity of ministers; they are tested in their capacity as head of government, responsible for the directions the government is taking. For example, Stephen Harper was asked to explain government policy on civil rights and minority issues in 11 questions. Opposition members also asked the Prime Minister to justify actions by ministers, for example the involvement of the Minister of Labour in an expenses scandal, which is a clear example of the Prime Minister put on the spot for actions of another member of the government:

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Labour could not explain why his travel expenses failed to disclose a penny of almost \$150,000 for charter flights last year. We are not questioning that the minister needs to take trips. We are questioning the minister's practice of hiding the costs of them. In the name of transparency, on which the Conservatives campaigned, can the Prime Minister tell us which other ministers are hiding their travel expenses the way that the Minister of Labour did?

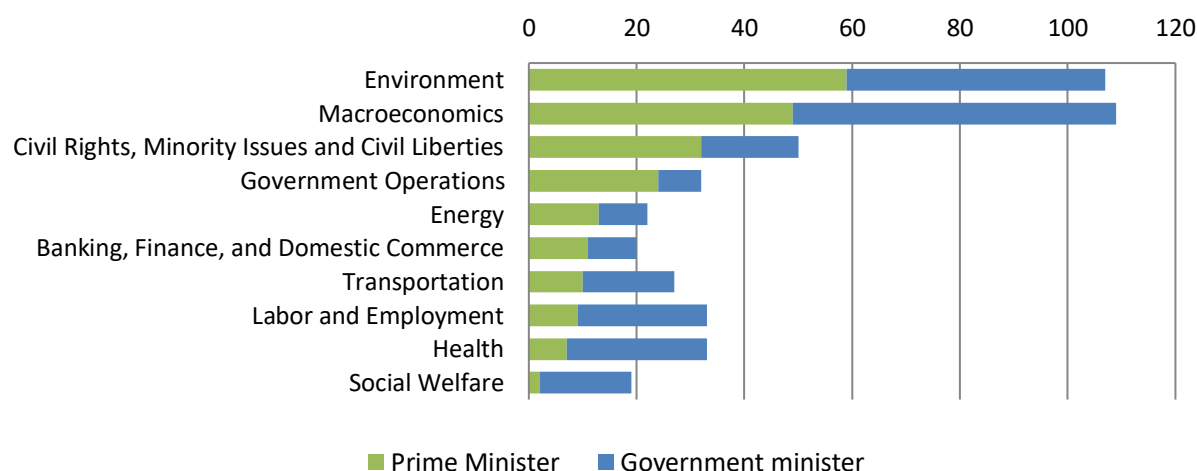
Another form of collective address in questions was to ask the Prime Minister to account for actions of his party. Throughout 2007 and 2008, Stephen Harper was asked seven questions concerning the Conservative Party, which referred to accusations about spending beyond the limit allowed by the Canada Elections Act during the 2006 election.

This analysis shows evidence that Stephen Harper was questioned frequently for his responsibilities, either direct or shared, which suggests that Question Period, as a collective mechanism, provided focus on matters of personal prime ministerial accountability during the period analysed to an important degree.

## Australia

Turning to Australia, Figure 6.3 presents the top 10 topics that came up in questions to the Prime Minister and to ministers during Julia Gillard’s premiership.

**Figure 6.3. Australia: Top 10 topics in questions to the prime minister and to ministers (N)**



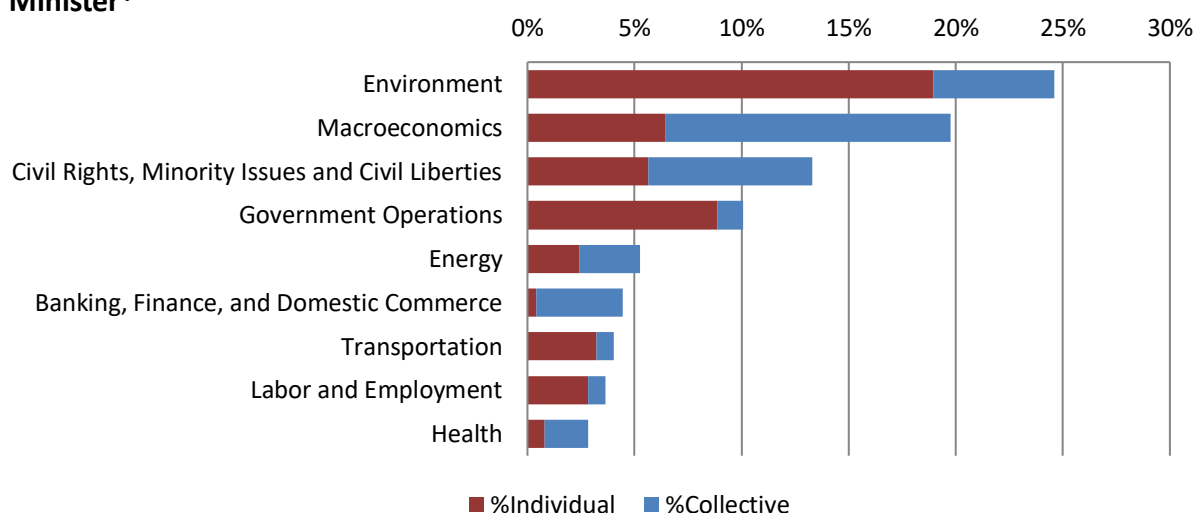
The landscape of questions to the Prime Minister in Australia appears, on a first glance, notably different to the one in Canada. Figure 6.3 suggests that neither of the top two most frequent topics is an area for which the Prime Minister is responsible either exclusively, or shared with a minister, with the exception of the few questions referring to the budget mentioned below. The most frequently mentioned topic concerned environmental policy, and this is due to the controversy regarding the introduction of a carbon pricing scheme during Julia Gillard’s premiership. After Gillard had ruled out a carbon pricing scheme during the 2010 federal election, famously declaring that ‘there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead’, the Labor government introduced legislation for a carbon pricing scheme in the Clean Energy Bill 2011.<sup>24</sup> Given Julia Gillard’s change of position on the matter, the passage of the bill through parliament was criticised fiercely by the opposition, and featured prominently in questions. As Gillard was seen as the lead spokesperson for the policy, many questions concerning the carbon tax were addressed directly to her – responsibility was, to a large extent, attributed to her. Hence, on the environment, the Prime Minister received more questions than the responsible minister (45% environment questions were addressed to the minister; 55% to the Prime Minister). This is a case that reveals the complexity of prime ministerial responsibility: although the environment is not an area within the Australian Prime Minister’s remit, the fact that she assumed leadership of the policy meant that she was seen as the political leader responsible for it.

The degree to which Julia Gillard was held to account for topics that are traditionally within the Australian Prime Minister’s direct or shared remit is strikingly lower than in Canada: only 27% of the questions addressed to her. Julia Gillard received 24 questions on government operations, which only amounts to 10% of the 248 questions addressed to her. On shared matters, she received 19 questions on the budget (8%), and very few questions on foreign affairs (10 questions; 4%) and on defence (15 questions; 6%). The latter two did not even enter into the top 10 topics asked at Question Time.

<sup>24</sup> Sydney Morning Herald (2010) <https://www.smh.com.au/national/pm-says-no-carbon-tax-under-her-govt-20100816-126ru.html> Accessed 1/07/2019

Out of the 24 questions on government operations addressed to Gillard, 21 referred to issues relating to public scandals involving the Prime Minister or other cabinet ministers. For example, the Prime Minister was asked ten questions by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition regarding her involvement in giving legal advice relating to the setup of the Australian Workers Union Workplace Reform Association. This referred to an incident in which Julia Gillard was involved during her legal career before she became Prime Minister. Gillard was not asked any questions on appointments or on other matters regarding the operation of government, which suggests that there is considerably less evidence of the Prime Minister being questioned about issues for which they are directly responsible in Australia, compared to Canada, during the periods analysed. Overall the Australian Prime Minister was questioned more on topical issues and current affairs (the environment, due to the carbon tax, and economics) than on issues for which they are directly or jointly responsible.

**Figure 6.4. Australia: Forms of address by topic in questions to the Prime Minister\***



\*Expressed as the percentage of individualised or collective questions on each topic, out of the total number of questions addressed to the prime minister (N= 248 questions).

At the macro-level, there is more evidence of collective language in questions in Australia, compared to Canada: 54% of questions asked Julia Gillard to respond personally, whilst 45% asked her to speak for the government. Out of the topics on which she received the most questions, Julia Gillard was predominantly asked to give account individually on the highly topical carbon tax, on which she was seen to be the lead spokesperson, and secondly on matters for which the Australian Prime Minister is personally responsible (government operations). The third aim of individualised questions was to demand from the Prime Minister to intervene in a national crisis. On transport, most of the questions addressed to the Prime Minister referred to the strike affecting the Australian national airline Qantas in November 2010.<sup>25</sup> As the Qantas situation was perceived as a national crisis, the Prime Minister, as leader of the government, was seen as the person to act. But, similarly to the carbon tax, it was also matter of blame attribution: a highly topical matter is one for which the Prime Minister must publicly take responsibility.

<sup>25</sup> Qantas management decided to ground all flights in an attempt to end months of industrial action by its staff, as well as disputes between the management and the unions representing staff, resulting in a major disruption of airline transport. BBC News (2010) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11691197> Accessed 8/07/2019

As Figure 6.4 illustrates, the Prime Minister was asked to speak more for the government on macroeconomics and on civil rights, liberties and minority issues, which primarily refers to immigration. A significant number of questions on immigration were meant to put the Prime Minister on the spot for policy failures, particularly in what concerns illegal immigration, as in this question from the Leader of the Opposition:

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) : My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind her that 42,000 people, on 700 illegal boats, have arrived on this government's watch and that more than 10,000 have been released into the community without comprehensive ASIO checks. Given that a convicted jihadist terrorist was held at a family facility in the Adelaide Hills for almost a year, through what officials called a clerical error, will the Prime Minister now concede that Labor's policies have made Australia less safe than it was under the former government?

But another type of collective accountability question on economic issues involved government backbenchers asking the Prime Minister to present government policy. Across all topics, these questions took similar forms, asking the Prime Minister to 'update the House' on how the government was working to deliver a positive outcome, for example to 'keep our economy strong for the future and to support working people along the way' (10 December 2012), 'putting in place the right policies, properly costed, to ensure that Australia's future is stronger, smarter and fairer', or 'to keep the economy strong, deliver reform and build a clean energy future' (13 March 2013). These 'helpful' questions – the famous Dorothy Dixers – allowed the Prime Minister to present the government's achievements.

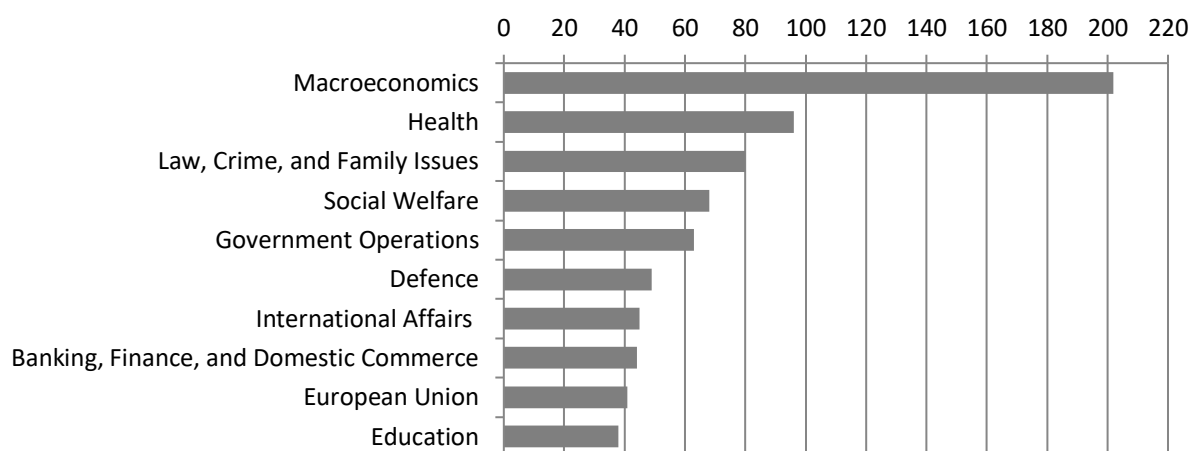
Evidence presented in this section suggests that questioning was significantly more targeted at prime ministerial responsibilities (either direct or shared), and more individualised, in Canada, compared with more topical, current affairs questioning on a more collective tone in Australia, during the two premierships analysed. This contrasting evidence suggests that questioning the prime minister can take a targeted, individualised form even in collective mechanisms, but also that collective mechanisms may play different roles within political systems. The Australian case reveals the complex nature of prime ministerial responsibility, with a case when the leader of the government assumes public leadership for a policy. These conclusions will be discussed further in the final section.

### 6.3.2. Individualised questioning mechanisms: UK and Ireland

#### UK

Figure 6.5 presents the top 10 topics on which David Cameron was asked questions.

**Figure 6.5. UK: Top 10 topics in questions (N)**



The figure indicates that David Cameron was questioned on a varied range of topics, few of which relate directly to the British Prime Minister's direct responsibilities. The main two topics were the economy and health policy, which are technically within the remit of ministers. As documented by Hazerika and Hamilton (2018), the Leader of the Opposition's office maintained the economy and the NHS as the centrepiece of Labour's questioning strategy at PMQs during the coalition government, and Figure 6.5 demonstrates this tendency. The two policy topics referred to the contested issues of austerity measures and NHS reform, which remained at the top of the opposition's questioning agenda throughout the coalition government (Yong and Bale 2016; Seldon and Snowdon 2015).

In total, only 21% of questions addressed to David Cameron were connected to the UK Prime Minister's direct or shared responsibilities. In terms of topics that are within the Prime Minister's direct remit, Cameron received 63 questions on matters related to government operations, on a wide range of subtopics, as discussed below. But this only amounts to 7% of all questions addressed to him during this period. On topics on which UK Prime Ministers hold significant responsibility but share responsibility with a minister, David Cameron received 49 questions on defence (6% of the 879 questions addressed to him throughout the period), and 45 questions on foreign affairs (5%). He also received 22 questions on the budget and government spending (3%).

Looking in more detail at questions on government operations, as Table 6.3 shows, Cameron was only asked two questions about appointments, both coming from Labour backbenchers during the PMQs session on 24 April 2013. Both concerned the appointment of Baroness Grey-Thompson as the chair of Sport England. On both questions, the Prime Minister replied that the issue fell within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Given the wide scope that the UK Prime Minister has for making appointments, surprisingly few questions were directed at this area of their responsibilities.



<b>Table 6.3. UK subtopics: Government operations</b>	<b>N</b>
Executive–legislative relations	18
Regulation of political parties, donations and campaigns	15
Prime Ministerial and Ministerial scandals and resignations	14
Devolution	10
Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight	4
Nominations and appointments	2
<b>N</b>	<b>63</b>

David Cameron also received several questions on issues related to government and institutional relations, including on a bill to allow the recall of MPs, on behaviour at PMQs, on organising the referendum on the AV voting system, and on the potential effects of House of Lords reform on the powers of the House of Commons. He was also asked to explain issues of misconduct, most prominently the involvement of his chief of staff, Andy Coulson, in the phone hacking scandal. He was asked five questions on this issue during July 2011, from the Leader of the Opposition and opposition backbenchers. David Cameron was also questioned repeatedly on whether he would take part in a televised debate between party leaders, an issue that featured prominently in the run up to the 2015 election.

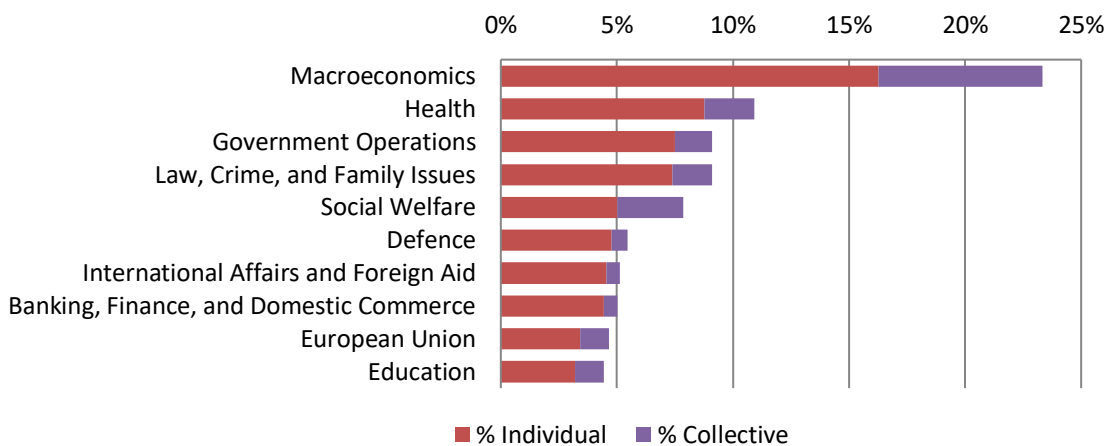
The questions on devolution asked David Cameron to make interventions. These included two questions from Scottish National Party MPs about further devolution of powers to Scotland, and questions from Democratic Unionist Party MPs about issues regarding Northern Ireland. He was also questioned by Wayne David, Labour MP for the Welsh constituency of Caerphilly, about reforming the Barnett formula regarding Wales; and by a Conservative backbencher calling for a UK-wide referendum on Scottish independence.

On defence and foreign affairs, Cameron was asked about matters of general foreign and defence policy, which are shared with ministers, but also about issues in which he was directly involved. For example, he was asked about the UK's NATO policies and the positions the Prime Minister would communicate at the NATO summit in 2012. A question from Labour MP Margaret Hodge, then Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, on 13 July 2011, accused David Cameron of personally blocking the National Audit Office from accessing documents from the National Security Council, which the Prime Minister chairs, and demanded that he should release the relevant documents immediately. During 2011 he was questioned on his proposal for a no-fly zone over Libya during the conflict, and in 2013 he was asked about his decisions regarding military intervention in Syria.

Overall, PMQs shows moderate evidence of targeting prime ministerial responsibilities; the focus was on topical affairs and on topics for which the Prime Minister is seen as having an important steering role.

Figure 6.6 explores the extent to which David Cameron was asked to account personally, or to speak for the government or for other ministers.

**Figure 6.6. UK: Forms of address in questions by topic\***



\*Expressed as the percentage of individualised or collective questions on each topic, out of the total number of questions addressed to the prime minister (N= 879 questions).

The UK displays the highest percentage of individualised-language questions (76% of questions) compared to all other countries. One explanation could be that PMQs has become very personalised and individualised: the Prime Minister is asked to account personally across many topics, regardless of whether these issues are directly within their remit. In some cases it is a matter of asking the Prime Minister about their involvement in the steering of policy; in others, it is a matter of pinning blame on them. This confirms findings in previous studies (notably Bates et al. 2014, but also Bevan and John 2016) that showed that the UK Prime Minister has been asked questions on an increasingly diverse range of topics over time: everything is seen as within the Prime Minister’s responsibility. The role of individualised language in this case is predominantly to assign responsibility. The following example shows how individualised language is used to attribute blame to the Prime Minister for policy failure:

**Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** The Prime Minister said that his economic policy would eradicate the deficit in this Parliament. All he can claim today is that after four years it came down by a third, but in the past few months it has been going up. Will he accept that the big fall in real wages since the election is a large part of the explanation for why his economic policy has fallen so far short on its central objective?

In terms of how collective accountability is performed, questions asking the Prime Minister to speak for the government fall into a few categories. Firstly, the Prime Minister was put on the spot for actions of ministers. Opposition backbenchers and the Leader of the Opposition criticized individual government ministers, and asked the Prime Minister to account for their actions. For example, on 27 June 2012, Labour MP Clive Efford asked David Cameron to explain a statement by the Health Secretary:

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** A third of south-east London health care trusts’ deficit is due to the private finance initiative. Is not the Secretary of State for Health wrong to suggest that the entire deficit is due to the PFI? [...]

Similarly, on 1 December 2010 Labour MP Margaret Curran asked the Prime Minister to explain a statement by the Business Secretary:

**Margaret Curran (Glasgow East) (Lab):** In a recent Lib Dem leaflet in Scotland, the Business Secretary compares tuition fees to the poll tax. Is it acceptable for the Business Secretary to say one thing in the House and, when campaigning for votes in Scotland, to condemn that policy?

Other questions were meant to put the Prime Minister on the spot for instances of embarrassing policy failures attributed to the government:

**Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op):** In the light of the National Audit Office's estimate of a £750 million cost to the taxpayer of the sale of Royal Mail, what measures will the Government take to ensure that when they sell Eurostar, the City gravy train will not take the taxpayer for a ride yet again? (15.04.2010)

The Prime Minister was also asked to give information about policy. For example, on 6 November 2013, Liberal Democrat MP Sir Robert Smith asked David Cameron to clarify the government's energy policy:

**Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Can the Prime Minister confirm that in the review of levies on energy bills the fairness of the funding process will be the priority, and that the Government still support vital measures to insulate people's homes to ensure that the fuel-poor can keep their houses warmer in winter?

Similar to Australia, government backbenchers intervened to ask the Prime Minister 'helpful' questions, allowing him to present positive effects of the government's economic and social welfare policies. For example, on 13 February 2013, Conservative MP Claire Perry praised the government's efforts on adult social care:

**Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that with the Government's plans to cap social care bills at £75,000 we are finally starting to defuse the ticking time bomb that is adult social care? The action will allow the insurance market to grow to protect against the liability, and we are helping people to protect their family homes in their old age.

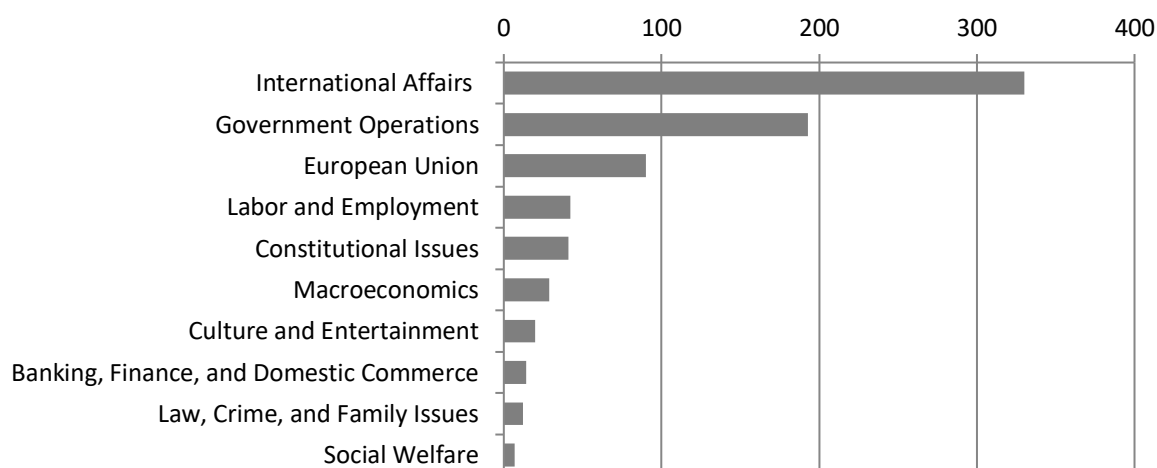
As will be discussed in Chapter 8, this type of question performs a form of support for the government, as government backbenchers allow the Prime Minister to present the government's policy in a favourable light: speaking for the government and collective language perform a supportive role, placing the Prime Minister at the helm of positive developments, rather than assigning blame to them.

Evidence from the UK suggests that, as an individualised mechanism, PMQs showed evidence of some focus on prime ministerial responsibilities, with some questions on government operations, foreign affairs and defence, which are areas of exclusive or shared responsibility. Still, topical issues concerning the government's economic plan and the NHS dominated PMQs throughout the coalition government. PMQs is strikingly similar, in this respect, to the Australian Question Time. Language was predominantly individualised: regardless of the topic, the Prime Minister is seen as responsible.

## Ireland

Turning to Ireland, Figure 6.7 suggests that questioning during Enda Kenny’s premiership was predominantly targeted at issues for which the Irish Prime Minister is personally responsible, more so than in all the other three cases: 77% of questions addressed to him were on areas within his direct competence. The top two topics on which the Prime Minister was asked questions most frequently are issues that are within their remit: foreign and international affairs (over 300 questions, 45% of questions), and government operations (193 questions, amounting to 27%). Within these topics, on foreign affairs, the Taoiseach was asked predominantly on two areas on which they are personally responsible and involved: bilateral and other types of high level talks, and issues related to Northern Ireland (Table 6.4). He was also asked 35 questions regarding his participation at the European Council.

**Figure 6.7. Ireland: Top 10 topics in questions (N)**



<b>Table 6.4. Subtopics in questions to the Prime Minister in Ireland: Foreign Affairs</b>		<b>N</b>
Diplomatic/Bilateral talks		247
Northern Ireland		76
Middle East		4
Eastern Partnership		2
Human Rights		1
<b>N</b>		<b>330</b>

Enda Kenny received 57 questions submitted in writing and 19 supplementary questions on issues connected to Northern Ireland, which reflects the Taoiseach’s key role in managing the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the UK in what concerns Northern Ireland. Questions covered a wide range of issues: the Taoiseach was asked about discussions with the British Prime Minister regarding devolution in Northern Ireland; in connection to this, the Taoiseach was also asked about the ‘government’s commitment to the Stormont House Agreement’, which was an agreement between the Irish and UK governments, and parties in Northern Ireland, regarding the governing of Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach was also asked to report on talks with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and on meetings of the British–Irish Council and of the North South Ministerial Council.

Questions on the third most frequently mentioned topic, the EU, also referred mainly to issues for which the Taoiseach is personally responsible. Enda Kenny was asked to give account about EU Council

meetings and other talks with EU leaders. The second most mentioned subtopic referred to whether the Taoiseach had had diplomatic talks with the Prime Minister of the UK in relation to the UK's referendum to leave the European Union.

Questions submitted in writing covered both prospective and retrospective aspects, and this pattern recurred across all topics – the Taoiseach was asked both to report on issues that had been discussed in meetings, and to outline issues that he was planning to address in future meetings. For example, on questions regarding diplomatic meetings, the Taoiseach was asked either to report on issues discussed during a meeting, or to indicate if he intended to bring up an issue at an upcoming meeting. Questions regarding EU Council meetings are also an example of prospective and retrospective accountability. The Taoiseach was questioned both prospectively, regarding issues that he was going to take up at EU Council meetings, and retrospectively, regarding whether he had raised specific topics or discussed with particular EU leaders. For example, on 13 December 2011 the Taoiseach was asked 19 retrospective questions on the EU Summit meeting on 9 December 2011. Examples included:

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he raised the question of protecting democracy in Europe in the context of proposed treaty changes at the meeting of EU leaders on 9 December 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the issues that he prioritised at the EU summit meeting on 9 December 2011.

Sometimes the question took a generic form of asking the Taoiseach to report on a meeting or a visit abroad. Given that supplementary questions must be connected to the initial question submitted in writing, this issue was followed up with more substantive questions. This practice allows a build-up strategy: questions submitted in writing range from the very general to the specific, covering various aspects of the same topic, to ensure that all relevant issues may be further explored through supplementaries. Party leaders cast a wide net through their written questions, to cover as many aspects as possible, whilst also remaining at a general level; and subsequently follow up with supplementary questions. Questions on preparations for the UK's Brexit referendum are a clear example of this strategy: on 29 September 2015, members submitted 18 questions in writing on this topic. Examples include: whether the Taoiseach's department had undertaken an impact assessment on Brexit; whether the Taoiseach had discussed the referendum with David Cameron during their recent meetings; whether he had discussed the issue with other European leaders at recent EU Council meetings and whether he was planning to set up a working group that includes business representatives. These topics were then followed-up extensively through supplementary questions.

This shows that Ireland manages to mitigate the potential effect of creating a scripted dialogue with the Prime Minister: even though the Taoiseach reads out a prepared answer to the written questions, they are then probed further through supplementary questions, and the spontaneous component of questioning builds on the more structured element required by the written questions.

The Irish Prime Minister was extensively scrutinised on issues connected to his responsibilities regarding machinery of government, and questions covered a wide range of issues, as Table 6.5 shows.

<b>Table 6.5. Subtopics in questions to the Prime Minister in Ireland:</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Government operations</b>	
Government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight	151
Executive–legislative relations	29
Nominations and appointments	12
Prime Ministerial and ministerial scandals and resignations	1
<b>N</b>	<b>193</b>

Many of the questions on government efficiency and bureaucratic oversight referred to cabinet committees. The Taoiseach was asked 18 questions regarding cabinet subcommittees and their meetings; issues referred to when the last meeting of a specific subcommittee took place, and in one instance whether he had attended the meeting.

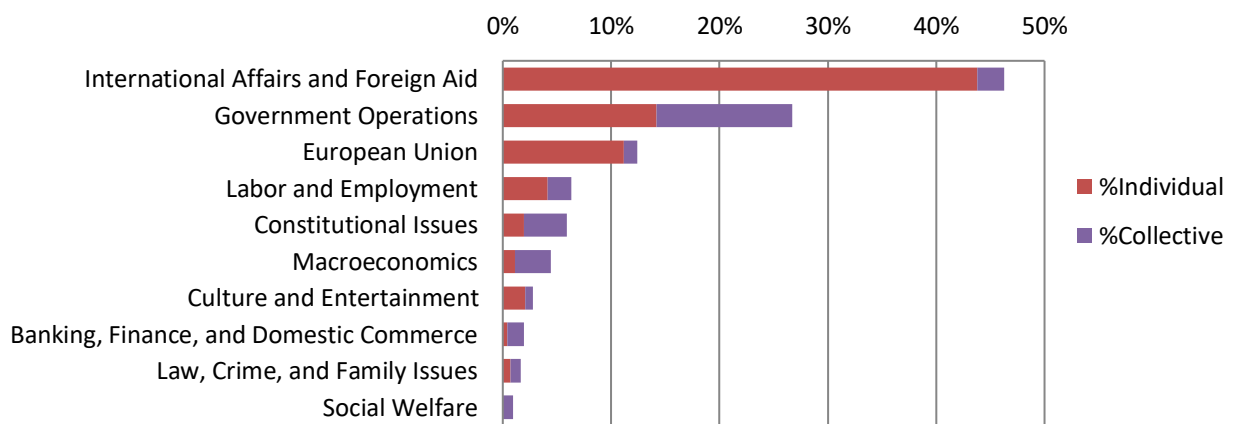
**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach the number of times the Cabinet sub-Committee on Social Policy has met since January 2014. (24.06.2014)

**Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the membership of the Cabinet sub Committee on Health. (25.09.2012)

Other questions inquired about the activity of the Economic Management Council, which was a Cabinet sub-committee set up to coordinate the government’s handling of the financial crisis, and the relationship with the EU, IMF and the European Central Bank. This is unusual among all the cases studied here, despite the fact that organising cabinet committees is a responsibility of prime ministers across all systems. Ireland is the only case in which the Prime Minister was questioned on this issue. He was also asked a wide range of questions related to the operation of the Department of the Taoiseach, such as its role in European Affairs, and details regarding the special advisers employed by the department.

Figure 6.8 below explores the extent to which Enda Kenny was asked to account personally, or to speak for the government or for other ministers. Overall, questions in Ireland were almost as individualised as were questions in the UK: 73% of all questions asked Enda Kenny to speak in personal name, and 27% for the government. Yet this is qualitatively different from individualised language in the UK: in the UK, the role of individualised address may be more to assign blame and responsibility; in Ireland, it is correlated predominantly with topics on which the Taoiseach is responsible.

**Figure 6.8. Ireland: Forms of address in questions by topic\***



\* Expressed as the percentage of individualised or collective questions on each topic, out of the total number of questions addressed to the prime minister (N= 726 questions).

As Figure 6.8 shows, almost all questions related to international affairs required the Prime Minister to speak for their own actions and decisions. The Taoiseach was also asked predominantly to speak for their own actions and decisions on EU matters, mainly in connection to his participation at EU Council reunions. In the UK, the Prime Minister conventionally makes statements in the House of Commons following international summits, so it is likely that some of the questions on those topics might be addressed during their statements, rather than at PMQs. In Ireland, the Standing Orders (S.O. 45) mention that statements are not followed by debate, so it is likely that any such questions will be brought up at Oral Questions.

The Prime Minister was asked to explain government decisions on constitutional issues and on economics; on constitutional issues, questions mainly referred to the set-up of the 2014 Irish Constitutional Convention. On economics, the main issue on which the Taoiseach was asked to give account for the government was the government’s economic programme.

This section suggests that there were notable differences between questioning in the UK and questioning in Ireland during the premierships analysed. The UK Prime Minister was primarily questioned on topical issues concerning the economy and the NHS, and to a much lesser degree on issues within their remit or shared with another minister. In Ireland, the Taoiseach was predominantly questioned on issues that are within their responsibilities and in which they had a direct involvement, and very little on current and topical affairs. With respect to the forms of address, both mechanisms show evidence of focus on the prime minister, with questions taking a predominantly individualised form. The potential connections between these observations and procedural features are discussed in the next section. The notable procedural differences between the two countries allow some ground to generalise beyond the time period analysed, and to posit that it is likely that similar patterns may be observed during other periods.

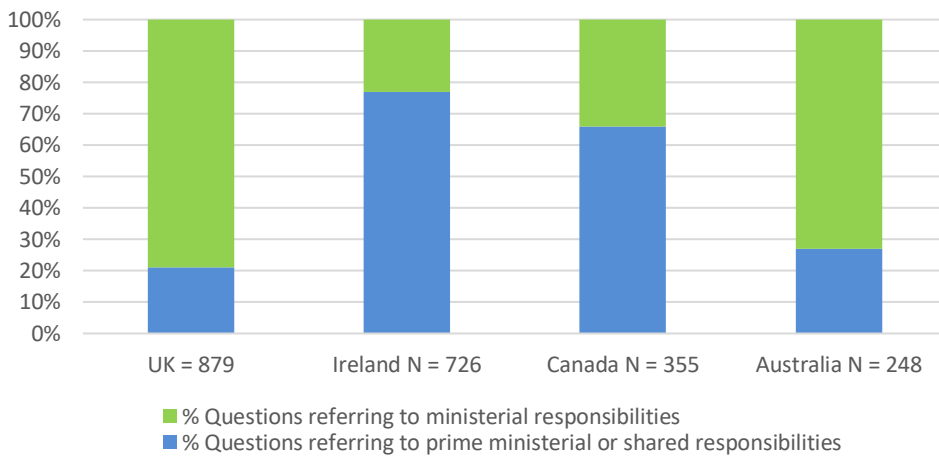
## 6.4. Chapter conclusions

In answer to the question set out in section 6.1, evidence presented in this chapter suggests the following with respect to focus on personal prime ministerial accountability:

### Topics

Summarising the evidence presented in the chapter, Figure 6.9 shows that there were more questions to prime ministers targeting personal prime ministerial responsibilities, either direct or shared, at Question Period in Canada (66%) than at Question Time in Australia (27%), and at Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland (77%) compared to PMQs in the UK (21%).

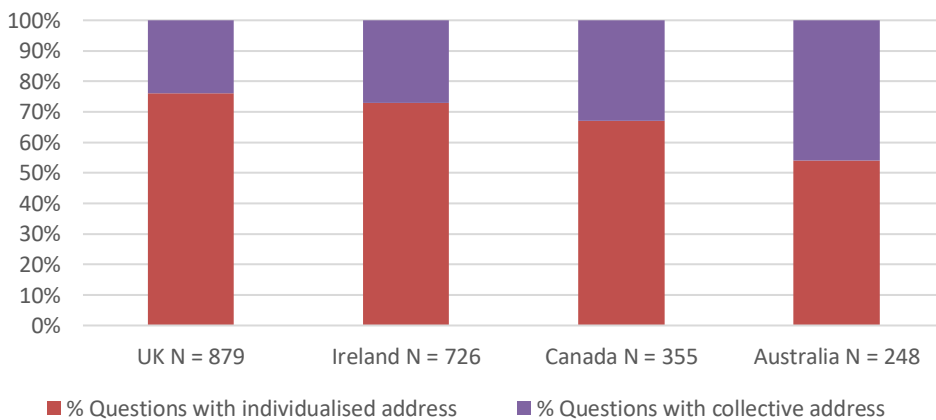
**Figure 6.9 Questions to prime ministers and prime ministerial responsibilities**



### Forms of address

As summarised in Figure 6.10, there was more evidence of individualised language in questions (individual accountability) and less of collective language (collective accountability) in Canada than in Australia, and levels of individualised and collective language in questions were almost equal in Ireland and in the UK.

**Figure 6.10 Forms of address in questions to prime ministers**



Bringing the two dimensions together to answer the question set out in the introduction reveals important contrasts between countries, and between types of mechanisms, with respect to focus on the prime minister and the practice of accountability. Overall, individualised language is predominant in



questions to prime ministers – responsibility is, to a large degree, attributed to them personally. They are asked much less to account for the government as a collective or for other ministers. These patterns are explained further below.

### **Topics of questions: prime ministerial accountability and accountability gaps**

These results suggest that whether or not prime ministers are questioned about their direct or shared responsibilities does not appear to follow the collective/individualised division. Canada was closer to Ireland in terms of targeting prime ministerial responsibilities than to Australia, and the UK ranked lowest among the four countries. The variation of topics among the four countries is also connected to the issues that were salient during the period analysed; but procedural differences suggest that some patterns may be a result of the operation of rules of procedure, and of the role of the questioning mechanism in the political system.

The topics on which prime ministers were asked questions in individualised procedures in the UK and Ireland differed. In Ireland, questioning was very closely targeted at issues for which the Taoiseach is personally responsible. In the UK, questions spanned a wide range of areas across government policy, and mainly focused on topical issues. This stark contrast indicates that Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is significantly more honed on targeting personal prime ministerial responsibilities – and thus potentially a more efficient mechanism for holding the prime minister accountable. Does this mean that Ireland is better at holding the prime minister to account? What might explain these differences? To what degree are these conclusions particular to the period analysed, and to what degree are they systemic?

One fundamental difference between the two mechanisms is procedural. PMQs allows spontaneous questioning, which may encourage more focus on current affairs and topical issues. The submission of questions in advance in Ireland creates a filtering mechanism: questions are certified by the Speaker as being in order; they must refer to the Taoiseach's responsibilities. Supplementary questions must also be related to the initial question, which leads to a questioning exercise closely focused on matters for which the Taoiseach is responsible, or in which they were involved. This suggests that, having a mechanism that requires questions to be submitted in advance and to be vetted by the Speaker, and which requires that supplementary questions should be connected to the questions submitted in writing is potentially more conducive to questions being targeted at the Prime Minister's personal responsibilities.

To the degree that questions submitted in advance lead to more provision of information, this type of mechanism may be considered more conducive to accountability. As discussed in Chapter 4, the main downside of written questions is the potential for scripted dialogue: knowing the question in advance, the Prime Minister may simply read out an answer prepared by the Taoiseach's Department, which doubtless undertakes preparation for Oral Questions. But the Prime Minister might also decide to leave some matters out of their prepared reply. Ireland mitigates this by allowing supplementary questions: deputies submit a general, broad question, on which the Taoiseach reads out an answer, but they may then follow-up on various detailed aspects of the question. Whatever the Taoiseach decides to leave out of the initial answer may later be covered in follow-up discussions. Such preparation also takes place in spontaneous mechanisms: the Prime Minister's staff in Canada, Australia and in the UK ensure that they are aware of potential question topics before questioning, and Prime Ministers spend a considerable time preparing (Docherty 2014; Bateman 2008; Hazerika and Hamilton 2018).

A second interpretation of the difference between the two individualised procedures may concern their role within the political system. In the UK, PMQs is the routine check-up on the Prime Minister (Hazerika and Hamilton 2018), and mainly concerns topical issues. Other venues such as the Liaison Committee are perhaps more specialised, and a more appropriate place for detailed scrutiny of the Prime Minister's

personal responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, on foreign and EU affairs, the Prime Minister's statements in the Commons offer another venue where their involvement is scrutinised. The main role of PMQs is routine scrutiny spanning across many topics concerning government policy, rather than targeted, focused scrutiny. It facilitates a regular dialogue with the head of government on current affairs, based on spontaneous questions. By contrast, in Ireland, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is the main forum for detailed scrutiny. As explained in the previous chapter, the parallel procedure, Leaders' Questions, was introduced precisely to allow leaders to question the Taoiseach on topical, current issues. If party leaders get to ask the Taoiseach spontaneous questions on topical affairs during Leaders' Questions, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach becomes more targeted at specific issues to do with the Prime Minister's remit. The Irish system also provides other venues for questioning the Prime Minister, for example on legislation at Business Questions. In both the Irish and the UK case, potential accountability gaps may thus be filled by other venues: insufficient scrutiny on current affairs in Ireland may be filled by Leaders' Questions, and the Liaison Committee may fill more detailed, targeted scrutiny gaps in the UK if PMQs predominantly focuses on topical affairs. This raises the question of whether having one plenary mechanism for questioning the Prime Minister may enable parliament to cover both topical, current affairs as well as more in-depth longer-term issues, or whether several mechanisms of different types (both in the plenary and in committee) might be more appropriate.

Canada and Australia, as countries that do not offer alternative oral questioning mechanisms, provide additional insight into this question. In Canada, 66% of questions related to the Prime Minister's direct or shared responsibilities. Given that in Canada there is no other forum for parliamentarians to question the Prime Minister, Question Period seems to have served the function of targeting prime ministerial responsibilities in questions to an important degree, as well as covering topical affairs.

By contrast, Julia Gillard received far fewer questions (27%) in connection to the Australian Prime Minister's direct or shared responsibilities. The main focus was on topical issues, particularly the carbon tax and the economy. This suggests that, in Australia, questioning the Prime Minister is mainly seen as an instrument for routine scrutiny on topical and current affairs, which makes Question Time in Australia more similar to PMQs than to the collective Question Period in Canada. In the absence of any other mechanism for questioning the prime minister, this may create significant accountability gaps in the political system.

### **Forms of address in questioning prime ministers**

There are observable differences between collective and individualised mechanisms with respect to how prime ministers are addressed: the language of questions is more individualised when they are questioned alone, and they are asked to speak more for the government in collective procedures. But there are also surprising contrasts between countries, and this analysis has provided important insights into the process of attributing responsibility.

In the UK, David Cameron was held personally responsible for a wide range of topics, very few of which are the Prime Minister's direct or shared responsibility. The role of individualised language was to assign blame to the Prime Minister. In Ireland, individualised questions referred predominantly to concrete actions in which the Taoiseach was personally involved.

In Australia, the role of individualised questions was to pin blame on the Prime Minister on highly topical matters (the carbon tax), to solicit her intervention in a national crisis (the Qantas dispute), but also to hold her accountable for her decisions on government operations. In the case of questions asking her to

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<sup>26</sup> For the only analysis of Liaison Committee session to date, see Kelso et al. (2016).

speak for the government, she was either asked critically to assume responsibility for actions of ministers or of the government, but also asked 'helpful' questions by backbenchers asking her to explain government policy. In Canada, questions addressed to the Prime Minister were more individualised, with 67% of questions pinning blame on the Prime Minister personally.

Although prime ministers are party leaders in all four cases, there are very few instances where they were asked to account for issues related to their parties (for example party conference expenses, manifesto commitments, or issues related to internal party management). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, addressing the prime minister as a party leader can also take other forms, for example through critical remarks about the government party.

### **Where next?**

This chapter looked at the topics on which prime ministers were asked questions, and at how parliamentarians addressed them and assigned responsibility. This assumes that all exchanges involve requests for information and the provision of information by the prime minister on a given topic; but the process of holding to account entails more types of requests. Going beyond the assumed information-seeking function of questions is the next necessary step in exploring how accountability is performed.

The analysis in this chapter also does not tell us how different parliamentary actors question prime ministers. Chapter 5 showed that mechanisms in each country assign actors different roles; but how do they question prime ministers? What types of requests do they make in their questions, aside from asking for information? The next chapter takes the discussion of accountability a step further, by examining what types of questions prime ministers are asked, and how different actors question them.

## **Chapter 7. Patterns of Accountability: How do different actors question prime ministers?**

To continue investigating the practice of accountability as an exchange between a responsible actor (the head of government) and the forum to which they are responsible (parliament), this chapter turns to the behaviour of questioners. It looks at the types of questions addressed to prime ministers, and at the behaviour of different parliamentary actors. The analysis seeks to map macro-level patterns of behaviour that recur across countries, but also to identify types of questions that are particular to actors in different countries.

Firstly, investigating types of questions contributes to the theoretical debate about the functions of parliamentary questions, and in particular to the theoretical debate about how accountability is carried out through questions, and the forms it takes (Wiberg 1995; Wiberg and Koura 1994; Martin 2011). This begins to reconstruct an image of what is requested and expected from prime ministers when they face questioning in parliament. Do parliamentarians ask prime ministers for information? Do they ask them to justify their actions, or those of the government? Are they asked to make commitments, and to use their authority to solve problems? Are they asked to make their views on a matter public? The chapter explores the degree to which questions to prime ministers primarily perform an information-seeking function as the default manifestation of accountability, and the degree to which they perform other functions such as demanding action, seeking reactions or asking for a response to an accusation.

Secondly, from a procedural and behavioural perspective, this chapter looks at how parliamentary actors behave corresponding to their roles during questioning. For example, Leaders of the Opposition have a prominent role in all four countries. How do they perform accountability? The degree of participation from opposition and government backbench MPs varies: what patterns do we observe in the ways in which they perform accountability? Sequence also matters: MPs in leadership positions are the 'first movers' in questioning, as sessions always start with an interaction between the prime minister and parliamentarians in leadership roles. Backbenchers intervene after this initial exchange, which suggests that they may adopt different strategies of performing accountability. Considering these patterns, and building on the discussions in the literature regarding the behaviour of actors depending on their government/opposition status, and on their leadership/backbench roles (King 1976; Alderman 1992; Salmond 2014; Andeweg 2013; Uhr 2009; Russell and Cowley 2018), I group the analysis below into two sections: the first referring to parliamentarians in leadership positions, and the second referring to backbenchers. This approach allows us to observe whether there are differences in the types of scrutiny performed by leaders compared to those performed by backbenchers, as well as differences between government and opposition backbenchers. It will also allow us to discuss differences between countries. As presented in Chapter 5, the four countries regulate participation differently. It is therefore important to observe what types of scrutiny are performed by different actors, and the coding of accountability behaviours, as explained below, will allow us to do that.

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the coding scheme used for this chapter built on types of behaviour identified by the literature as associated with accountability. Building on the literature on functions of parliamentary questions, I propose four functions of questions related to different dimensions of the concept of accountability:

<b>Dimension of accountability</b>	<b>Type of behaviour</b>
<b>Information-seeking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requests for information</li> <li>• Requests for explanation</li> <li>• Requests for a formal statement</li> </ul>
<b>Demanding action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands for action</li> </ul>
<b>Reaction-seeking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request for comment or opinion</li> </ul>
<b>Attributing responsibility and blame</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request for response to an accusation</li> </ul>

Identifying these types of requests in questions helps us to distinguish the function of the question. These distinctions matter on a theoretical level. In practice, they matter insofar as they may elicit different types of responses from the prime minister, or put them on the spot in different ways. On a practical level, information-seeking questions probe the prime minister's knowledge of issues going on in government. Faced with such a question, prime ministers are expected to provide either factual information or justification for the arguments and process that led to a particular decision.

A demand for action is a type of request distinct from a request for information, and it aims to ask the prime minister to take action to rectify a particular situation. Presented with a case to which they are expected to react and take action, the prime minister must acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, describe the degree to which the government is aware of the situation, and describe what steps have been taken (if any) as well as what steps will be taken in the future. Crucially, this type of question tries to press the prime minister to make a public, upfront commitment. I differentiate between various ways of demanding action through qualitative analysis of examples.

A third category refers to requests for comment or opinion. Rather than asking for a specific piece of information, or to justify a decision, these questions ask prime ministers to express an opinion or belief on a particular issue. Words such as 'believe', 'think' or 'comment' are used in phrasing the question. The function of such questions is to seek a reaction from the prime minister, and to put them on the spot by asking them to comment or give their opinion. Given media attention, they may need to be careful about what views they express on particular issues. Alternatively, this type of question coming from a government backbencher may allow the prime minister to put their views on particular matters on record.

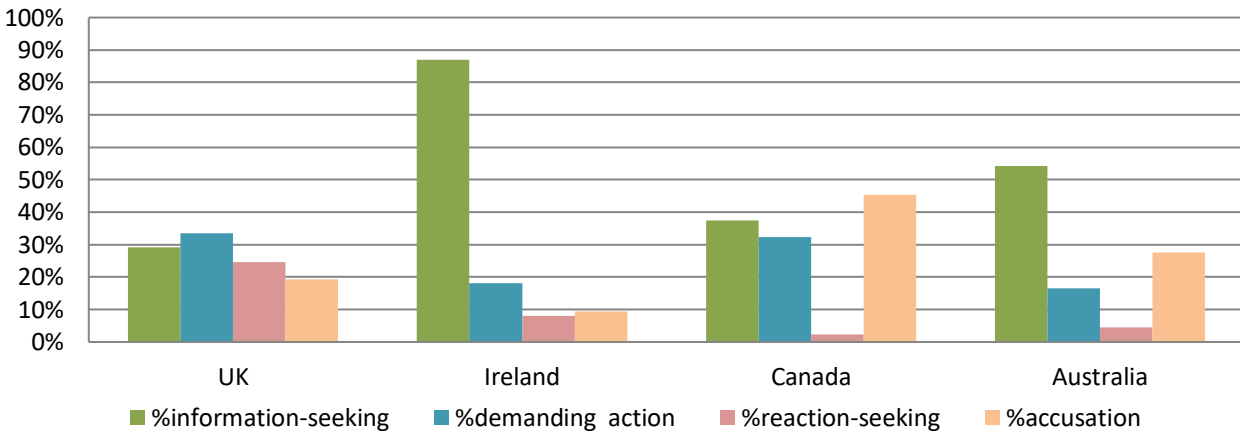
The final category involves requests for responses to accusations. Prime ministers are blamed for a negative development and they must offer a credible defence to a particular action or decision taken by themselves or someone else in government.

Using these categories will provide a way of making sense of how different types of actors use their questions: it gives an indication of questioning style and strategies by different actors, and of the kinds of probing that prime ministers faced in the periods analysed.

### 7.1. Accountability in questions: Cross-national patterns

Figure 7.1 presents the distribution of questions of different types, expressed as the percentage of items coded according to the above categories out of the total number of questions in each country.<sup>27</sup> It illustrates a curious diversity of behaviours across countries.

**Figure 7.1. Types of accountability behaviours in questions to prime ministers**



Information-seeking requests occupy a significant proportion of questions to prime ministers in Ireland (87%) and in Australia (54%). In the case of Ireland, this is driven by the procedural requirement to submit questions in writing, and by the formulaic nature in which these questions must be drafted. In Australia, it is driven by questions from government backbenchers, which primarily take an information-seeking form, as discussed further below.

But accountability is not just performed as an information-seeking request; other types of behaviour occupy a much larger proportion of questions across systems. The high number of requests for responses to accusations in Canada and Australia points towards an accusatory and adversarial tone of questioning in these parliaments, although not all such requests are conflictual. The UK and Canada display slightly higher levels of demands for action. In the UK, this is mainly driven by questions asked by backbenchers, as discussed further below. The UK also displays the highest number of reaction-seeking questions, which is again primarily driven by backbench questions, and many by government backbench questions asking the prime minister to comment or express views, as will be discussed in section 7.3.

Figure 7.1 hence suggests that questioning the prime minister may take different forms across countries. Actors attempt not only to elicit information from the head of government, but also to secure commitments, to generate reactions, and to assign blame. Next, I look at how different actors question prime ministers and the types of requests they make in their questions.

<sup>27</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, the types are mutually exclusive, but within the same intervention, in some cases a parliamentarian may ask more than one type of request: one that seeks information, and one that demands action, for example. The Figure therefore refers to questions coded at information seeking as a % of the total; questions coded at demand for action as a % of the total, etc. Consequently, the numbers in the figure add up to more than 100 per cent.

## 7.2. Parliamentarians in leadership positions: Leaders of the Opposition, Opposition frontbenchers, and other party leaders

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Leader of the Opposition assumes a prominent role in questioning across all four cases. They are allocated speaking time with priority in the UK, in Canada and in Australia. In Ireland the Leader of the Opposition is also one of the lead questioners, and they account for a high proportion of the questions submitted in writing. Their role as ‘first movers’ in the charge against prime ministers gives them an important role in the process of holding to account.

**Figure 7.2. Leaders of the Opposition: % of questions of different functions (questions to the prime minister)**

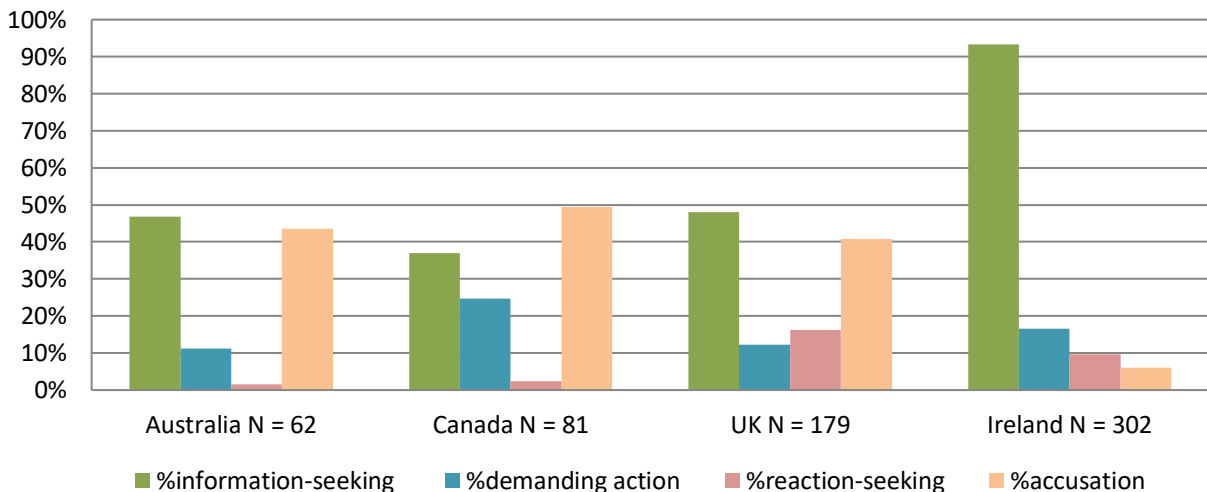


Figure 7.2 presents an overview of the behaviour of Leaders of the Opposition during the four premierships. It suggests that there is some variation in their patterns of behaviour across systems, but also indicates similarities between the UK, Canada and Australia.

Leaders of the Opposition performed an incisive, potentially aggressive style of accountability: over 40% of questions in Australia and the UK, and 49% in Canada asked the Prime Minister to respond to an accusation. Questioning by the Leader of the Opposition took a significantly less confrontational form in Ireland: only 6% of the Leader’s interventions required the Prime Minister to respond to an accusation. The adversarial nature of questioning will be discussed further in Chapter 8, but the types of requests made through questions give an indication of the tone of debates.

Procedural rules again seem to affect the types of questions. Leaders asked information-seeking questions at similar levels in the UK (48%) and in Australia (47%). In Ireland, questions submitted in writing are drafted in a formulaic way that usually includes a request for information and/or a request for a statement; consequently, a great majority of questions (93%) were information-seeking. This shows that, on a procedural level, requiring questions to be submitted in writing, and to be drafted primarily as requests for information, has a clear effect on the wording of the question, and may in turn have an effect on the type of scrutiny performed through questions.

Table 7.1 summarises the types and sub-types of questions used by Leaders of the Opposition. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, it draws on an examination of the population of questions within each category and on inductively identifying sub-categories by identifying the object of requests. This type of analysis, which was applied to questions from all categories of actors discussed in this chapter, reveals similarities across systems, in terms of patterns of behaviour that recur, but also differences in terms of how different actors use questions. On a conceptual level, this inductive analysis based on qualitative reading serves to further explore the observable implications of accountability. It is not intended to offer a numeric summary of the sub-types of questions in the data, but to list the sub-types identified and to summarise the qualitative examples discussed in the chapter.

**Table 7.1. Leaders of the Opposition: types and sub-types of questions**

<b>Question type</b>	<b>Question sub-type</b>
<b>Information-seeking</b>	About the prime minister's actions and decisions, sometimes referring to election promises About the government's actions and decisions About actions and decisions of individual ministers About policy developments/details of policy
<b>Demand for action</b>	Demand for a commitment to a course of action on policy Demand for a commitment to change policy that is perceived as detrimental Demand for dismissal of a minister Demand to persuade a minister to change course of action Demand that the prime minister personally take action on an issue, e.g. to discuss it with the leader of another country
<b>Reaction-seeking</b>	Request for comment/opinion on a minister's statement Request for comment/opinion on the development of a situation Request for comment/opinion on policy developments – framing the issue as negative and seeking the prime minister's views
<b>Attributing responsibility or blame</b>	Accusation relating to personal actions or decisions Accusation relating to government actions or decisions

Across all systems, Leaders of the Opposition used information-seeking questions mainly as a form of *retrospective accountability*, to inquire about the prime minister's or the government's past actions or decisions. For example, in Australia, Tony Abbott challenged Julia Gillard during the Question Time session on 13 March 2013 to explain why she had promised during the election campaign not to introduce a carbon tax, a policy which the Gillard government later proceeded to bring forward. Sometimes information-seeking refers to current, topical issues. For example, during the session on 7 September 2011, Ed Miliband asked David Cameron repeated questions regarding why waiting times for operations in the NHS had gone up. Questions in the UK also included examples of requests for information used *prospectively*, to ask what course of action the Prime Minister intended to take on an issue. For example, in March 2011 Ed Miliband asked David Cameron about his intentions to bring forward a proposal for a no-fly zone over Libya.

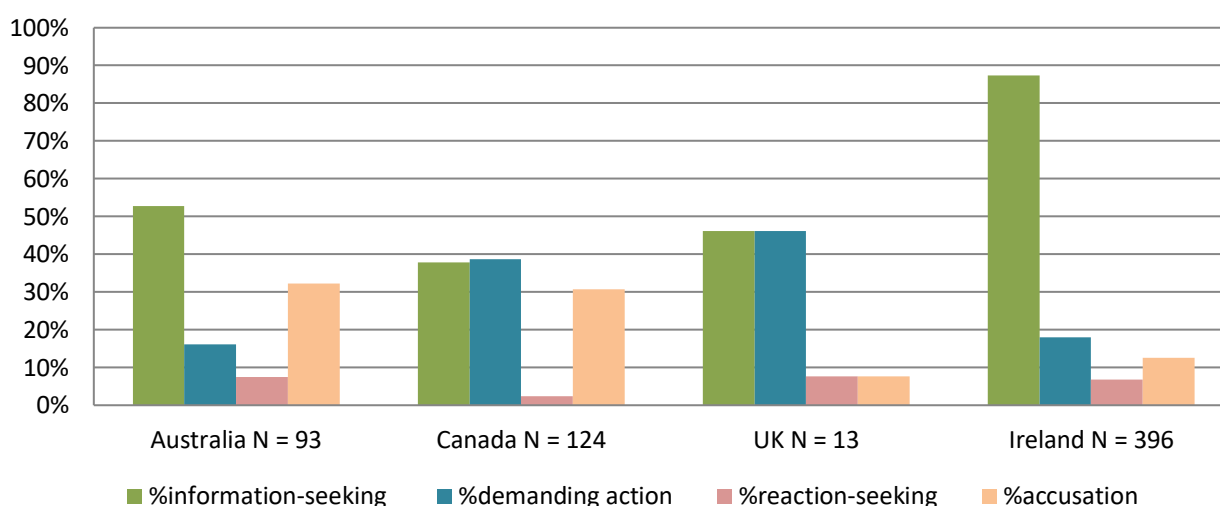
Demands for action often referred to policy: prime ministers were asked to commit to a particular course of action or to change a policy that the Leader described as detrimental. On 22 February 2012 Tony Abbott asked Julia Gillard to support an opposition proposal and increase funding for the Australian War Memorial, given that funding had decreased. In October 2006, the Canadian Leader of the Opposition, Stéphane Dion, asked Stephen Harper to 'reverse his anti-democratic actions and permit a fair vote



among producers on the future of our Canadian Wheat Board’, arguing that the Prime Minister was interfering with voting procedures in the Board. Leaders also asked prime ministers to take action personally, for example to persuade their ministers to take a particular course of action, or to dismiss ministers. Prime ministers were also asked to take action personally in foreign affairs matters. As Leader of the Opposition, Micheál Martin often demanded that Enda Kenny should take up issues personally with foreign leaders, for example with David Cameron on issues relating to Northern Ireland.

Reaction-seeking questions in the form of requests for comments or opinion were most prevalent in the UK. Ed Miliband asked David Cameron to express views on policy, and also on the development of issues at the international level. For example, Cameron was asked whether he agreed that the 2014 referendum in Crimea was ‘illegal, illegitimate and in direct violation of the terms of the Ukrainian constitution’. When the prime minister is asked to express views on policy developments, these consequences or developments are presented as negative, in order to put the prime minister on the spot.

**Figure 7.3. Opposition frontbenchers and party leaders: % of questions of different functions (questions to the prime minister)**



As discussed in Chapter 5, opposition frontbenchers (i.e. members of the Shadow Cabinet of the main opposition party, and members in shadow government positions in other opposition parties) participate in questioning in Canada and Australia but do not participate in the UK or in Ireland. For the purpose of bringing together all opposition MPs in leadership positions, Figure 7.3 combines data on frontbenchers from the main opposition parties in Canada and Australia with that on the other party leaders aside from the Leader of the Opposition. In the UK, other party leaders had very few interventions (N =13), but the data is included here for illustrative purposes.

Opposition party spokespersons are the main questioning actors in Ireland aside from the Leader of the Opposition. Similar to the Leader of the Opposition, their participation patterns are determined by the rules: they submit questions in writing, which contain formulaic requests for information or requests for a statement. Consequently, similar to the questions from the Leader of the Opposition, a large majority of their questions are information-seeking.

In all cases, and similarly to Leaders of the Opposition, other MPs in leadership roles use information-seeking questions mainly as a form of retrospective accountability.

Opposition party leaders and frontbenchers in Canada and Australia made frequent requests for responses to an accusation. They always intervene towards the beginning of the session in both cases – so, similar to Leaders of the Opposition, they assume an incisive role in questioning. But they appear overall less focused on accusations than Leaders of the Opposition: 32% of their questions contained an accusation in Australia, compared with 44% in the case of the Leader; in Canada, similarly, 31% of interventions from frontbenchers and party leaders contained an accusation, compared to 49% of questions from the Leader of the Opposition. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, this suggests that Leaders of the Opposition were the most conflict-seeking actors of the opposition in all systems except for Ireland, and one of their roles is to lead the attack against the prime minister.

**Table 7.2. Opposition frontbenchers and party leaders: types and sub-types of questions**

<b>Question type</b>	<b>Question sub-type</b>
<b>Information-seeking</b>	Prime minister's actions and decisions Government actions and decisions Actions and decisions of individual ministers Policy developments/Details of policy
<b>Demand for action</b>	Remedial action for policy failure Commitment to change policy (in some cases as a demand to support opposition policy) Drop policy that is perceived as negative Dismiss minister Support for a piece of legislation
<b>Reaction-seeking</b>	Request for comment/opinion on a minister's statement Seeking the prime minister's view on an issue
<b>Attributing responsibility or blame</b>	Accusation relating to personal actions or decisions Accusation relating to government actions or decisions

Again, similarly to Leaders of the Opposition, demands for action mainly focused on policy: to take remedial action regarding policy that is perceived as having negative effects; to make a policy commitment on behalf of the government; or to request policy change. A type of behaviour different from that of Leaders of the Opposition involved demanding support for a piece of legislation. For example, the Shadow Minister for Small Businesses asked Julia Gillard on 9 February 2011 to offer concessional loans to businesses that suffered financial, not only physical, damages caused by floods: 'Will the Prime Minister consider taking up the opposition's constructive policy proposal to extend \$100,000 concessional loans to these businesses so they can get back on their feet and keep local people employed?' Similar suggestions to dismiss existing policy and instead support opposition proposals were also made in Canada. Jack Layton asked the Prime Minister to support 'an amendment to the legislation, proposed by the NDP to ensure that the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development will be a senior public servant who answers directly to the House and its members, and to no one else'.

Party leaders and frontbenchers deployed relatively few reaction-seeking questions, aiming to test prime ministers and put them on the spot. In Australia this took the form of the questioner quoting someone's evaluation of a policy development, and asking the prime minister to offer their view. During Question Time sessions in 2010 and 2012, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare both asked Julia Gillard to comment on negative evaluations of the carbon tax coming from experts and from independent regulators. In Ireland, the Prime Minister was asked to offer views on developments in international politics. For example, on 16 October 2012 Socialist

Party Deputy Joe Higgins asked Enda Kenny to describe his ‘perspective on the development of the general Eurozone economy over the next period of one or two years’. Similarly to the questions asked by Leaders of the Opposition, these questions are meant to test the prime minister and ask them to declare their views publicly.

### **How do MPs in leadership roles perform accountability?**

This section shows that MPs in leadership roles performed similar types of scrutiny; but there are some notable differences.

Across all systems except Ireland, Leaders of the Opposition demanded responses to accusations much more frequently than other opposition party leaders, which suggests that they are the most incisive and adversarial actors, in terms of their style of performing accountability. As the first actors to intervene in the interaction with the prime minister, they lead the charge for the opposition.

One of the main accountability strategies by MPs in leadership roles involved information-seeking questions, either prospective or retrospective. Ireland stands out due to the way in which questions are drafted, which gives them an information-seeking format; and due to the close link between follow-up questions and tabled questions. This is an important conclusion for the role of parliamentary procedure – it means that, in mechanisms where this rule applies, prime ministers are predominantly put on the spot for their knowledge about government activity, and for their ability to justify and present information.

Demands for action and attempts to secure commitments from prime ministers coming from Leaders of the Opposition primarily referred to policy: they asked prime ministers to change policy that was perceived as detrimental. Leaders of smaller parties also followed this pattern, but, particularly in Canada and Australia, they also asked the prime minister to support policy or pieces of legislation proposed by their parties. In the UK, the Leader of the Opposition assumed a particular strategy for putting the Prime Minister on the spot by asking him for his views through reaction-seeking questions.

Having noted how MPs in leadership roles contribute to scrutinising the prime minister, we now turn to backbench actors.

### 7.3. Backbench Parliamentarians

As discussed in Chapter 5, backbench MPs usually intervene in the second part of the session, following the prime minister’s interaction with MPs in leadership roles.

#### 7.3.1. Opposition backbenchers

As discussed in Chapter 5, opposition backbenchers play a prominent role in Canada – their interventions are conventionally prioritised (O’Brien and Bosc 2017), and they account for 45% of questions to the Prime Minister, more than in any other of the four systems analysed. They also play a prominent role in the UK, accounting for 36% of questions. In Australia, they asked 17% of the questions to the Prime Minister. In Ireland, by contrast, their role in questioning the Prime Minister is minor, as party leaders play the main role. Opposition backbenchers feature very infrequently there: they addressed only 15 questions to the Prime Minister in the period investigated.

Figure 7.4 shows notable similarities in the behaviour of opposition backbenchers across systems; they used around 40% of their questions for information-seeking purposes in Australia, Canada and the UK. They also asked around 30% of their questions with the purpose of demanding action, and around 30% requiring the Prime Minister to respond to accusations. Similarly to the Leader of the Opposition, backbenchers in Canada deployed an accusation to the Prime Minister in nearly half of their questions.

**Figure 7.4. Opposition backbenchers: % of questions of different functions (questions to the prime minister)**

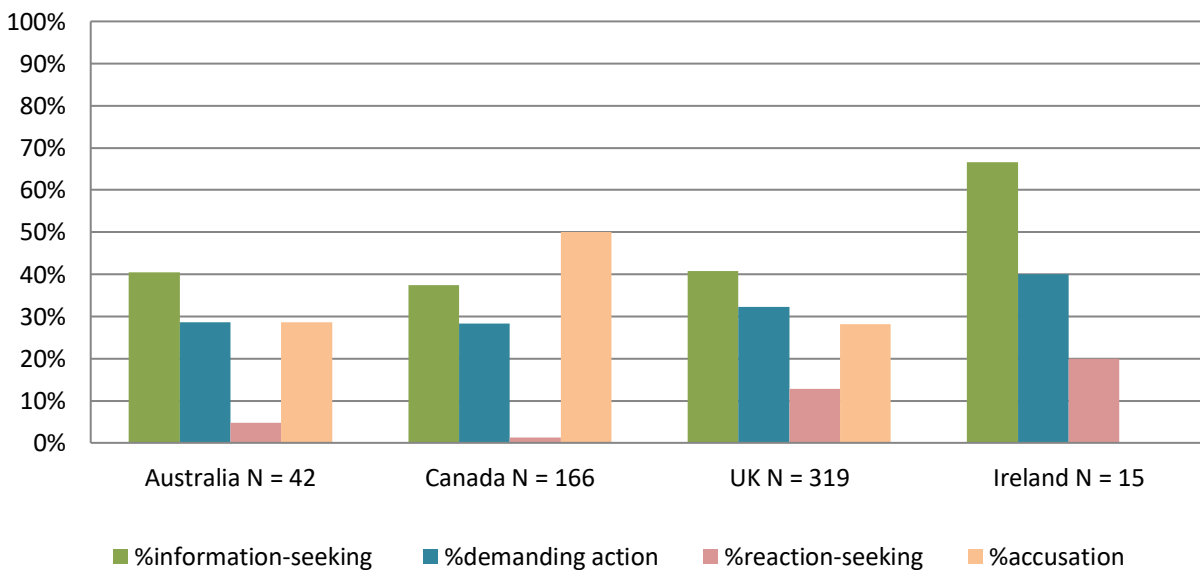


Table 7.3 summarises sub-types of questions used by opposition backbenchers across systems.

**Table 7.3. Opposition backbenchers: types and sub-types of questions**

<b>Question type</b>	<b>Question sub-type</b>
<b>Information-seeking</b>	The prime minister's own actions and decisions Government actions or decisions Policy: what steps will the government take to redress a particular problem
<b>Demand for action</b>	Remedial action for policy failure Drop policy that is perceived as negative Dismiss minister Declare support for/bring forward a piece of legislation Asking the prime minister to make a policy commitment on behalf of the government Asking the prime minister to ensure that something will be done for the member's constituency (UK) Asking the prime minister to work with a minister on an issue (UK) Meetings: meet an MP to discuss a particular issue; meet a group working on a particular issue (UK) Visit a constituency (UK)
<b>Reaction-seeking</b>	Request for comment/opinion on policy failure Request for comment/opinion regarding a minister's statement Request for comment/opinion: endorsement of policy
<b>Attributing responsibility or blame</b>	Accusation relating to personal actions or decisions Accusation relating to government actions or decisions

Qualitative exploration suggests that some types of questions recur across systems: opposition backbenchers used questions to inquire about actions and decisions of the prime minister or of individual ministers, and to demand change of policy. Backbenchers in the UK present a more varied range of behaviours than their counterparts in the other countries: they asked questions demanding action in connection to their constituencies, either to highlight local issues, or to use local examples in order to contribute to a wider national conversation. Demands for action to visit a constituency or to work with a group to solve a particular issue were also exclusive to the UK.

Opposition backbenchers used information-seeking questions both to ask the prime minister retrospectively about how the government was dealing with particular issues, but also prospectively in order to ask how the government would address a particular situation.

Demands for action present more varied forms, particularly in the case of UK backbenchers. Across all cases, backbench MPs made demands that the prime minister should take action in relation to policy. They asked the prime minister to make commitments on behalf of the government (in the UK and Australia) or to take steps to address the consequences of a policy failure (in Canada and Australia). As an example of demanding a commitment on policy, Labour MP Mary Glendon asked David Cameron on 22 February 2011 to 'give a commitment today' to drop plans to freeze the national minimum wage. Prime ministers are also asked to declare support for policies or for pieces of legislation. For example, Labour MP Katy Clark asked David Cameron on 2 November 2011 to 'take a personal interest and make sure that legislation is brought forward as soon as possible' to tackle the issue of dog attacks. During the same session, Labour MP Alex Cunningham asked the Prime Minister to support his ten-minute-rule bill on banning smoking in vehicles when children are present. UK backbench MPs raised issues related to their

constituents, and asked the prime minister either to make policy commitments that would benefit their constituencies, as discussed above, or to visit their constituencies. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, backbench MPs in the UK generally bring up more constituency issues in their questions to the Prime Minister than their counterparts in the other countries.

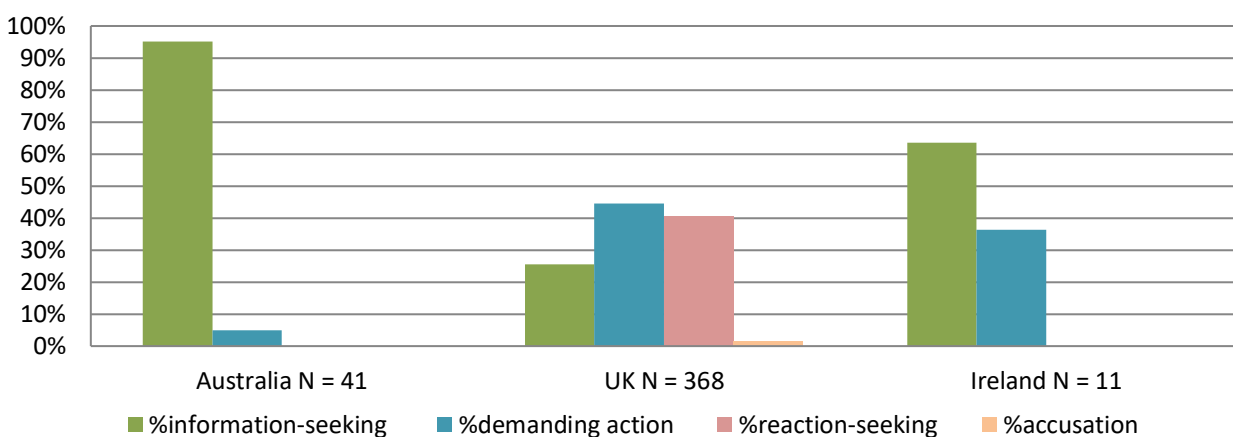
### 7.3.2. Government backbenchers

As discussed in Chapter 5, the role of government backbenchers in questioning procedures, and in questioning prime ministers, varies considerably among the four countries. Government backbenchers play a significant role in questioning the Prime Minister in the UK; they are allocated almost as much time as opposition backbenchers, given the convention that the Speaker calls members alternately from each side. Among the four case studies, PMQs is the procedure where government backbenchers have by far the most access to questioning the Prime Minister (N = 368; 42% of questions to the Prime Minister come from government backbenchers). This is significantly higher than in all other countries. In Australia, government backbenchers address questions predominantly to government ministers. They are also involved in questioning prime ministers, but only 41 (16%) out of the 250 questions asked by government backbenchers were directed to the Prime Minister during the period analysed. Ireland displays even lower levels of questioning from backbenchers, with only 11 questions over the entire period analysed. The examples included in the dataset comprise questions submitted in writing asking the Prime Minister to give details on their actions in a foreign policy matter.

In Canada, government backbenchers ask fewer questions overall: 77 questions (7% of all questions) during the period analysed, and only one addressed to the Prime Minister. All questions coming from government backbenchers in Canada were information-seeking, with a large majority (69) containing a request for information.

Figure 7.5 shows the types of questions asked by government backbenchers to prime ministers in the UK, Australia and Ireland. It contains data for both coalition parties in the UK.

**Figure 7.5. Government backbenchers: % of questions of different functions (questions to the prime minister)**



The figure further illustrates the visible differences in behaviour between backbenchers in the UK and their counterparts in other countries. Whilst in the case of opposition backbenchers the particularities of the UK case only became apparent through qualitative analysis, in the case of government backbenchers important differences are already visible in the macro-level patterns of behaviour.

Whilst in Australia government backbenchers mainly asked information-seeking questions, in the UK they displayed a much more varied range of behaviours. The difference is notable: in Australia, 95% of questions from government backbenchers to the Prime Minister were information-seeking, compared to only 26% in the UK. Qualitative analysis of examples, presented in Table 7.4, explains this difference in patterns, as discussed below.

**Table 7.4. Government backbenchers: types and sub-types of questions**

Question type	Question sub-type
<b>Information-seeking</b>	Request for information or explanation on policy Request for information or explanation on an appreciative tone, outlining policy or positive effects of policy and prompting a positive statement from the prime minister Request for information about a specific constituency issue.
<b>Demand for action</b>	Demands for action on policy Demands for action on constituency issues
<b>Reaction-seeking</b>	Request for comment – constituency promotion (UK) Request for comment – policy promotion (UK) Request for comment – attack on the opposition (UK)
<b>Attributing responsibility or blame</b>	Request for response to an accusation – government policy (UK)

As backbenchers provide support for the government, a general type of ‘helpful’ question recurs across systems. This is recognised as the ‘Dorothy Dixier’ question in Australia and as the ‘helpful backbench’ question in the UK (Larkin 2012; Bates et al. 2014). It takes the generic form of a request for information on an appreciative tone, describing policy or outlining positive effects of policy, and prompting a positive statement from the prime minister. This type of question is the default type of backbench question in Australia and Canada. In Canada, these questions are addressed to ministers. In Australia, there are many such examples of helpful prompts addressed to Julia Gillard:

**Ms ROWLAND (Greenway):** My question is to the Prime Minister. Over the last 12 months how has the government worked to keep the economy strong, deliver reform and build a clean energy future? (14.09.2011)

**Ms ROWLAND (Greenway):** My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the government's plan to build a stronger and smarter economy and how the passage of the Australian Education Bill through the House brings us one step closer to this? (05.06.2013)

Similar examples can be observed in the UK:

**Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** Will the Prime Minister tell the House what the Government are doing to keep pensioners warm in this cold weather and will he join me in congratulating the Suffolk Foundation on the great success of its “surviving winter” campaign? (16.01.2013)

But government backbenchers in the UK used questions for a much more varied range of purposes. Even in respect to requests for information, they also used questions to inquire about specific issues, not only to prompt helpful statements from the Prime Minister.

Aside from asking for information, UK government backbenchers also demanded action, particularly on constituency issues, but also on more general policy issues. For example, on 3 December 2014 Conservative MP Bernard Jenkin asked David Cameron to ‘undertake to put the Government’s entire

weight into addressing the collapse of sea bass stocks when considering European Union fisheries policy this month’.

Government backbenchers in the UK also asked the Prime Minister to comment on developments within their constituency, mainly with the aim of promoting achievements at the constituency level, as discussed further in chapter 9. For example, on 16 January 2013, Mark Pawsey, the Conservative MP for Rugby, asked David Cameron: ‘Will the Prime Minister join me in praising Rugby borough council’s attitude to new development, and perhaps visit Rugby to see how we are going about it?’.

In terms of seeking reactions, UK government backbenchers asked the Prime Minister to express views on positive policy developments; instead of taking the form of a request for explanation, this type of question instead asked whether the Prime Minister agreed with the MP’s assessment of the consequences of a particular policy. They also asked the Prime Minister to express views on opposition actions or policy, attacking the opposition and giving the Prime Minister a chance to make an attack himself. Two such questions occurred on 24 April 2013:

**James Wharton (Stockton South) (Con):** Yesterday, figures showed that this Government had reduced the deficit by a third. Does the Prime Minister agree that to borrow and spend more, which the shadow Chancellor has confirmed will be Labour’s policy in 2015, would risk squandering that progress?

**Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con):** Does the Prime Minister agree that one does not solve a debt crisis by borrowing more, and that for the Opposition to have any credibility they need to acknowledge the mess they made, apologise to my constituents, and just say sorry?

These types of questions relate more to the conflict and support functions, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The differences across systems remain stark: whilst government backbenchers in Australia *only* asked for information to prompt positive statements from the Prime Minister, the UK presented a notable diversity of behaviours. In terms of the types of questions that prime ministers received, this means that the Australian Prime Minister could always expect to fall back on a comfortable, helpful question from their own side following a question from the opposition. In the case of the UK, the more nuanced questions meant that, aside from supporting the Prime Minister, government backbenchers also participated in scrutiny.

In the case of Australia, the only questions that departed from the formulaic prompts for policy statements came from MPs sitting as Independents but supporting the government. On 21 October 2010, Rob Oakeshott asked the Prime Minister to intervene on a state-level issue, which related to the prime minister’s role as manager of federal issues. On 25 November 2011 Andrew Wilkie asked Julia Gillard to commit the government to implementing a national disability insurance scheme.

As would be expected, government backbenchers generally do not ask the prime minister to respond to accusations. There are no examples of such behaviour in Canada, Australia or Ireland. The UK includes a few examples alluding to policy criticism, notably one on 27 April 2011 from Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston criticising the negative effects of the Medical Training Application Service introduced by the Labour Government, and asking David Cameron: ‘Is the Prime Minister aware that there are concerns that the current proposals to reorganise medical training and work force planning could have similar unforeseen consequences?’



### **How do backbench MPs perform accountability?**

The previous section noted similarities in the ways in which MPs in leadership roles perform accountability. This section suggests that backbench behaviour across systems is much more diverse, and this is related to the different levels of involvement of backbenchers in questioning in different countries.

Opposition backbenchers are key actors in the UK and in Canada. Their questions took an information-seeking form, but also demanded answers to accusations. Similarly to leaders, their demands for action referred to policy: asking the prime minister to take a particular course of action or to drop policy. In the UK, notably, a significant proportion of demands for action referred to members' constituencies: asking the Prime Minister to take action on issues with consequences at the local level.

Across all four systems, the role of government backbenchers is the most prominent in the UK, where they asked nearly 10 times as many questions as their counterparts in Australia. Their range of behaviours was much more diverse, and they brought different styles of accountability in questioning the prime minister. In Australia, their questions were mainly information-seeking. This is a limited form of accountability that only has the role of allowing the Prime Minister to present government policy. In the UK, they asked a significant number of information-seeking questions, but they also demanded action on policy, and in connection to constituencies. This suggests that, allowed a significant role in questioning, government backbenchers can perform important forms of accountability. But, as discussed in Chapter 5, this also depends on the degree of party control.

### **7.4. Chapter conclusions: How do different actors question prime ministers?**

The analysis in this chapter provides four main conclusions regarding the behaviour of actors across systems that may be linked to procedural features, but also to theoretical debates about the functions of oral questioning mechanisms.

Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, the analysis in this chapter contributes to the debate about functions of questioning mechanisms by illustrating the diversity of types of accountability in questions, but also by identifying sub-types of accountability performed by different actors. Accountability does not just involve information-seeking: it also involves securing commitments, asking the prime minister to express personal views, and attributing responsibility. The analysis also highlights retrospective and prospective forms of accountability: prime ministers are not only asked to explain and justify past decisions, but also to set out what steps they or the government intend to take in response to particular situations.

Secondly, MPs in leadership roles performed relatively similar forms of accountability across all cases that allow spontaneous questioning. Leaders of the Opposition performed similar forms of accountability to other MPs in leadership roles, and Leaders assumed the role of leading the attack against the Prime Minister in Canada, Australia and the UK. This pattern will be explored further in Chapter 8.

Thirdly, the main behavioural differences between actors appear at the backbench level: UK backbenchers stand out as displaying a much more diverse range of behaviours in questions than their counterparts in other countries. This diversity also provides evidence of more independent behaviour from backbench MPs in the UK. Aside from questions inquiring about the Prime Minister's actions and decisions, government actions and decisions, and other aspects of policy, opposition backbenchers in the UK also brought up constituency issues. This was much more frequent than in all other systems and it is primarily associated with asking the Prime Minister to take action to redress a local issue. Aside from information-seeking questions that are meant to help the Prime Minister to make a positive statement about the government's achievements, government backbenchers in the UK also made genuine requests

for information, and even asked the Prime Minister to respond to accusations. Similarly to opposition backbenchers in the UK, they also made numerous demands for action, primarily in connection to constituencies. Backbench behaviour in other systems appeared more cohesive. For example the prevalence of information-seeking questions in the case of government backbenchers in Australia clearly shows a high frequency of 'helpful' questions. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, this constitutes a latent form of support for the government.

Finally, and importantly, procedural constraints have an effect on questioning. In Ireland, the requirement to submit questions in writing in advance, and the requirement that supplementary questions must be connected to the questions submitted in writing, means that a majority of questions are primarily information-seeking. This brings further evidence to the fact that, by design, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach mainly focuses on detailed scrutiny and information-seeking. Canada, Australia and the UK, which do not require notice for questions and are characterised primarily by spontaneous questioning, present a wider diversity of types of questions.

## Chapter 8. Conflict and Support in Questioning Prime Ministers

This chapter continues the investigation into how questioning prime ministers contributes to different functions of parliaments. Specifically, it investigates the performance of conflict and support through questions addressed to prime ministers, and through answers given by prime ministers in Canada, Australia, the UK and Ireland. To this aim, the chapter addresses the following questions:

To what degree is there evidence of conflict in different countries, under different questioning mechanisms?

- What do rules of procedure allow? To what degree are they enforced?
- How much evidence is there of conflictual behaviour in questions? How do different actors perform conflict through questions?
- How much evidence is there of conflictual behaviour in prime ministerial answers? How do prime ministers perform conflict?

To what degree is there evidence of support in different countries, under different questioning mechanisms?

- How much evidence is there of supportive behaviour in questions? How do different actors perform support through questions?
- How much evidence is there of supportive behaviour in prime ministerial answers? How do prime ministers perform support?

The primary aim of this chapter is to contribute to theoretical discussions about the relationship between the functions of oral parliamentary questioning mechanisms and the functions of parliaments with respect to expression of conflict and support. The second aim is to study connections between procedural features and behaviour by observing parliamentary behaviour under different mechanisms. The importance of these questions as well as the conceptualisation and operationalisation of conflict and support that guide the analysis in this chapter are explained in the next sections.

## 8.1. Conflict and support in questions and answers: concepts and measurements

### 8.1.1. Conflict in oral questioning mechanisms

As discussed in Chapter 2, questioning mechanisms in Canada, Australia and the UK have been criticised for the adversarial nature of exchanges, with the implication that conflict is detrimental to the performance of accountability. But how much evidence is there of conflict during questioning in these countries? What is the role of conflict in exchanges with prime ministers, and which actors perform it? Conflict management is a key function of legislatures: parliaments provide an arena for conflict to be expressed as parliamentarians interact through different parliamentary procedures. Some procedures may facilitate the manifestation of conflict more than others. The most common expression of conflict in legislatures refers to the negotiation of conflicting positions between actors over policy and legislation (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Pakenham 1970; Copeland and Patterson 1994). But other parliamentary procedures, notably oral questions, also allow parliamentarians to express disagreement publicly. Previous studies suggest that oral questions are a parliamentary interaction during which parliamentarians display conflictual behaviour. Criticising the government is primarily a role of the opposition, but government parliamentarians may also make critical remarks. Given the public nature of oral questioning mechanisms, conflict may take a performative form, with each side wanting to appear as having 'won' against the other. Prime ministers are thus also motivated to respond to the opposition's attacks and to display conflictual behaviour. To the extent that oral questioning mechanisms allow these forms of micro-level, intra-parliamentary conflict to be expressed, they serve as safety-valves or 'tension release' venues (Pakenham 1970), and contribute to the overall conflict management function of parliaments. Considering the extensive criticism against conflictual interactions in questioning, I set out to investigate the extent to which conflict is manifested in different oral questioning mechanisms, and how. Building on previous studies that discuss conflict in questions and answers discussed in Chapter 2 (Bull and Wells 2012; Bates et al. 2014; Harris 2001; Waddle et al. 2019; Allen et al. 2013) and on the research conducted for this chapter, I propose the following operationalisation of conflict:

#### Manifestations of conflict

- 1. Contextual conflict:** Members displaying disorderly conduct, manifested through noise or shouting. This is disorderly conduct happening in parallel with the exchanges between the prime minister and parliamentarians.
- 2. Latent conflict:** Asking the prime minister unanswerable questions, or questions that do not prompt an answer, but seek to elicit a reaction.
- 3. Manifest conflict:** Explicit manifestations of conflict through parliamentary speech, either in questions, or in answers from the prime minister. This refers to explicit conflictual remarks: explicit instances of criticism of policy, of the government, of the prime minister, or of a political party. In the case of answers from the prime minister, this takes the form of policy criticism, criticism of the previous government, personal criticism or party criticism.

The analysis in this chapter takes note of contextual conflict and focuses primarily on forms of manifest conflict. As discussed in the Methodology chapter and explained in sections 8.3 and 8.4 in this chapter, the following coding categories were used to identify types of conflictual remarks in questions and answers:

Conflictual remarks	
Questions	Answers
Policy criticism	Policy criticism
Government criticism	Previous government criticism
Prime minister criticism	Personal criticism
Party criticism	Party criticism

### 8.1.2. Support in oral questioning mechanisms

Legislatures also offer an arena for parliamentarians to express support for policy proposals, for the government, for the prime minister, or for their own party. Offering support to the government is primarily a role of the government majority in parliament, but opposition actors may also express support for issues that have cross-party support, as well as making positive comments about their own side. Building on previous studies detailed in Chapter 2 that refer to manifestations of support in questions and answers (particularly Bates et al. 2014 and the notion of ‘helpful questions’; Allen et al. 2013 and the notion of ‘acclaim’ in election debates), and on the research conducted for this chapter, I propose the following operationalisation of support:

#### Manifestations of support

- 1. Contextual support:** Cheering and endorsements manifested in parallel with the exchanges between the prime minister and parliamentarians.
- 2. Latent support:** Drawing on the literature, evidence presented in the previous chapter has demonstrated that government backbenchers ask ‘helpful’ questions that prompt the prime minister to present government policy in a favourable light. We have seen that this type of behaviour is typical of government backbench behaviour in Australia and Canada, and that it is also commonly present in the UK.
- 3. Manifest support:** Explicit manifestations of support through parliamentary speech, either in questions, or in answers from the prime minister. This refers to explicit appreciative remarks: explicit instances of appreciation of policy, of the government, of the prime minister, or of a political party. In the case of answers from the prime minister, this takes the form of policy appreciation, government appreciation, as well as personal or party appreciation. This is the focus of this chapter.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter and explained in sections 8.4 and 8.5 in this chapter, the following coding categories were used to identify types of appreciative remarks in questions and answers:

Appreciative remarks	
Questions	Answers
Policy appreciation	Policy appreciation
Government appreciation	Government appreciation
Prime minister appreciation	Personal appreciation
Party appreciation	Party appreciation
	Self-appreciation

### 8.1.3. Expectations on conflict and support in questions

Interactions during oral questions in parliament are subject to institutional constraints and imperatives derived from government and opposition roles, but also party and leadership roles. The literature on the behaviour of parliamentary actors provides grounds to set out expectations for how actors may behave based on their institutional roles. Table 8.1 below summarises this discussion.

#### Conflict in questions

1. In Australia, Canada, and in the UK, questioning in parliament is regarded as an adversarial activity (Bull and Wells 2012; Waddle et al. 2019; Bates et al. 2014; Larkin 2012; Weller 1985). Evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6 indicated that Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is more focused on detailed scrutiny, rather than on topical affairs. We would therefore expect to see less conflict in Ireland than in the other cases.

2. Based on the literature on the role of the opposition in Westminster-type parliaments (Andeweg 2013; Dewan and Spirling 2011; Uhr 2009), I expect opposition actors to use conflictual remarks in questions to criticise policy, the prime minister, the government, or the government party. A concerted attack of the opposition against the prime minister reflects the ‘opposition mode’ posited by Anthony King (1976), which sees the opposition frontbench and backbench united in an attack against the government.

- Chapter 5 showed that Leaders of the Opposition are ‘first movers’ in all four cases. Chapter 7 provided evidence that they may assume a more incisive style of questioning. Considering this, as well as their roles as ‘prime-ministers-in-waiting’ in all systems considered here (Alderman 1992; Uhr 2009), I expect Leaders of the Opposition to be particularly conflictual.
- I also expect opposition backbenchers to be conflictual and to use conflictual remarks in questions to criticise policy, the prime minister, the government, or the government party.
- On a more exploratory note, I aim to observe which actors are more conflictual, and how they contribute to conflict: for example, how conflict strategies are distributed between backbenchers and leaders.

3. Based on the adversarial nature of the government/opposition divide in these parliaments, I expect to see evidence of government backbenchers using conflictual remarks to criticise the opposition in the cases with considerable government backbench presence in questioning: the UK and Australia.

- On an exploratory note, I am interested to see if government backbenchers make conflictual remarks towards the government, the prime minister, policy, or towards the government party. This would be evidence of intra-party conflict. I am also interested to see whether coalition partners make conflictual remarks towards each other.

#### Support in questions

1. I expect government backbenchers to make appreciative remarks towards the government side. The relationship between the government and its backbenchers is crucial (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018). As a group, they play a default support role for the government, but they also share ideological and policy goals with the prime minister, and an interest to promote a positive image for their party (Russell and Gover 2018). As the literature and previous chapters suggest, their behaviour during questioning entails ‘latent’ support in the form of helpful questions. I am interested to see the degree to which they perform manifest support in the form of explicit appreciative remarks. This applies to systems where Chapter 5 indicated that there is participation from government backbenchers in questions to prime ministers: Australia and the UK.

2. I expect all types of opposition actors to make appreciative remarks towards their own side.
  - Given the role of Question Time in enhancing party morale, I expect MPs in leadership roles, particularly Leaders of the Opposition, to make appreciative remarks towards the party: for example to support policy proposals made by the opposition, or to comment positively on the party's record in office.
  - I am interested to see if opposition actors make any appreciative remarks towards the government side, and, if this does occur, how it is distributed between leaders and backbenchers.

**Table 8.1. Conflict and support in questions: expectations and exploratory analyses**

	Conflict		Support	
Actors	Expectations	Exploratory	Expectation	Exploratory
<b>Opposition</b>	Conflictual remarks towards the government/the prime minister/policy	Distribution between MPs in leadership and backbench roles	Appreciative remarks towards their own side, primarily from MPs in leadership roles	Distribution between MPs in leadership and backbench roles
<b>Government</b>	Conflictual remarks towards opposition parties	Conflictual remarks towards the government/the prime minister/policy	Appreciative remarks towards the government/the prime minister/policy	-

#### 8.1.4. Prime ministerial answers: expectations

Prime ministers are prominent and powerful actors, operating in leader-centred, personalised political environments. As discussed in the literature review chapter, they perform different roles in the political systems under investigation.

Prime ministers have various opportunities to display leadership, such as public speeches, media appearances and press conferences (Grube 2016; Rush 2014). In this chapter, I investigate one facet of public display of leadership: parliamentary performance through answers to oral questions. Question Time is the main point of engagement between the prime minister and parliament in all four systems, and one that attracts considerable media attention. Answers to oral questions are opportunities for prime ministers to display leadership of the government and of their parties. It is an opportunity to portray themselves as competent, capable leaders, and to contrast themselves, their government, and their party, with the opposition. This is done for the parliamentary audience, but also in order to send messages to the public, and to the media, considering the significant attention given to the questioning of the prime minister in parliament, particularly in the UK, Canada and Australia. When they appear before parliament to answer questions, prime ministers are subject to a series of constraints and incentives, which arise out of their institutional roles as leaders of the government and party leaders. They must indicate that they have made the right decisions, and that they are competently fulfilling their roles.

1. Based on the literature discussing the rhetorical strategies of prime ministers and political leaders in extra-parliamentary and parliamentary contexts, and based on their role as party leaders, I expect prime ministers to use their speaking time in answers to attack the opposition through explicit

conflictual remarks: to demonstrate the faults of the opposition and the contrast between the opposition and the government. In answering questions, I expect them to be particularly conflictual towards the Leader of the Opposition, against whom they need to contrast themselves.

2. I expect prime ministers also to acclaim their own side (Grube 2016; Allen et al. 2013) and make explicit appreciative remarks:
  - to demonstrate the competence of the government, indicating that the government is keeping its promises, and that ministers are making the right decisions;
  - to demonstrate the positive consequences of policies pursued by their government;
  - to demonstrate the ability of their parties to hold office.

Prime ministerial answers are also subject to several constraints. Procedurally, their answers are subject to time limits: they can only hold the floor for a few minutes at a time, so they cannot give a speech. Their answers are also reactive to the question, and this may produce effects on the types of remarks they make, particularly if they are responding to a conflictual question (Harris 2001; Bull and Wells 2012). As explained in section 8.2, rules of procedure do not specifically restrict the language that prime ministers may use during answers, aside from general restrictions of language that apply to all parliamentary debates. The only explicit restriction is that answers must be relevant to the question. Prime ministers may also be constrained by the communication strategies of their parties. As prime ministers are spokespersons for their parties, and as Question Time is a frequent, routine public appearance, parties use this opportunity to propagate their core messages. For the UK, Hazerika and Hamilton (2018) have documented the strategies that went into preparing the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister for PMQs. Whilst there is no equivalent documentation for the other countries, we can assume that some prior preparation plays a role in the conduct of prime ministers at Question Time: analysis of the data indeed suggests the presence of 'core party themes' in prime ministerial answers.

Naturally, a significant degree of the variation of the ways in which prime ministers pursue conflict and support also comes down to individual style. The analysis presented in this chapter does not discuss individual style. It focuses on mapping cross-case patterns of behaviour.

### **8.1.5. Chapter structure**

The first sections of the chapter focus on conflict. The objective is to observe and examine behaviour in different types of questioning mechanisms, and to discuss the possible connections between rules and behaviour. What do the rules allow? To what extent are rules enforced? What types of behaviour do we observe under different institutional settings? Section 8.2 investigates the rules of procedure in questions and answers, as well as the extent to which the rules are enforced. Section 8.3 then looks at evidence of conflict in questions: how conflict is performed by various actors during questioning. Section 8.4 investigates how prime ministers pursue conflict through their answers.

The final two sections investigate evidence of support in questions, and how it is manifested by various actors. The final section looks at whether there is evidence of support in answers by prime ministers, and then explores the ways in which it is expressed. The concluding section brings this evidence together and discusses implications.

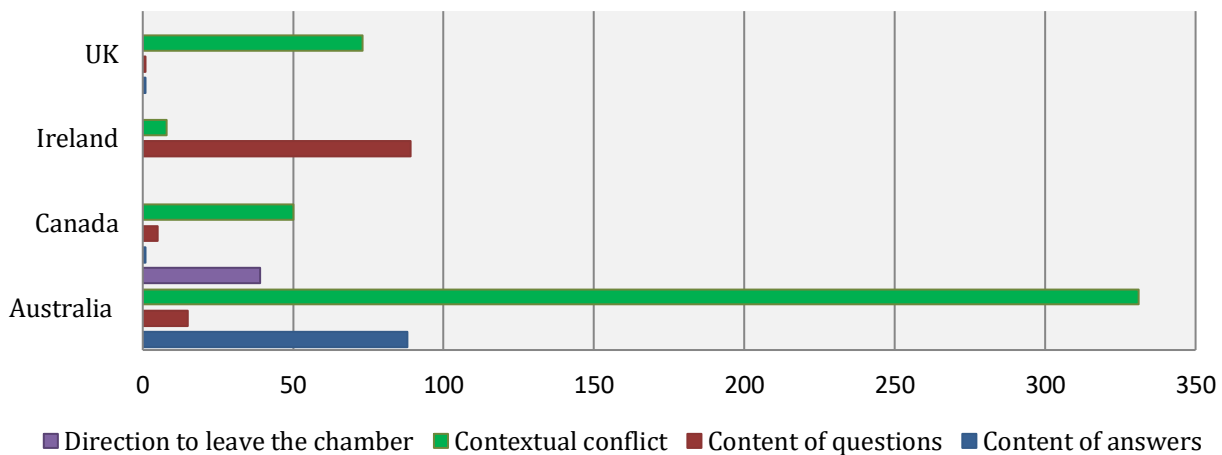


## 8.2. Rules and practice regarding the content of questions and answers

Rules of procedure prescribe the limits within which functions such as conflict and support may be performed: whether members may use certain types of language in their questions depends on what the rules allow, and on the extent to which the rules are enforced. This section examines the extent to which parliamentary rules of procedure restrict the content and language of questions and answers in each case study country. I also investigate the extent to which rules are enforced by analysing how often Speakers intervened during questioning, and for what purpose.

All four parliaments list two types of restrictions regarding the content of questions: restrictions concerning topics that may be addressed in questions, and restrictions concerning language. Rules of procedure do not mention specific restrictions with respect to the language used in answers; general rules regarding the propriety of language in parliamentary debates also apply to answers to questions. As discussed further below, the rules in Ireland and Australia mention some restrictions with respect to the relevance of the answer to the question. Figure 8.1 summarises categories of interventions by Speakers with respect to contextual and manifest conflict.

**Figure 8.1. Interventions by the Speaker in questioning**



**Contextual conflict:** count of instances when the Speaker called the House, or a member, to order for heckling, shouting, or for any other type of contextual conflict manifested in parallel with an exchange between the prime minister and a questioner. Speakers intervened in all four systems to limit contextual conflict. They intervened very often in Australia, with 331 such interventions recorded during the 30 sessions analysed in this study. This chimes with the characterisation of the Australian House of Representatives, and of Question Time in particular, as a noisy and adversarial environment. The famously adversarial PMQs comes second, but still displays considerably fewer interventions: 73 calls to order over 30 sessions.

- **Direction to leave the chamber:** refers to the enforcement of Standing Order 96(a) in Australia, which allows the Speaker to ask members to leave the chamber for disorderly conduct. The Speaker enforces this rule if members engage in contextual conflict and disrupt the conduct of Question Time.

**Content of questions:** count of instances when the Speaker intervened to make a remark about the topic or the language of a question. Figure 8.1 reflects the frequent interventions by the Speaker in Ireland to ask members to refrain from entering into a debate, but also to note whether the topic of a question is within the remit of the Taoiseach. The Speaker in Australia also intervened to police the content of questions, particularly with respect to language, with 15 interventions calling members out of order for imputations, interjections, insults or unparliamentary language, but also for asking questions that were not directly relevant to the prime minister's responsibilities. Figure 8.1 displays the low frequency of such interventions in Canada (5) and in the UK (1).

**Content of answers:** counts of instances when the Speaker intervened to make a remark about an answer given by the prime minister. There is very little evidence of Speakers intervening to coerce the content of answers, aside from interventions in Australia asking the Prime Minister, or ministers, to keep their answer relevant to the question. This type of intervention was done either proactively – the Speaker intervenes to ask the Prime Minister or a minister to adjust their answer; or reactively, when a member (usually the Manager of Opposition Business) intervened to suggest that the Prime Minister or a minister is not answering with relevance to the question. This did not refer to the language of answers – there is little or no evidence of Speakers coercing conflictual language in the periods analysed.

### 8.2.1. Australia

The rules regarding the content of questions are described in the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives:

'The following general rules apply to all questions: (a) Questions must not be debated. (b) A question fully answered must not be asked again. (c) For questions regarding persons: (i) questions must not reflect on or be critical of the character or conduct of a Member, a Senator, the Queen, the Governor-General, a State Governor, or a member of the judiciary: their conduct may only be challenged on a substantive motion; and (ii) questions critical of the character or conduct of other persons must be in writing. (d) Questions must not contain: (i) statements of facts or names of persons, unless they can be authenticated and are strictly necessary to make the question intelligible; (ii) arguments; (iii) inferences; (iv) imputations; (v) insults; (vi) ironical expressions; or (vii) hypothetical matter. (e) Questions must not refer to debates in the current session, or to proceedings of a committee not reported to the House.'

Given that Question Time in Australia is entirely open, i.e. questions are spontaneous rather than submitted in writing in advance, the power of the Speaker to decide what is considered orderly language is crucial. The Standing Orders explicitly mention the role of the Speaker in ensuring that questions are in order:

The Speaker may: 51 (a) direct a Member to change the language of a question asked during Question Time if the language is inappropriate or does not otherwise conform with the Standing Orders;'

As shown in Figure 8.1, the Speaker intervened very often to limit contextual conflict. As mentioned, the Standing Orders also empower the Speaker to ask members to leave the chamber; the Speaker frequently intervenes to enforce this in the case of disorderly conduct, usually preceded by a warning to the member in question:

The SPEAKER: The member for Wentworth is warned.

The SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Cowan will leave the chamber under standing order 94(a). He cannot continue this behaviour. (13.03.2013)

Rules concerning the content of questions are restrictive, but also leave extensive latitude for the Speaker to judge compliance. There is evidence of questions that contain critical observations referring to the conduct or character of members, imputations, as well as insults and ironical expressions, despite these being disallowed by the rules. The presence of questions that contain such critical comments reflects the latitude of the Speaker in calling out conflictual language. Many of these remarks came from the Leader of the Opposition, for example:

**Mr ABBOTT** (Leader of the Opposition):[...] I ask the Prime Minister, isn't her claim that a new tax on electricity will not push up prices further evidence that she has lost her way and also that she has lost her grip on what happens in the real world? (17.11.2010)

Opposition frontbenchers also asked questions that include explicit imputations:

**Mr ANDREWS:** [...] Why is the Prime Minister intent on slugging struggling Australian families with higher electricity prices? When will she start taking the concerns of real Australian people seriously? (28.10.2010)

These examples suggest that the power of the Speaker in calling members to order for adhering to the rules is essential. Overall, despite evidence of conflict, the Speaker of the House of Representatives only intervened 15 times to coerce language in questions. The following examples illustrate the Speaker's judgement on the content of questions:

#### **5 June 2013**

**Mr WILKIE** (Denison): My question is to the Prime Minister. SBS report that no asylum seekers have been processed on Manus Island and that detainees are attempting suicide and self-harm. But who knows for sure, because journalists are not allowed access and SBS was stopped by DIAC and contractors? Prime Minister, your government claims that it is PNG that is blocking access, but the PNG Prime Minister and the centre administrator both deny it. Someone is lying here. Who is it, Prime Minister?

**The SPEAKER:** The use of the word 'lying' of course is out of order. So I will ask the member for Denison to rephrase the last part and I will advise that, by now, everyone should know that the use of the word in any context is out of order. The member for Denison, on the last part.

#### **15 February 2012**

**Mr SWAN** (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer): [...] That is why we are out there, coming back to surplus and conducting one of the most significant fiscal consolidations—that is, return to surplus—seen in our history, because we understand with global uncertainty you have to be serious about your fiscal policy and send a message to international markets. That is not attainable by those opposite. We have seen the Three Stooges type farce of the last week from those opposite—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer was referring to three members of the opposition in an inappropriate way. He will withdraw.

With respect to answers, according to standing order 104 (a) and (b), '(a) An answer must be directly relevant to the question. (b) A point of order regarding relevance may be taken only once in respect of each answer.' The Speaker intervened 88 times to call members of the government, including the Prime Minister, to reply with relevance to the question. This often happened in response to a point of order from a member.

### 8.2.2. Canada

The rules regarding the content of questions are described in the House of Commons Procedure and Practice (O'Brien and Bosc 2017). These restrictions are based on precedents and rulings by the Speaker, and are also enforceable by the Speaker. They are not mentioned in the Standing Orders.

'[W]hen recognized in Question Period, a Member should:  
Ask a question; be brief; seek information; and ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual Minister addressed.  
Furthermore, a question should not: be a statement, representation, argument, or an expression of opinion; be hypothetical; seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise; seek information which is secretive in its nature, such as Cabinet proceedings or advice given to the Crown by law officers; reflect on the character or conduct of Chair Occupants, members of the House and of the Senate or members of the judiciary; reflect on the Governor General; refer to proceedings in the Senate; refer to public statements by Ministers on matters not directly related to their departmental duties; address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities; be on a matter that is sub judice; deal with the subject matter of a question of privilege previously raised, on which the Speaker reserved his decision; create disorder; make a charge by way of a preamble to a question; be a question from a constituent; seek information from a Minister of a purely personal nature; request a detailed response which could be dealt with more appropriately as a written question placed on the Order Paper; concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses.'  
(O'Brien and Bosc 2017 – online reference)

As in Australia, Question Period in Canada is open, i.e. written submission of questions is not required. Some aspects of the rules require interpretation. For example, whether a question contains 'a statement, representation, argument, or an expression of opinion', whether it is hypothetical, whether it contains critical remarks about the conduct of a member of the house, and whether it seeks information of a personal nature, is a matter of interpretation. Hence the judgement of the Speaker with respect to what is considered acceptable language is again crucial.

In connection to items listed in the treatise, there is explicit evidence in the data of questions that contain references to party responsibilities, internal party matters, or party or election expenses, or that 'reflect on the character of members of the house'. The Prime Minister was frequently addressed as party leader, sometimes explicitly, and he was asked to comment on matters regarding internal party affairs and party expenses:

**Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately it is not only the Prime Minister who gave an illegal donation to the Conservative Party. There are at least 2,900 delegates with fees totalling at least \$1.7 million. There is more. The party's executive director says that Conservatives have been accepting off-book donations for years. This is illegal money that the party has no right to spend and it must be returned to the donors. When will the Prime Minister agree to pay back the \$1.7 million in illegal donations? (25.09.2006)

The Speaker intervened to limit contextual conflict and to call the House to order. There is, however, scarce evidence of calls to order in cases of conflictual language. As shown in Figure 8.1, the Speaker only intervened five times to make remarks about the content of questions. For example, he asked members to refer to others by their parliamentary titles:

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I have reminded members a number of times over the last couple of weeks that naming another hon. member by name is out of order. We do have to refer to perhaps the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence. I recognized the member's name in the minister's answer. He knows that is out of order. (25.09.2006)

There is also an example of the Speaker asking members not to comment on the attendance of other members:

**The Speaker:** Order. Members will want to be careful about referring to the presence or absence of members. It is out of order to refer to the absence of members. Saying members are present for a certain percentage of the time can lead to all kinds of perils for all kinds of members. The hon. member for Abbotsford. (13.05.2008)

With respect to answers, the Standing Orders do not mention any restrictions, and the treatise on procedure explicitly specifies that 'There are no explicit rules which govern the form or content of replies to oral questions' (O'Brien and Bosc 2017).<sup>28</sup>

### 8.2.3. Ireland

The section of the rules of procedure of the Dáil that describes rules regarding the content of questions mainly refers to the topics that may be addressed in questions. The only specification regarding the language used in questions is that '(5) Questions shall not contain argument or personal imputation.' The rules also describe the role of the Speaker in the conduct of questioning proceedings, as described below:

#### Rules regarding the content of questions

'Questions addressed to a member of the Government must relate to public affairs connected with his or her Department, or to matters of administration for which he or she is officially responsible (including bodies under the aegis of his or her Department in respect of Government policy). Provided that, at his or her absolute discretion, the Ceann Comhairle may permit a Question or topical issue in relation to such a body where a member has made a reasonable request for information to that body, relating to the member's functions as a public representative, and an adequate response is not forthcoming.

#### Powers of Ceann Comhairle as to Questions: matters of order relating to Questions.

**37. (1) (a)** The Ceann Comhairle shall examine every Question in order to ensure that it conforms with the provisions of this Standing Order. The Ceann Comhairle shall rule out of order any Question which does not comply with Standing Orders: Provided that the Ceann Comhairle, or the Clerk under his or her authority, may amend any Question, after consultation with the member responsible for the Question, to secure its compliance with Standing Orders.

*(b)* Where the Ceann Comhairle has ruled a Question out of order, the member in whose name the Question was put down may, subject to the requirement to accept that ruling, request further information from the Ceann Comhairle regarding the reasons for his or her ruling.

(2) The purpose of each Question shall be to elicit information upon or to elucidate matters of fact or of policy and Questions shall be as brief as possible.

(3) Questions put down for oral answer may not seek information provided orally in the Dáil within the previous two months in response to an oral Question or in response to a matter raised under Standing Order 29A: Provided that, where an oral Question is not reached and a written answer thereto is provided in the Official Report of Debates, the provisions of paragraph (4) of this Standing Order shall apply.

(4) Questions for written answer may not seek information provided within the previous two weeks in response to a Question (whether answered orally or in writing) or in response to a matter raised under Standing Order 29A.

(5) Questions shall not contain argument or personal imputation.' (Houses of the Oireachtas 2017)

As explained previously, a key difference between Ireland and the other cases is the fact that questions are submitted in writing in advance: given this, the Speaker does a preliminary selection of questions and rules out of order questions that do not comply with the Standing Orders.<sup>29</sup> However, the rest of the questioning session comprises supplementary questions, so there is scope for members to intervene in

<sup>28</sup> The intervention recorded in Figure 8.1. referred to an instance of the Speaker correcting the Prime Minister for addressing another member by the wrong title.

<sup>29</sup> The Speaker explained this process in detail in a session on 20 September 2011.

ways that are out of order. It is then the responsibility of the Speaker to ensure that questions comply with the Standing Orders.

The Speaker intervened 89 times to make indications about the content of questions, but this did not refer to conflictual language. The most frequent type of intervention asked members to put a question, rather than to engage in a debate, and also to suggest that some questions are within the remit of ministers, rather than of the Taoiseach.

Still, the data suggest that there is evidence of conflictual behaviour during questioning. Deciding whether questions comply with the Standing Orders remains at the discretion of the Speaker. For example, on 18 September 2012, the Leader of the Opposition told the Taoiseach that

‘[...]It seems once again that the Government, particularly the Taoiseach, is sitting back and hoping something will fall into its lap such that we can claim a negotiating victory.’.

On 18 October 2011, Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett told the Taoiseach:

‘Will the Taoiseach not question President Van Rompuy and the European authorities about their insistence that there should be no burning of Irish bondholders and that we should benefit in no way from the plans to burn bondholders in Greece? As a consequence, the Taoiseach's strategy of being the best boy in the class in Europe has failed disastrously’.

Such sentences may be considered imputations, but it remains the decision of the Speaker whether to allow them or not. As subsequent sections in this chapter will demonstrate, the language in Ireland is much less conflictual overall than that in the other three parliaments. The following interventions illustrate the Speaker's judgements with respect to accusations:

### **19 January 2016**

Deputy Micheál Martin: It would have been better if the Taoiseach had been far more forthcoming when he was asked in public about this issue because his Department had no comment to make on it. A more comprehensive response earlier would have been far more advisable. The critical point is that there is no question but that the German Chancellor was lobbying on behalf of the industry, an industry which had serious questions to answer in terms of its interest in ensuring public health. I will take no lectures from the Taoiseach on my right to put these questions in the interests of the public. Essentially, what happened was that the German Chancellor, Ms Merkel, lobbied on behalf of the car industry to delay important public health directives and the Taoiseach acquiesced.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy made a statement. He should be very careful.

Deputy Micheál Martin: A statement is fine.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot make accusations against people which have already been denied.

### **26 November 2013**

An Ceann Comhairle Before the Taoiseach responds, as a long-serving Deputy and a former Minister, it is not in order to accuse Ministers of leaking documents to the media. I wish to put that on the record.

With respect to answers, standing order 44A indicates that answers must ‘address each and every request for information contained therein.’, and that members may appeal to the Chair if they do not think the answer complies to this requirement. The restrictions regarding the content of answers therefore mainly concern their adequacy to the question. Figure 8.1 shows no evidence of interventions by the Speaker with respect to answers.

#### 8.2.4. UK

Erskine May (2011, pp. 358-365) describes extensive rules regarding the admissibility and orderliness of questions. The specifications in Erskine May refer to the topics of questions, i.e. matters on which questions may not be addressed, and the language of questions. An extensive part (pp. 359-361) refers to topics on which questions may not be addressed, for example issues regarding the Royal family, decisions made by either House of Parliament, matters sub judice, or matters that are not within the competence of ministers. With respect to the Prime Minister specifically, Erskine May specifies that:

'It has been ruled that the Prime Minister cannot be interrogated as to the advice that he may have given to the Sovereign with regard to the grant of honours, the ecclesiastical patronage of the Crown, the appointment and dismissal of Privy Counsellors, the dissolution of Parliament, or, in certain circumstances, the exercise of the prerogative of mercy' (p.360)

With respect to the content of questions, Erskine May offers the following specifications:

'Questions which seek an expression of an opinion, or which contain arguments, expressions of opinion, inferences or imputations, unnecessary epithets, or rhetorical, controversial, ironical, or offensive expressions, are not in order' (p.359)  
'Questions must not reflect on the character or conduct of persons' (p.359)  
'Questions are also inadmissible which [...] are trivial, vague, or meaningless' (p.365)

It also sets out the following caveat with respect to the discretion of the Speaker:

'The Select Committee on Parliamentary Questions 1971-72 expressed its concern that the cumulative effect of previous decisions relating to the orderliness of questions should not be allowed to become unduly restrictive. It is therefore recommended that, while the Speaker should continue to have regard to the basic rules concerning the form and content of questions which are set forth in the pages that follow, he should not consider himself bound, when interpreting these rules, to disallow a question solely on the ground that it conflicted with any previous individual ruling' (p.359)

Similar to Question Time in Australia and Question Period in Canada, Prime Minister's Questions is an open procedure, as members are not required to submit questions in writing in advance. The Speaker has a great degree of discretion in enforcing orderliness during questioning.

The specifications with respect to the language of questions that may be considered conflictual are vague, and there is extensive evidence of explicit conflictual behaviour on the one hand, and of infrequent intervention by the Speaker on the other. The Speaker mainly intervenes to call the House to order and to manage contextual conflict. The following examples illustrate evidence of conflictual language in questions, which may be considered contrary to the rules:

#### Leader of the Opposition:

**Edward Miliband:** All the right hon. Gentleman shows is how out of touch he is. He is even out of touch with his own Office for Budget Responsibility's figures, which show that, by 2015, people will be worse off than they were in 2010 because prices have been rising faster than earnings under his Government. Why is this happening? He told us that the economy would be growing, but the truth is that it has been flatlining. Will he acknowledge that it is his failure to get growth that means that we have falling, not rising, living standards in this country? (13.02.2013)

**Edward Miliband:** We have a failing Prime Minister; he is out of touch, and he stands up for the wrong people. (13.03.2013)

## **Opposition backbenchers:**

**Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab):** Does the Prime Minister think he was right to tell journalists on a plane that the United Kingdom is paying bribes to Libya, and does he agree with the Foreign Office's assessment that he was "loose-tongued and reckless"? (2.03.2011)

Although Erskine May describes extensive restrictions with respect to the content of questions, evidence from the period studied shows that the Speaker did not intervene to call members to order for the content of questions, or to call the Prime Minister to order for his answers. The Speaker intervened to call the House to order when the level of noise became disruptive, or when members interrupted each other.

Erskine May (2011, p.366) discusses content restrictions for oral answers : 'An answer should be confined to the points contained in the question, with such explanation only as renders the answers intelligible, though a certain latitude is permitted to ministers of the crown [...]'. There are no mentions of restrictions with respect to the language that should be used in answers. General restrictions referring to language in debates apply. The data shows only one intervention by the Speaker to make a remark in respect of an answer.



### 8.2.5. Conclusions

All four parliaments have rules regarding the topics and language of questions. In all systems, rules are quite extensive, but they also leave extensive scope for interpretation, and hence for the Speaker to decide what is admissible. Considering the authority of the Speaker in the conduct of questioning procedures discussed in Chapter 5, their inclination to police the content of questions is crucial.

The degree to which Speakers intervened to police the content of questions (on any of the two dimensions) varied among the four countries.

Firstly, all Speakers intervened to police *contextual conflict*. Questioning mechanisms known for their adversarial culture in Australia, Canada and the UK display evidence of interventions by the Speaker. But Speakers mainly intervened to police noise, and very rarely to coerce the content of questions.

Secondly, there is considerable variation in how Speakers police the *content* of interventions. The Speaker intervened to raise objections to the content of question in Australia, but this referred mainly to topics, and rarely to the language used in questions, except for cases when he judged that members had used unparliamentary language. In Ireland, the Speaker mainly intervened to ask members to pose a question and not to make a statement. This type of intervention is connected to the time limits for questions in Ireland, which allow members to make longer interventions; if they digress and make a speech, the Speaker intervenes to require them to ask a question. The Speaker intervened very rarely to raise issues about the content of questions in the UK. In Australia the Speaker also intervened to police the content of answers, in connection to the provision in Standing Orders that requires answers to be relevant to questions. But Speakers did not intervene to make any remarks about conflictual language in answers in the period analysed in any of the four countries. This prompts important questions about the behaviour of prime ministers, which will be addressed in this chapter: do they use conflict in their questions? If so, the virtually non-existing interventions by the Speaker suggest that they get away with it.

This variation again demonstrates that the interpretation of the Speaker is key in deciding whether a question adheres to the rules or not. Despite evidence of highly conflictual behaviour in questions in Canada, Australia and in the UK, Speakers allow such adversarial interventions, and only intervene to rule them out of order when unparliamentary language is used. Concordantly with the passage from Erskine May cited in the UK section, one possible explanation for this is that Speakers allow members to interact freely up to the point where there is a major transgression of language; adversarial language is seen as a part of the conduct of oral questions, and the conflictual nature of exchanges is accepted as an inherent feature of practice. The Australian Parliament website even notes that '[B]ecause the government and the opposition are both seeking to pursue their objectives and make their points powerfully, Question Time can be characterised by a degree of intensity and emotion. Strongly held views can generate strongly worded debate.' (Parliament of Australia 2019c). This suggests that conflict is part of the culture of how questioning is conducted in these countries, and that it is one of the functions of oral questions to prime ministers.

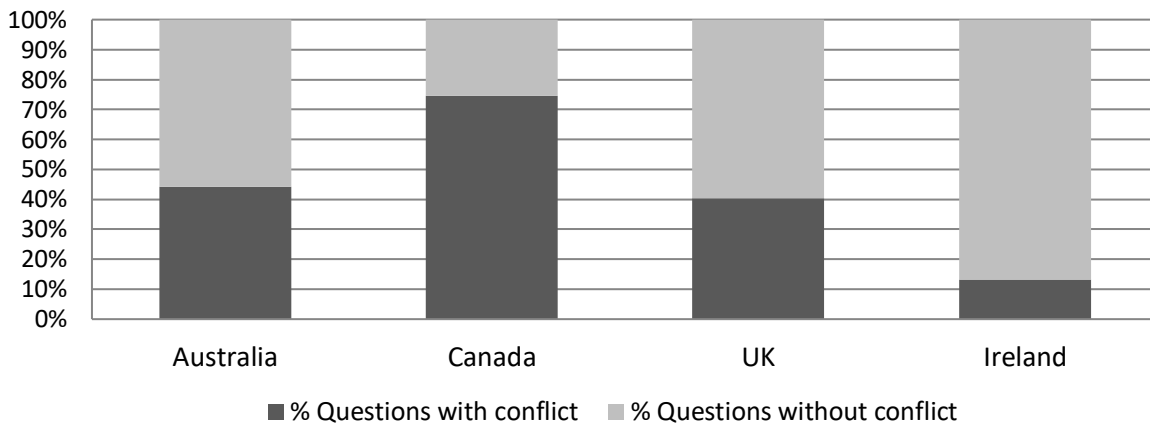
### 8.3. Conflict in questions

Having explored the rules regarding the content of questions and answers, this section looks at the degree to which there is evidence of conflictual behaviour in questions in the four countries. The aim is to investigate the degree to which some questioning mechanisms display more, or less evidence of conflict in questions to prime ministers, and to discuss this in connection with the rules.

#### 8.3.1. Evidence of conflictual behaviour in questions

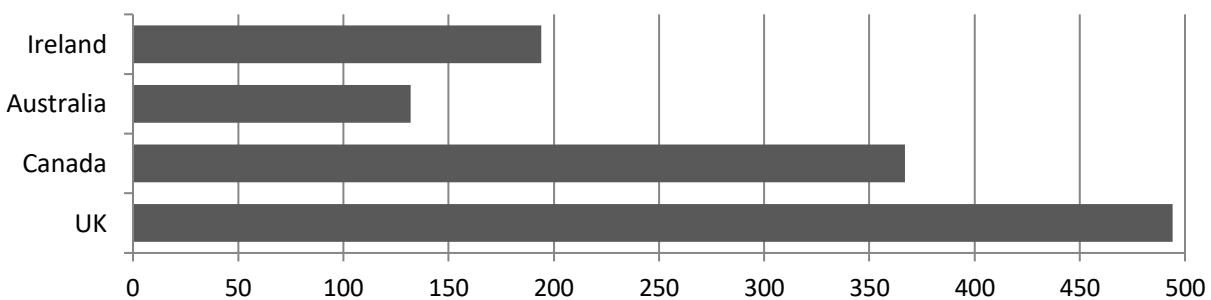
The first measure of conflictual behaviour in questions is the percentage of questions to the prime minister that contain at least one conflictual remark.

**Figure 8.2. Questions to prime ministers with conflictual remarks (%)**



The second measure counts the total number of conflictual remarks in questions recorded for each country.

**Figure 8.3. Conflictual remarks in questions to prime ministers (N)**



The degree of conflict in questions varies among countries. Canada displays the highest proportion of questions that contain at least one conflictual remark, at 75% (Figure 8.2). The proportion of questions containing instances of conflict in the UK and Australia is around 40%. In terms of the number of instances of conflict recorded, the UK had the highest number of conflictual remarks, with over 490 individual instances recorded for the total number of questions, and Canada was a close second, at 367.

On a first reading, Figures 8.2 and 8.3 suggest that questioning performs a conflict management function: parliamentary actors use questions to criticise and to express disagreement. Some mechanisms present higher levels of conflict than others (Figure 8.2). As expected, based on the proportion of conflictual questions shown in Figure 8.2. Question Period in Canada, Question Time in Australia and PMQs in the UK have an important role in providing an arena for conflict, but this applies much less to Ireland. This preliminary analysis does not tell us how conflict is performed and what shape it takes: are questions used to criticise policy? Are they used for point-scoring and political attacks? The next step is hence to unpack this variation further: which actors perform conflict? What types of conflictual remarks do they use in their questions? The following section will investigate the types of conflict displayed in questions by various actors. It discusses the degree to which conflictual remarks refer to policy, and the degree to which they refer to the government, the prime minister, or another political party.

### 8.3.2. How do different actors perform conflict through questions?

Having looked at the overall proportion of questions with conflictual remarks as well as the total number of conflictual remarks in each system, this section investigates which actors perform conflict in each system. Next, I look at *how* they perform conflict, and discuss potential effects of procedural rules on behaviour, as well as connections to the theoretical debates about functions of questioning mechanisms.

**Figure 8.4. Who accounts for more conflictual questions?**

**Proportion of conflictual questions by different types of actors in questions to prime ministers**

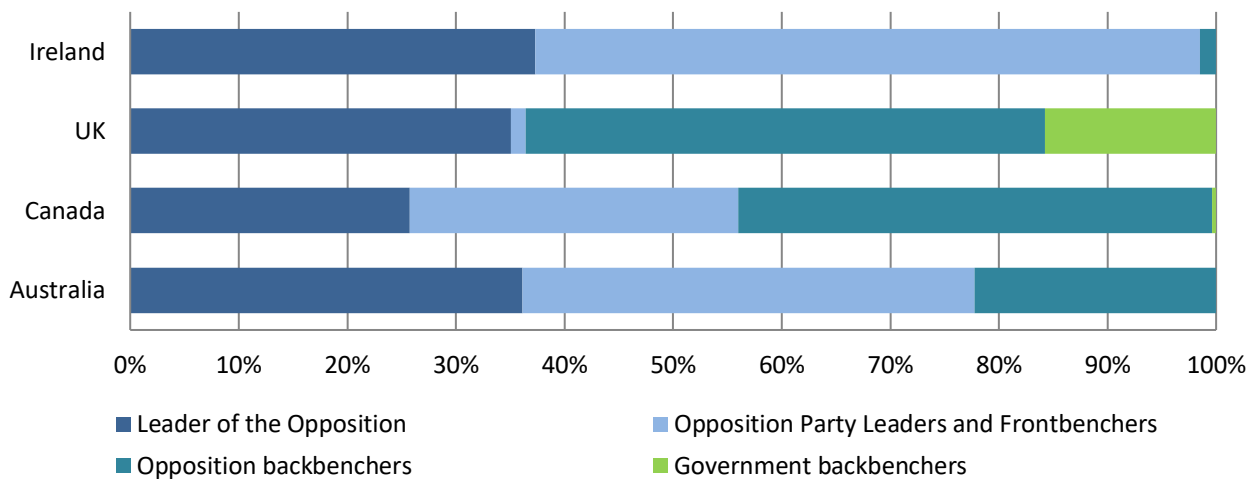


Figure 8.4 provides a first overview by looking at the proportion of conflictual questions by different actors, out of the total number of conflictual questions in each country. As expected, members of the opposition were the most active in deploying questions with at least one conflictual remark, accounting for 99% of such questions in Australia and Canada, and around 85% in the UK. Part of this variation reflects the roles of different actors in the questioning process: Leaders of the Opposition occupy a prominent role in questioning, and they single-handedly account for a significant proportion of conflictual questions across all cases. Frontbenchers and party leaders play a significant role in Ireland, Canada and Australia, with frontbenchers taking a front stage role in Australia. Unusually among all

systems, government backbenchers in the UK also engage in conflictual behaviour, as detailed in subsequent sections. Conflict expressed by government backbenchers refers to conflictual remarks addressed to the opposition, but also seeks to observe if there are examples of conflictual remarks towards the government or the prime minister. Conflict in questions from opposition actors refers to conflictual remarks directed at the government, at the prime minister, or at government policy. There are very few instances of opposition parties making conflictual remarks referring to other parties in opposition – this refers to a few examples of the National Democratic Party in Canada being critical of the Liberal Party for their record in office, as the Liberal Party of Canada had been in government since 1993 prior to the 2006 election.

The following sections explore this variation and investigate how different actors pursue conflict. Firstly, for each category of actor, I investigate the degree to which they participate in conflict in each country by looking at the proportion of their questions that contain at least one conflictual remark. Next, I describe the extent to which they deploy conflictual remarks in order to criticise policy, versus the extent to which they use conflict for comments referring to the prime minister, the government or another political party. This distinction is important: it shows the degree to which members use questions as an opportunity to criticise concrete, technical aspects of policy, and the degree to which they make more political, personalised critical comments about the government or the prime minister, or of a political party. Finally, I seek to explore the variation further with qualitative analysis of examples of criticism. In doing so, this chapter seeks to identify strategies of conflict deployed by different actors across cases, and also explores within-case variation.

As explained in the Methodology chapter and in Section 8.1, the coding scheme used for this section built on types of behaviour associated with conflict. The coding unit is a ‘conflictual remark’ – a sentence or group of sentences within an intervention by a parliamentary actor. As this coding is applied to sub-units within an intervention, several categories may apply to any single intervention. For example, a question may contain an instance of policy criticism and government criticism, or just an instance of government criticism. Given the complexity of parliamentary speech, any question may contain more than one instance of conflict: this coding makes it possible to capture that, and to capture the variety of types.

Table 8.2 below summarises sub-types of conflictual remarks found as recurring themes in questions to prime ministers. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, and similar to the analyses in the previous chapter, this classification draws on an examination of the population of questions within each category and on inductively identifying sub-categories. On a conceptual level, this inductive analysis based on qualitative reading of the population of examples within each category serves to further explore conflict in questions. It is not intended to offer a numeric summary of the sub-types of questions in the data, but to list the sub-types identified and to summarise the qualitative examples discussed in the chapter.

**Table 8.2. Conflict strategies: Types of conflictual remarks in questions to the prime minister**

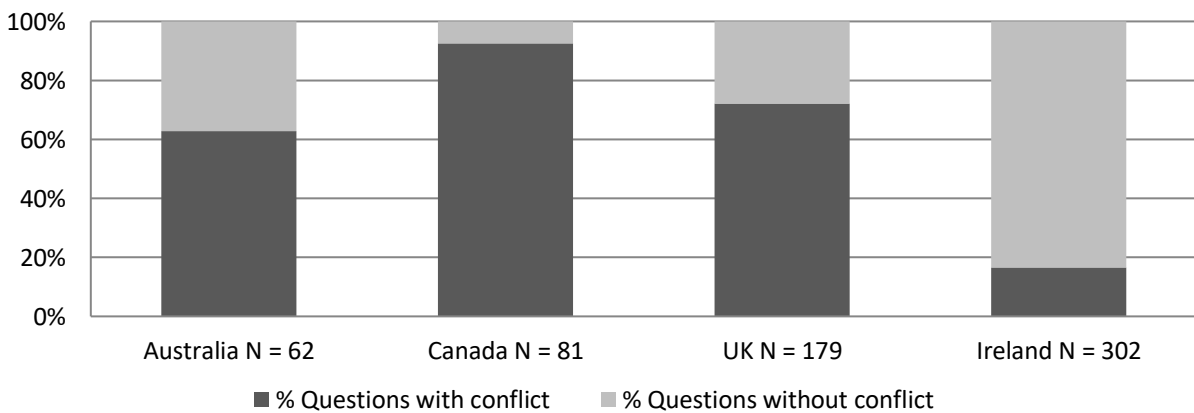
<b>Policy criticism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy has detrimental effects</li> <li>• The policy would be prospectively detrimental/the government is persevering with policy despite evidence that it is detrimental</li> </ul>
<b>Government criticism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism of individual ministers</li> <li>• Criticism of the government for a specific decision</li> <li>• Criticism of the government for a specific decision that has negative effects on constituents</li> <li>• General criticism of the government: bad management, evidence of negative developments; recurring statements such as ‘the government has lost its way’</li> </ul>
<b>Prime minister criticism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism of the prime minister for a specific decision</li> <li>• Criticism of the prime minister for breaking a promise (usually a promise made in the election campaign)</li> <li>• Personal criticism of the prime minister</li> </ul>
<b>Party criticism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party scandals, and party behaviour in public life (e.g. expenses scandals, partisan appointments)</li> <li>• Party election promises (not fulfilled)</li> <li>• Party policy positions</li> <li>• Party statements or actions that can be linked to the party’s long-standing traits or ideological tradition</li> <li>• Criticism of the leader of the party</li> </ul>

**1. Leaders of the Opposition**

As discussed throughout this thesis, the interaction between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition is the centrepiece of proceedings across all the systems investigated here. This section investigates the behaviour of Leaders of the Opposition across systems, looking at the degree to which their questions are conflictual, and also exploring the conflict strategies they employ.

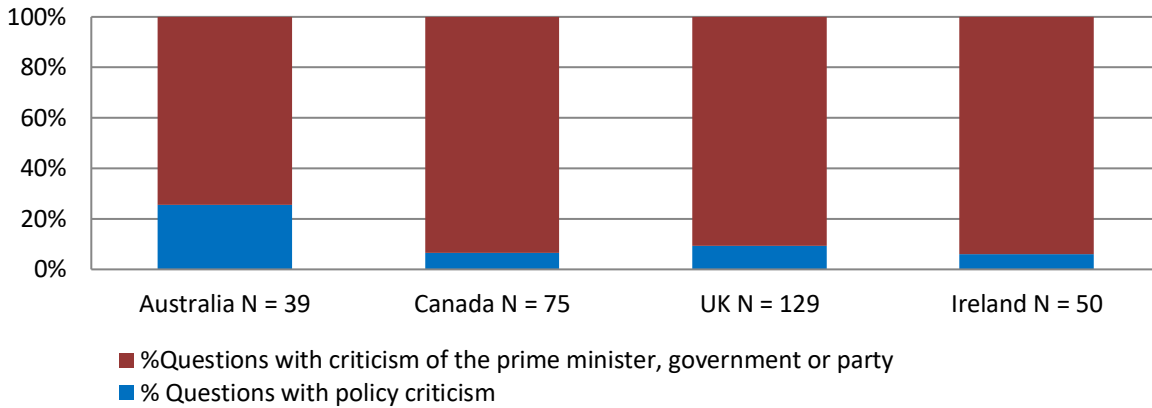
**What proportion of questions to prime ministers from Leaders of the Opposition contains conflictual remarks?**

**Figure 8.5. Leaders of the Opposition: % of questions to prime ministers with conflictual remarks**

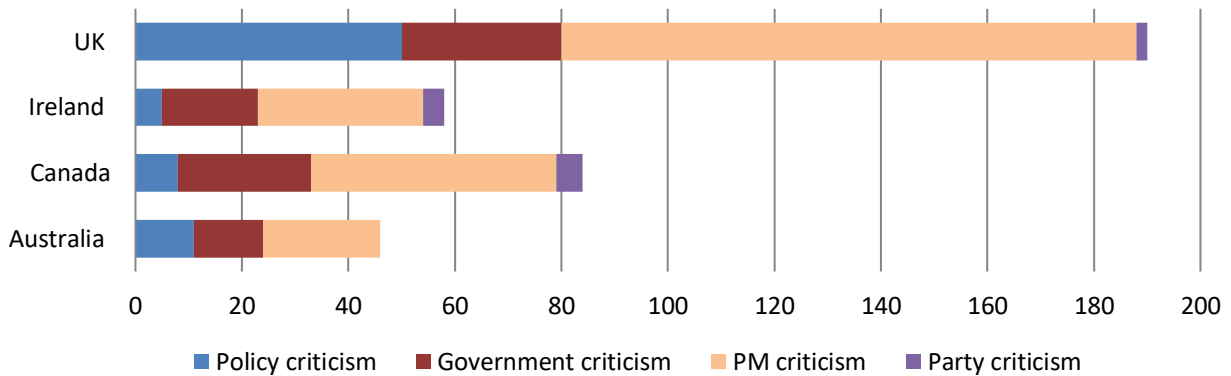


**What types of conflict do Leaders of the Opposition deploy in their questions to prime ministers?**

**Figure 8.6. Leaders of the Opposition: % of conflictual questions to prime ministers displaying different types of conflict**



**Figure 8.7. Leaders of the Opposition: Types of conflictual remarks in questions (N)**



As outlined in the expectations in section 8.1, Leaders of the Opposition were significantly confrontational actors, with 93% of their questions containing instances of conflict in Canada, 72% in the UK, and 63% in Australia. In line with findings presented in previous chapters, the Leader of the Opposition in Ireland was much less adversarial, with only 17% of their questions containing an instance of conflict.

In terms of the types of conflict, Figure 8.6 presents evidence that Leaders engaged in policy-focused conflict to a very small extent; as discussed in subsequent sections, they were the actors who were the least inclined to do so. As shown in Figure 8.7, remarks take a highly personalised form across all systems, with the most frequent type being personal criticism of the prime minister.

Policy criticism was deployed most frequently in the UK and in Australia. In deploying policy criticism, Leaders make reference to statements made by particular groups affected by the policy, but also to official government statistics. They also used questions to highlight the contrast between the government’s and the opposition’s policies. Across systems, Leaders pointed out the negative effects of existing policies, and also suggested that the government is persevering with policy despite evidence that it is detrimental. For example, on 18 May 2011, Ed Miliband told David Cameron:

**Edward Miliband:** We are getting used to this. As we saw on health, when there is a terrible policy the Prime Minister just hides behind the consultation. Frankly, it is just not good enough. Let me tell him what people think of this policy. The judges are saying the policy is wrong, End Violence Against Women is saying that it is the wrong policy, and his own Victims Commissioner says that the policy is “bonkers”. I know that he is in the middle of a consultation, but I would like to hear his view on this policy, which he should drop.

In Australia, Tony Abbott was a famously adversarial Leader of the Opposition - he was the first Leader in 26 years to be suspended for conflictual behaviour during Question Time.<sup>30</sup> He recurrently pressed Julia Gillard on the issue of the carbon tax, particularly on the fact that the government was ignoring evidence that the policy was detrimental:

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that Alcoa warned the government last year that the carbon tax would impact on its economic viability, given that Alcoa has today shelved a \$3 billion investment because of the carbon tax and given that the government's own modelling says that the carbon tax will reduce aluminium production by 61.7 per cent, why is the Prime Minister still in denial about the carbon tax destroying jobs in manufacturing industry? (15.02.2012)

In the UK, Ed Miliband frequently explained policy having negative consequences by making reference to statements made by groups of people who would be directly affected.

**Edward Miliband:** Nobody believes the Prime Minister and nobody trusts him on the health service. At the Homerton hospital on Monday, I met senior staff working in HIV services, who explained to me how the Bill will fragment and disrupt services—[*Interruption.*] The Health Secretary should be quiet and listen to the people who work in the health service. If he had done some listening before—[*Interruption.*] He should calm down. (22.02.2011)

**Edward Miliband:** [...] Is the Prime Minister aware of the deep concern among schools, families and leading sportsmen and women about the Education Secretary's decision to take away all the funding from the highly successful school sport partnerships? Will the Prime Minister overrule the Education Secretary and reverse the decision? (24.11.2011)

As their questions are the opening act of Question Time in all systems, Leaders of the Opposition predominantly deployed personalised criticism, focusing mainly on the Prime Minister (Figure 8.7). Leaders criticised prime ministers for specific decisions, but also for perceived long-term mismanagement and faulty strategy. The theme of breaking a promise, particularly an electoral promise, was common to all cases, as illustrated in the examples below. Prime ministers are seen as responsible for the electoral promises made by their parties upon assuming office.

**UK: Edward Miliband:** I have to say to the Prime Minister that his promise on immigration makes the Deputy Prime Minister's promise on tuition fees look like the model of integrity. If he can break so spectacularly a solemn promise on a fundamentally important issue, why on earth should anyone believe any of his election promises this time? (14.12.2011)

**Ireland: Micheál Martin:** On 23 February 2011, two days before the general election, the Taoiseach claimed Ireland could not afford Ministers to be doing constituency work in their first 100 days in office and that he would ban them from doing so if elected. There was no small print or qualification to this claim. Characteristically, the Taoiseach patted himself on the back for making such a bold promise. We now learn from several parliamentary questions that the Taoiseach never had any intention of carrying out this commitment. On taking office, he and his Ministers immediately hired over 60 people to do constituency work, spending approximately €750,000 in their first 100 days. (11.10.2011)

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<sup>30</sup> ABC News (2012) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-20/abbott-thrown-out-of-question-time/4210814> Accessed 8/07/2019

**Canada: Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign we heard a lot of promises about the legislation introduced today. Where is there something in the bill to stem the flood of Conservative staffers now lobbying their bosses in cabinet? Where is the Prime Minister's pledge to implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations? Yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board told the House that the government would proceed with all its campaign promises. However this selective accountability act hardly achieves that. Maybe it is time for the Prime Minister to come clean with the House and tell Canadians that he has no intention whatsoever of living up to those campaign promises. (11.04.2006)

**Australia: Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition):** My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her promise, made precisely two years ago today, that: 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' Will the Prime Minister now apologise to Australia's forgotten families for this breach of faith? (16.08.2012)

There are also instances of purely personal criticism. On 11 April 2006, The Leader of the Opposition accused the Canadian Prime Minister that he 'cannot cope with anyone who disagrees with him'. Similar examples of negative characterisations occurred at PMQs, where Ed Miliband suggested that David Cameron should take 'anger management' training (16.05.2012) or that 'He breaks his promises, he does not think things through and when the going gets tough, he dumps on his colleagues.' (11.05.2011).

In criticising the government as a collective, Leaders of the Opposition used general criticisms suggesting that the government was 'out of touch' or not managing a situation particularly well, or that they were not respecting the wishes of citizens. They also criticised individual ministers and their decisions.

Leaders of the Opposition rarely criticised the prime minister's party specifically. There were no examples of such remarks in Australia, only five in Canada, four in Ireland, and two in the UK. Ed Miliband explicitly criticised the Conservative party, making reference to its perceived long-standing traits, by saying that:

- '[I]n the dog days of this Government, the Conservative party is going back to its worst instincts: unfunded tax cuts, hitting the poorest hardest and now undermining the minimum wage. The nasty party is back.' (15 October 2014)
- 'When it comes to Europe, it is the same old Tories: a divided party, and a weak Prime Minister'. (16 January 2013)

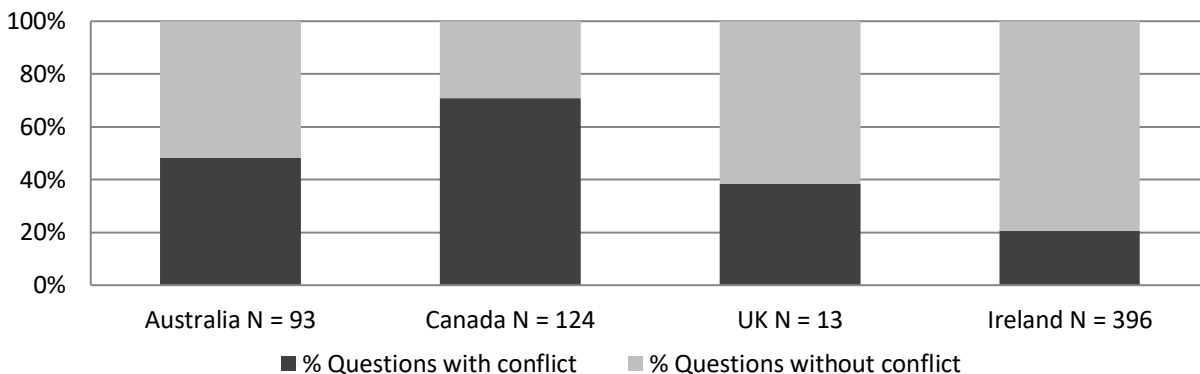
The next section further investigates behaviour of MPs in leadership roles by looking at patterns of behaviour displayed by opposition frontbenchers and party leaders.



## 2. Opposition frontbenchers and party leaders

What proportion of questions to prime ministers from opposition frontbenchers and party leaders contains at least one conflictual remark?

Figure 8.8. Party leaders and frontbenchers: % of questions to prime ministers with conflictual remarks



What types of conflict do opposition frontbenchers and party leaders deploy in their questions to prime ministers?

Figure 8.9. Opposition frontbenchers and party leaders: % of conflictual questions to prime ministers displaying different types of conflict

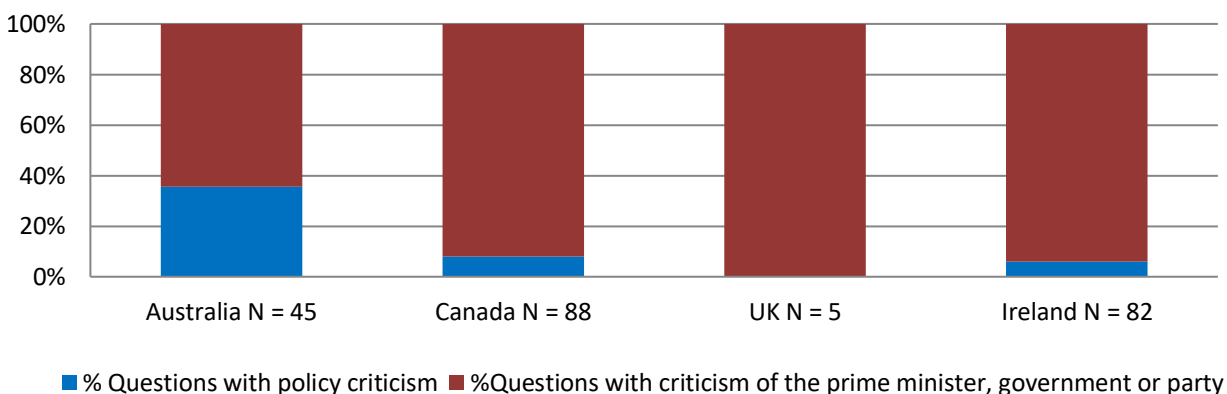
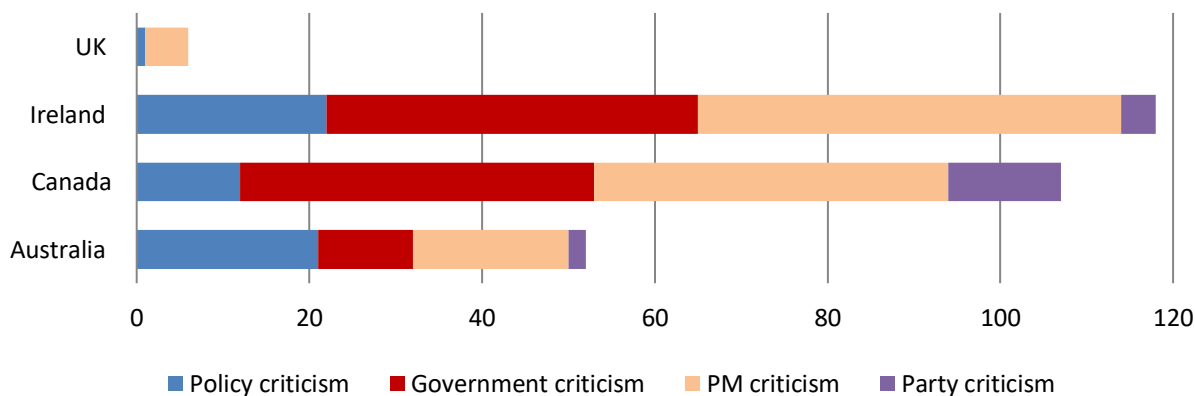


Figure 8.10. Party leaders and frontbenchers: types of conflictual remarks in questions (N)



Party leaders intervene most frequently in Ireland, where they are the main actors together with the Leader of the Opposition, and in Canada, where they are afforded time by the established recognition patterns, as detailed in Chapter 5.<sup>31</sup> They are highly adversarial actors in Canada, with over 70% of their questions containing an instance of conflict. In terms of macro-level patterns of behaviour, figures suggest that the behaviour of opposition frontbenchers and party leaders resembles that of Leaders of the Opposition across all systems to a great degree. Similar to questions from Leaders of the Opposition, the critical remarks deployed by party leaders and frontbenchers remain predominantly focused on the prime minister or the government, and less focused on policy (Figures 8.9 and 8.10). Qualitative analysis suggests that, compared to the markedly personalised strategies of Leaders of the Opposition, who mainly targeted the Prime Minister, frontbenchers and other party leaders focused more on the government.

Conflictual remarks referring to the government were very frequent in Ireland and Canada. Leaders either criticised a particular decision, an individual minister, or made more general critical remarks about the government. In Australia, this was often expressed by the formula that ‘the government has lost its way’, which was part of the communications strategy of the main opposition party, the Liberal–National coalition. Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julia Bishop, claimed that ‘the government has clearly lost its way on border protection’ (15.11.2010). Other opposition frontbenchers claimed that ‘the government seems to have lost its way on banking’ (17.11.2010), or asked ‘Does the Prime Minister agree that these policy announcements were obvious political mistakes and further evidence that the government has lost its way?’ (17.11.2010).

Critical remarks referring to the Prime Minister remained very frequent. The claim that the Prime Minister had broken a promise appears again in questions from frontbenchers and leaders in Australia and Canada.

With respect to criticism of policy, their remarks take similar forms with those seen in the case of other opposition actors: criticising aspects of policy that are evidently detrimental or aspects that would have negative consequences in the future. In the latter case, a recurring theme was that the government is persevering with policy despite evidence that it would have negative consequences. In Australia, this type of criticism was frequently found in questions about the government’s proposed carbon tax, on which the opposition conducted a coordinated attack.

Confirming the evidence presented in Chapter 7, we observe that MPs in leadership position take an incisive approach to questioning, with Leaders of the Opposition leading the attack against the prime minister and the government. The next two sections look at patterns of behaviour by opposition and government backbenchers.

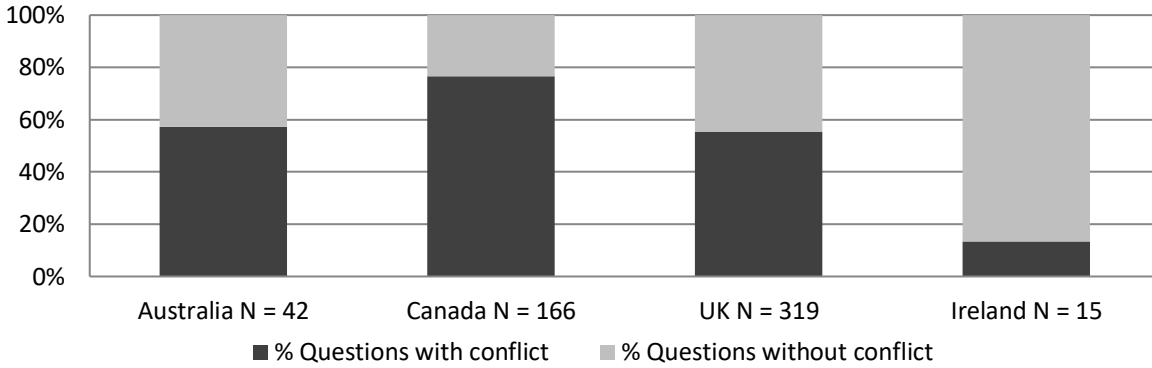
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<sup>31</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, in the UK, frontbenchers do not participate in questioning, and other party leaders played a very small role during this period, so the data presented here is for illustrative purposes only.

### 3. Opposition backbenchers

What proportion of questions to prime ministers from opposition backbenchers contains at least one conflictual remark?

Figure 8.11. Opposition backbenchers: % of questions to prime ministers with conflictual remarks



What types of conflict do opposition backbenchers deploy in questions to prime ministers?

Figure 8.12. Opposition backbenchers: % of conflictual questions to prime ministers displaying different types of conflict

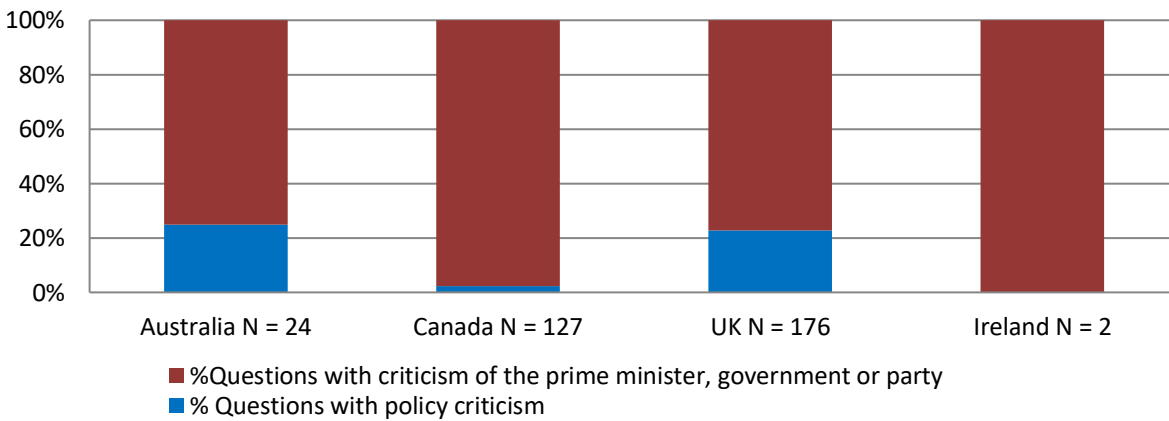
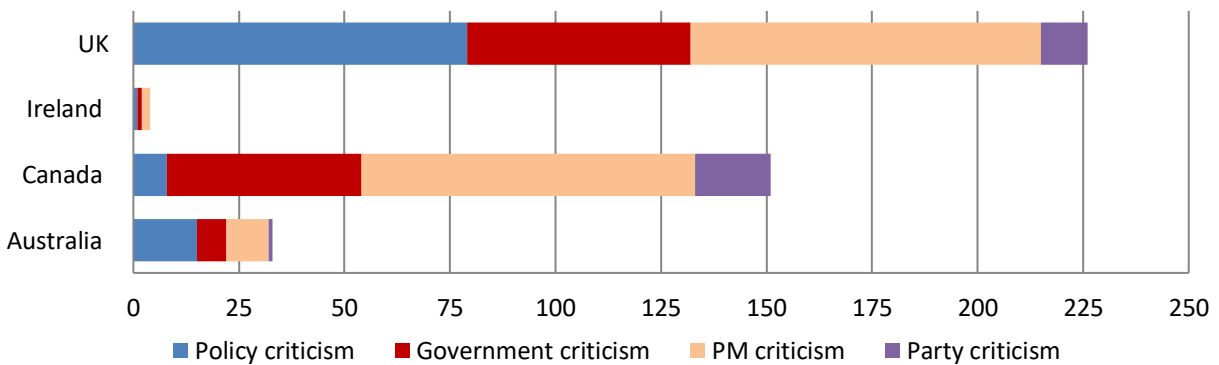


Figure 8.13. Types of conflictual remarks in questions from opposition backbenchers (N)



As discussed in previous chapters, opposition backbenchers play a significant role in questioning the Prime Minister in Canada and in the UK, as well as in Australia. As Figure 8.11 illustrates, they are highly conflictual actors in these systems, particularly in Canada, where 77% of their questions contain a conflictual remark. Figures 8.12 and 8.13 show that conflict in opposition backbench questions is highly personalised, with 50% of conflictual remarks referring to the Prime Minister out of the total number of remarks made in Canada, and 37% in the UK.

Generally, the most frequent forms of negative comments referred to a specific decision made by the Prime Minister, or to the fact that the Prime Minister had broken a promise (usually an electoral promise), as illustrated in the examples below.

**Australia: Mrs GRIGGS** My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her promise before the election to establish a regional processing centre in East Timor to dissuade unauthorised arrivals from coming to Australia. As she is yet to present a formal proposal to the government of East Timor and has reversed her pre-election commitment not to expand detention centres in Australia, and given that today the 107th boat this year has arrived. why should the Australian people trust her to stop the boats? (21.10.2010)

**Canada: Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in this week's budget, the Prime Minister broke his campaign promise to deliver at least the Liberal government's commitment of \$591 million over five years for the Pacific Gateway Strategy, choosing instead to dilute and delay this urgently needed funding over eight years instead of the previous five year period. Why has the Prime Minister broken his election promise to British Columbians? Are there not enough potential votes in our province? (4.05.2006)

**UK: Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** Cutting net migration to tens of thousands, reducing spending on welfare and, yes, eradicating the deficit by the end of this Parliament formed the triple crown of the Prime Minister's promises to the British people. How does it feel as Prime Minister when you are once, twice, three times a failure? (3.12.2014).

Policy criticism occurred in around 25% of questions from opposition backbenchers in the UK and in Australia, but on a purely numeric level, this activity was much more prominent in the UK than in Australia. In the UK, 40 out of the 176 questions from opposition backbenchers that contained instances of conflict involved policy criticism. In Australia, only 6 out of the 24 conflictual questions focused exclusively on policy criticism. Opposition backbenchers usually presented evidence that a particular policy had detrimental effects, and suggested that the government had been persevering with it in spite of such evidence. These tactics are similar to the ones used by opposition Leaders and frontbenchers. In the UK, this tactic sometimes included evidence of detrimental effects of policy on constituents, as will be detailed further in the next chapter.

Criticising the government also took similar forms to the types of conflictual remarks found in questions from leaders: opposition backbenchers criticised specific government decisions; they also deployed a generic criticism of the government, which is not linked to a specific decision, but rather to general consequences of the government's handling of affairs, and they also criticised individual ministers across all systems. Party criticism took diverse forms across systems. Opposition backbenchers addressed conflictual remarks specifically to parties in the UK and in Canada. In Canada most of the comments referred to particular scandals in which the Conservative party was involved at the time. In the UK, opposition backbenchers usually criticised particular policy proposals. Another line of disparaging comments referred to the Conservative party generally, claiming that they are 'the same old Tories' or that 'you cannot trust the Tories with the NHS'.

Evidence presented in this section suggests that policy criticism was a feature of opposition backbench questions in the UK and in Australia; but more political forms of conflict in the form of criticism referring to the prime minister or to the government remained much more frequent. This adds further evidence to the primarily political function of conflict in parliamentary questions to prime ministers. In line with expectations, the notable similarities between backbench and frontbench attack tactics bring evidence of coordinated, opposition-mode behaviour in questioning prime ministers (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018). The next section investigates the behaviour of government backbenchers.

#### 4. Government backbenchers

**What proportion of questions to prime ministers from government backbenchers contains conflictual remarks?**

**Table 8.3. Conflictual remarks in questions to prime ministers from government backbenchers**

	Questions addressed to the prime minister	Questions with conflictual remarks	% Questions with conflictual remarks	% Questions without conflictual remarks
Australia	41	0	0%	100%
Canada	1	1	100%	0%
UK	302	58	19%	81%
Ireland	11	0	0	100%

In terms of explicit manifestations of conflict, we would expect government backbenchers to be mainly critical of the opposition. However, there are almost *no instances* of this type of behaviour in the other cases aside from the UK. As discussed in previous chapters, government backbenchers in the UK display a very varied range of behaviours, and this also applies to the ways in which they manifest conflict. Table 8.4 summarises the distribution of conflictual remarks between the two coalition partners:

**Table 8.4. Conflictual remarks from government backbenchers in the UK**

Type of conflictual remark	Main coalition party (Conservative, N = 302)	Junior coalition party (Liberal Democrats, N = 66)
Policy criticism	9	2
Government criticism	2	2
Criticism of the prime minister	0	2
Criticism of senior coalition party	0	1
Criticism of opposition party	42	5
Criticism of junior coalition party	5	0
<b>Questions with conflict (N)</b>	<b>58 (19%)</b>	<b>12 (18%)</b>
<b>Questions without conflict (N)</b>	<b>244 (81%)</b>	<b>54 (82%)</b>

Firstly, as expected, government backbenchers criticised the main opposition party. They often criticised Labour policies, usually either to demonstrate the faults of opposition policies versus those proposed by the government, or to suggest that the opposition is against positive policy decisions that the government is taking. They also criticised Labour's record in government. A recurring form of question highlighted the negative consequences of decisions made by the previous Labour government, and asked the Prime Minister to intervene to redress the situation:

**Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con):** On the day when 200 people from Bombardier in Derby are here to hear whether we can change the arrangements for the Thameslink contract, can the Prime Minister give us some hope about future contracts and about changing the tender arrangements—the mess that we were left in by the previous Government? (7.09.2011)

Conservative backbenchers also criticised Labour's record in local politics. Another type of critical remark referred to the performance of the main opposition party in regional politics – the case of the management of the NHS in Wales by the Labour administration in Wales.

**Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend meet me to help get more beds for Hereford hospital? Will he send a Minister to meet the magnificent staff and, possibly, Welsh patients who have acquired addresses in England so that they can access life-saving cancer care drugs that are not available under the Labour-run Welsh NHS? (3.12.2014)

Contrary to expectations corresponding to their role, government backbenchers in the UK also made a few critical remarks towards the government side: nine remarks referred to government policy, as the two examples below show.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** After votes for prisoners, we now have the potential for human rights legislation to give sex offenders the opportunity to come off the sex offenders register. Is the Prime Minister aware that my constituents are sick to the back teeth of the human rights of criminals and prisoners being put before the rights of law-abiding citizens in this country? Is it not time that we scrapped the Human Rights Act and, if necessary, withdrew from the European convention on human rights? (16.02.2011)

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con):** The National Star college in my constituency provides world-renowned care for some of our disabled youngsters with the most profound and complex learning difficulties to enable them to lead independent lives. Sadly, its future, like that of a few similar colleges, is being placed in jeopardy by a decision not to ring-fence its funding. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will wish to solve this problem, so may I invite him to the college to see this wonderful care for himself? (16.01.2013)

As discussed in the opening sections, the degree to which government backbenchers can afford to be openly critical about the government is a sensitive issue. On the one hand, parliamentarians must perform a scrutiny role, and, in this case, speak up for issues that concern their constituents. They may also wish to signal ideological differences on policy. But ultimately, it is also in their interest to maintain the image that the government is doing its job well, and to contribute to the PMQs performance. Given the media spotlight in which PMQs operates, many critical questions from government backbenchers may empower the opposition to argue that the government is divided, or that the Prime Minister does not have the support of his backbenchers.

Backbenchers from the junior coalition party, but also from the main party, criticised particular government departments. In line with the role of 'keeping tabs' on coalition partners (Martin and Vanberg 2011; Höhmann and Sieberer 2019) members of the junior coalition party also criticised the Prime Minister, the government, and the senior coalition party, as shown in Table 8.4, and in the example below, but this occurred at a relatively low level overall.

**Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD):** Council tax payers in Essex paid £5,000 for the then leader of the county council and his cronies to attend the Conservative party conference. That was one of hundreds of dodgy transactions using council credit cards spread over eight years, totalling around £500,000 at an average of more than £1,000 a week, which include 60-plus overseas visits to Australia and Vietnam, among

other places. Does the Prime Minister agree that such extravagant misuse of public money should be the subject of an independent inquiry? (24.04.2013)

This section brings further evidence to the fact that backbenchers in the UK display much more diverse types of behaviour than their counterparts in other countries. Section 8.5 in this chapter will explore the participation of government backbenchers to the support function across systems, indicating that, although government backbench parliamentarians in Australia and Canada<sup>32</sup> contribute very little to the conflict function, they contribute to support, and do so in an implicit, rather than explicit fashion. Their efforts to contribute to their own side's case are primarily directed towards performing support for the government.

### **8.3.3. Conclusions**

Evidence presented in this section suggests that, in line with expectations, questioning performs a clear conflict function in Canada, Australia and in the UK, and to a much lesser degree in Ireland. The fact that Speakers intervene mainly to limit noise in the chamber and much less to police the content of questions suggests that there is a cultural element to the conflictual nature of questioning mechanisms: their role in providing an arena for the manifestation of conflict is an integral part of the political system.

The behaviour of parliamentary actors is mostly in line with expectations associated with their government/opposition status, and with their leadership/backbench roles. As expected, the most conflictual exchanges are the ones between the Prime Minister and the opposition, and Leaders of the Opposition are by far the most conflictual actors, with nearly all their questions containing conflictual remarks in all systems except for Ireland. Analysis of questions asked by different types of actors shows that conflictual remarks are used mainly to score political points against the prime minister and the government, and to a much lesser degree to criticise policy.

Evidence also suggests some notable differences in the behavioural patterns of backbench MPs across systems, particularly government backbench MPs. Although we would expect government backbenchers across systems to make explicit conflictual remarks towards the opposition, I only found evidence of this in the UK. There are very few instances of explicit critical remarks towards the opposition in questions from government backbenchers in Canada and Australia; government parliamentarians in these countries contribute very little to the conflict function. As will be discussed later in this chapter, they primarily contribute to the support function. Government backbenchers in the UK participate in conflict both to criticise the opposition, but also sometimes to make critical remarks referring to policy, or to the government. This brings further evidence to the distinctiveness of backbench behaviour in the UK indicated in previous chapter.

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<sup>32</sup> In the case of Canada, the discussion in the section on support also refers to questions to ministers, in order to illustrate the types of functions played by government backbench questions in Canada.

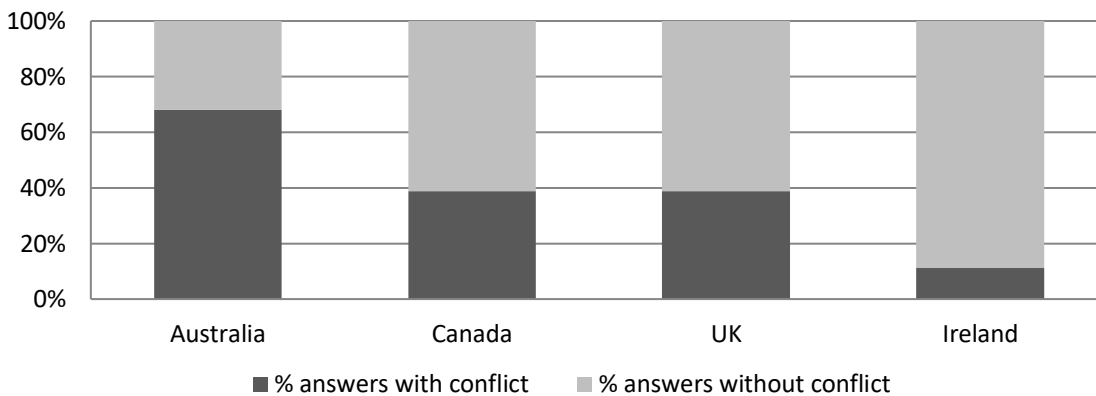
## 8.4. Conflict in answers

In order to paint a fuller picture of the dynamics of conflict, this section turns to explore the degree to which prime ministers use their speaking time to make conflictual remarks and to attack the opposition. As discussed in the Methodology chapter and in section 8.1, the coding for prime ministerial answers mirrors that used for questions. I applied coding categories to conflictual remarks made by prime ministers in their answers.<sup>33</sup>

### 8.4.1. How much evidence is there of conflictual behaviour in prime ministerial answers?

What proportion of answers contains conflictual remarks?

Figure 8.14. Prime ministerial answers containing conflictual remarks (%)



The first step in evaluating the degree of conflict in prime ministerial answers is to calculate the proportion of answers that contained at least one conflictual remark. This measure suggests that the Australian Prime Minister was the most adversarial, with over 65% of her replies containing at least one conflictual comment. David Cameron and Stephen Harper came second, with around 40% of their answers containing at least one conflictual remark. The data on Enda Kenny's replies confirms the overall less adversarial nature of questioning in Ireland, with only 11% of his answers containing a critical remark.

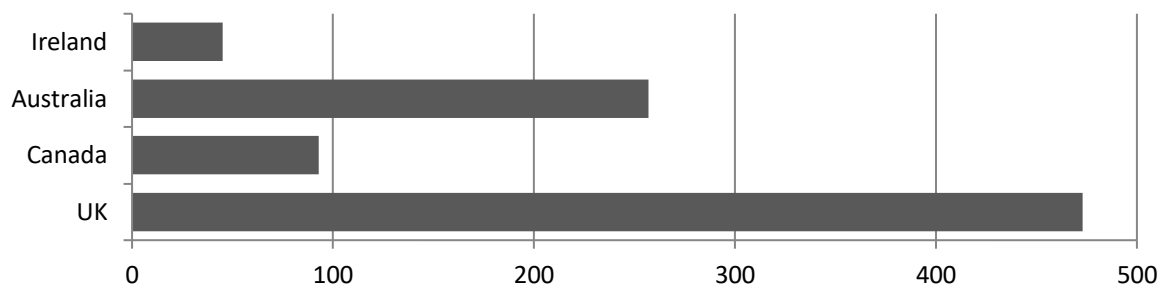
The first conclusion to note is that the degree of conflict in answers does not correspond to the degree of conflict in questions presented in Section 8.3. Prime ministers can sometimes be much more adversarial than their questioners, as is the case in Australia, or much less, as is the case in Canada. This variation is discussed in subsequent sections and returned to in the conclusion.

<sup>33</sup> As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the coding unit in this case is a 'conflictual remark' – a sub-unit within an answer. As this coding is applied to sub-units within an intervention, several categories may apply to any single intervention. For example, an answer may contain a conflictual remark referring to policy, a conflictual remark referring to the previous government, or both.



## How many instances of conflict are recorded in prime ministerial answers in each country?

**Figure 8.15. Conflictual remarks in answers (N)**



The second measure (Figure 8.15) counts the total number of conflictual remarks deployed by each Prime Minister during the period analysed. In terms of the absolute number of conflictual remarks made in answers, David Cameron was the most adversarial Prime Minister among the four, with over 450 conflictual comments. Julia Gillard comes second, with over 250 critical comments. Stephen Harper and Enda Kenny were much less adversarial in their replies.

Viewed comparatively, Figures 8.14 and 8.15 present some puzzling trends: the Canadian and British prime ministers had the same proportion of answers containing conflictual remarks, yet Stephen Harper made considerably fewer conflictual comments overall, compared to David Cameron. This prompts us to explore whether procedural rules might play a role in the degree of conflict in answers. Answers from prime ministers contain numerous examples of remarks that would be considered conflictual by the standard of the rules for questions. Yet, as discussed in section 8.2, Speakers almost never intervene to sanction language in prime ministerial answers: they largely get away with conflictual remarks.

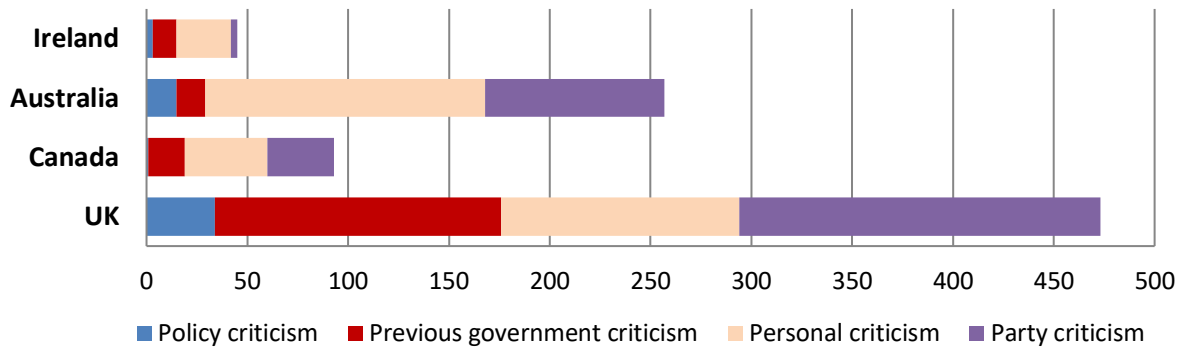
### **8.4.2. Time restrictions**

The first aspect to note with respect to the difference between the degree of conflict in questions and answers is the difference in time allocation for questions and answers, documented in Chapter 5.

In Australia, the Prime Minister has much more time to respond to questions. Whilst questions are only 30–45 seconds long, the Prime Minister has 3 minutes to respond. By contrast, the Canadian Prime Minister only has 35 seconds to respond. As a result, answers are much longer in Australia, often amounting to short speeches, than in Canada, where answers often are just a few sentences long. The fact that the Prime Minister in Australia is considerably more conflictual than the questioners may be linked to the time limits specified by the rules, which allow them more time to deploy several types of criticism within the same response. This does not imply a causal relationship between the two; the Prime Minister also has 3 minutes to respond in Ireland, and answers are indeed long, yet there is considerably less evidence of criticism. The length of answers may facilitate more conflict in what is already a parliament with an adversarial culture.

### 8.4.3. How do prime ministers perform conflict?

Figure 8.16. Types of conflictual remarks in prime ministerial answers (N)



Having noted that prime ministers use their speaking time not only to answer the question, but also to attack the opposition, the aim of this section is to analyse how they do it: what do they criticise? Whom do they criticise? For what?

As expected, prime ministers used their answers as an opportunity to display leadership of the government and of their parties. They criticised opposition parties, both for their policy positions and other public statements, but also for their record in government. Figure 8.16 shows that conflictual remarks deployed by prime ministers were often highly partisan and personalised. In their conflictual remarks, prime ministers referred predominantly to parties, either in the form of criticisms addressed to parties specifically, or to the previous government. Their conflict strategies were also personalised: prime ministers made many conflictual comments criticising other members, mainly the Leader of the Opposition, with whom they generally had heated exchanges. Instances of criticism of opposition policy proposals were much less frequent.

Some of the criticisms that prime ministers directed explicitly at other opposition parties referred to statements made by parties, and their positions on various issues. A common theme across all cases refers to reproaches made by the Prime Minister regarding the opposition party's behaviour with respect to legislation:

**Canada: Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, last year and this year we cut taxes for families. The Liberal Party is going to vote against cuts for families. (20.03.2007)

**Australia: Julia Gillard** [...] In this parliament we have passed 185 bills, remarkably 22 of them in the last fortnight. They have been world-leading bills like the plain paper packaging proposal, where, of course, we had to fight every step of the way to get the Liberal Party to break its addiction to big tobacco and do the right thing by Australians who suffer tobacco addiction. We have passed legislation for superannuation because Labor is and always will be the party of superannuation. We brought it in against the trenchant opposition of the Liberal Party. (25.08.2011)

**UK: David Cameron:** [...] When we put that cap on housing benefit, what was the Labour reaction? Labour voted against it. When we said that in order to make savings housing benefit should not be paid in respect of spare rooms that people are not using, what was Labour's attitude? Labour opposed it. That is what is happening. (14.05.2014)

Creating distance from and contrast with the previous government is another common theme. Prime ministers frequently criticised the previous government, pointing out how it had left a dire state of affairs, which the current government must correct.

**Australia: Julia Gillard:** [...] Of course, this has been part of the rebuilding of the health system we have needed to do as a result of the way it was when we inherited it in 2007, where of course the Leader of the Opposition had left it short of money, short of doctors and short of nurses—indeed, short of everything that goes to making a health system. He certainly left it short of any reform vision. (25.08.2011)

**Canada: Stephen Harper:** Once again, Mr. Speaker, this government is working hard. We are working with the industry and provinces to finalize the text that we agreed to some weeks ago. We expect all parties can and will abide by the agreements they made. We will reach a final agreement. The only people who will be disappointed are the members opposite who did such a terrible job of managing this file for 13 years. (13.06.2006)

**Ireland: Enda Kenny:** The position is that most of the legislation that the previous Government was dealing with is either to be amended or rewritten. In fact, pieces of legislation that were clearly promised as priorities by Deputy Martin's party in government were only that — empty promises. (18.05.2011)

Prime ministers also used their answers to deploy personal criticism primarily towards Leaders of the Opposition, but other members were also targeted, particularly frontbenchers and members that had a government role previously. Some of these comments reacted to the style of the question put by the Leader of the Opposition. For example, on 31 October 2011, Julia Gillard accused the Leader of the Opposition of using questions for purely political reasons: 'What we see in that question is absolutely typical of the Leader of the Opposition. He comes in here and makes allegations based on no facts, because he is always interested in playing politics.' In a questioning session on 16 October 2012, Enda Kenny told Michael Martin: 'I have never heard the Deputy, during his time as a Member of this House, utter one word which would instil confidence in the people. All he offers is negativity, disillusionment and despair.' On 30 November 2011, David Cameron told Ed Miliband: 'I know that the right hon. Gentleman's entire party is paid for by the unions, but I must say that what he has just told the House is extraordinary and completely and utterly untrue.'

Other comments referred to actions of the Leader of the Opposition. For example, on 13 March 2013, Julia Gillard accused the Leader of the Opposition:

**Ms GILLARD:** But the Leader of the Opposition ought to inform himself of the way the government's budget works and the way in which projections are done. If the Leader of the Opposition is genuinely concerned about this question, then he may want to stop the reckless negativity that has prevented him from joining with the government to fully implement the work of the Angus Houston report—that is, the former Chief of the Defence Force, aided by other experts including Paris Aristotle and Michael L'Estrange, respected experts. But of course the Leader of the Opposition did not want to accept an expert report that did not equate with his prejudices.

On 20 March 2007, Stephen Harper accused the Leader of the Opposition of opposing reforms:

Mr. Speaker, last year and this year we cut taxes for families. The Liberal Party is going to vote against cuts for families. More importantly, the Leader of the Liberal Party is going to vote against fixing the fiscal imbalance. Why? Because he wants all of Canada's money to go to the federal government for it to run provincial jurisdictions. That is not our take on federalism. Furthermore, that philosophy is rejected by every party in Quebec.

Prime ministers were sometimes critical about aspects of policy supported by the opposition. This happened frequently in the UK and in Australia during the periods studied. Julia Gillard used this tactic to contrast the opposition's policy with her government's policy in very stark terms:

'[...] What the Leader of the Opposition fails to recognise is the difference in the two schemes. Ours is a price that is paid by big polluters and as a result we cut carbon pollution. We then use that revenue to assist Australian families by cutting tax, increasing family payments and increasing pensions. We protect Australian jobs and we invest in a clean energy future. Under the Leader of the Opposition's plan to reach exactly the same target he puts a tax on families—

**Ms GILLARD:** Under the Leader of the Opposition's plan he would oppose additional tax on Australian families. He would give that money to big polluters, he would cut pensions and he would cut family payments.' (17.08.2011)

Overall, the concentration of conflictual remarks in answers to the Leader of the Opposition reinforces the role of this exchange in questioning. Leaders make the first move and attack the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister must respond on a par; prime ministers are keen to appear to have 'won' against the Leader.

#### **8.4.4. Conclusions**

The conflictual nature of PMQs or Question Time is not just the fault of the questioners. This section showed that prime ministers do not just answer questions: they forcefully use answering time to attack the opposition. Across systems, conflictual remarks by prime ministers are predominantly partisan and personalised. Importantly, as section 8.2 showed, Speakers largely let them get away with it. Questioning mechanisms provide the Prime Minister with a free ticket to make their case.

The degree of conflict in questions does not correspond to the degree of conflict in answers. Prime ministers can be more adversarial than their questioners, as was the case in Australia, or much less, as in Canada. The UK Prime Minister was almost as adversarial as the questioners. Some of these differences may reflect the personality and style of prime ministers, but part of the variation may also reflect procedural and cultural features of the parliaments analysed. Procedurally, time limits for answers allow some prime ministers more time to make their case – which would allow them to dominate their questioners if conflict were simply a function of how much time they have available. In Canada, where time limits for answers are short, the Prime Minister made many fewer conflictual remarks. In procedures where prime ministers have more time to formulate answers, such as Australia, they have more time to deploy several types of conflictual remarks. Still, in Ireland, which has the longest time limits for answers, and where questions amount to short speeches, there is much less evidence of conflictual behaviour. This suggests that a significant part of the explanation is cultural: in parliaments with an adversarial culture, where questioning performs a conflict-facilitating function, time limits merely constrain the degree to which conflict may be deployed in answers.

## 8.5. Support in questions

Having so far looked at conflict in questions and answers, this section turns to investigate the degree to which parliamentary actors used questions to perform support. This refers to appreciative remarks made towards the government by government backbenchers, but also instances of opposition actors making appreciative remarks about their own party or, perhaps exceptionally, about the government party or the government, or the prime minister.

### 8.5.1. Evidence of supportive behaviour in questions

Table 8.5 shows the proportion of questions that contained at least one appreciative remark, summarising the degree to which questions were used for support, as well as the total number of questions containing at least one appreciative remark.

#### What proportion of questions to prime ministers contains appreciative remarks?

Table 8.5. Appreciative remarks in questions to prime ministers (%)

	Questions to prime ministers (N)	Questions with support (N)	% Questions with support	% Questions without support
Australia	248	8	3%	97%
UK	879	81	9%	91%
Ireland	726	5	1%	99%
Canada	355	9	3%	97%

There is very little evidence of political support in the form of explicit appreciation through questions in Ireland, Canada and Australia, compared to the UK. This variation is discussed in the next sections.

### 8.5.2. How is support manifested by different actors?

#### 1. Government backbenchers

Government backbenchers are the main actors from whom we would expect supportive behaviour. However, across all cases, explicit manifestations of support were not very frequent, with the notable exception of the UK. These differences cannot be attributed to procedural rules, or to conventions, as there are no rules that would prohibit parliamentarians from making explicitly appreciative remarks.

Even in Australia, where government backbenchers play a prominent role in questioning, there were only two examples of explicit policy appreciation, and two of explicit government appreciation. There was also an example of explicit policy appreciation from an independent backbencher who was supporting Gillard's minority government. As discussed in previous chapters, in Canada government backbenchers intervened much less frequently, and intervened very rarely to question the Prime Minister; their questions were mainly addressed to ministers. There are no examples of Canadian government backbenchers making explicit policy appreciations. This again underlines the point highlighted in Chapter 5: the Canadian Prime Minister is under fire from the opposition, with no 'helpful' backbench questions to fall back on.

As the frequency of 'helpful questions' from government backbenchers in Australia discussed in the previous chapter showed, the manifestation of support in Australia was predominantly latent – backbenchers gave the Prime Minister the opportunity to present the government in a favourable light, to present policy, and to attack the opposition, but did not make *explicit* appreciative remarks themselves. Given that the Speaker alternates between government and opposition actors in giving members the call,

the Prime Minister gets the chance to neutralise an opposition question with an answer to a helpful backbench question.

The analysis in this section focuses on appreciative remarks by UK government backbenchers, presented in Table 8.6. This refers to appreciative remarks from the main coalition party: the Conservative Party. Although we might expect the junior coalition party (the Liberal Democrats) to contribute to the support function to a degree, there were only six examples of such remarks in the data, out of the total of 66 questions asked.

**Table 8.6. Explicit appreciative remarks by government backbenchers from the Conservative Party in the UK**

Type of appreciative remark	N	%
Policy appreciation	37	12%
Government appreciation	26	9%
Prime Minister appreciation	10	3%
Party appreciation	8	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100%</b>

As discussed, government backbenchers in the UK generally displayed a more varied range of behaviours compared to their counterparts in other systems. Exploration of the conflict and support functions adds further evidence to this. Firstly, in line with expectations, government backbenchers in the UK made explicit appreciations of government policy, of the government, as well as of the Prime Minister personally. With respect to policy, this usually referred to appreciation of positive consequences of policy, most often linked to constituencies. For example:

**Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con):** Since 2010 there has been £50 million-worth of investment in schools in Watford. Only last week, we had the announcement about St John’s Church of England primary school, under Father David Stevenson. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that this situation of massive investment in schools will continue, because it is hugely benefiting my constituents and their children? (15.10.2014)

**Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con):** Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating Drapers’ academy, which is in the most deprived ward in my constituency? It is sponsored by the Drapers’ Company and Queen Mary college, London. In only its second year, it has become the fastest improving school in the country, and is a wonderful example of the Government’s academy scheme. (21.11.2012)

The association between supportive comments and constituency representation is discussed in the next chapter. There were also two instances where government backbenchers mentioned a forthcoming measure and express their support, prompting the Prime Minister to also add further support:

**John Glen:** For too long many women, and especially hard-working stay-at-home mums, have been penalised by the country’s pension system for interruptions to their national insurance contributions. After 13 years in which the previous Government did nothing to address this situation, does the Prime Minister think that this week’s announcement of a single-tier pension will finally deal with this grave injustice? (16.01.2013)

**Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con):** I welcome the decision not to increase fuel duty. Does the Prime Minister think that this shows hard-pressed families and businesses that we mean business about refuelling growth? (27.06.2012)

Government backbenchers also made explicit appreciations for the Prime Minister for successful leadership and steering of government policy, as the examples below illustrate:

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** The Prime Minister has rightly focused the Government on growth. The development of new housing plays a key part in the provision of that growth, as well as the provision of much-needed new homes. (16.01.2013)

**Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con):** Could I urge the Prime Minister to stay on this track and make the difficult decisions when he has to for the good of this country, and not to listen to the voices opposite, which have only one thing to suggest: borrow, borrow, borrow? (24.04.2013)

Government backbenchers in the UK contribute to the support function in an explicit, outspoken way, by making positive comments, not just by asking 'helpful' questions. Aside from providing a prompt to the Prime Minister, they use questions as a means to raise their own profile in the government party by public expression of support.

## 2. Opposition parliamentarians

Similar to the findings for government backbenchers, opposition actors also made very few explicit supportive statements in Canada and Australia. These rare examples fall along the expected line of opposition actors showing support for their own party. These manifestations mainly came from party leaders, frontbenchers and Leaders of the Opposition. In Australia there were just two remarks of own party appreciation, one from the Leader of the Opposition and another from an opposition frontbencher:

**Mr ABBOTT [...]** I ask the Prime Minister: when will the government find its way by adopting the coalition's policy on price signalling, which will actually help to prevent unjustifiable interest rate increases and actually help to solve the problem? (15.11.2010)

**Mr MORRISON (Cook): [...]** When will the Prime Minister finally admit that the Howard government got it right and that when Labor came to power they found a solution and created a problem? (14.09.2011)

In Canada there were five remarks of own party appreciation from the Leader of the Opposition, and two from an opposition party leader. There is no evidence of opposition backbenchers in these countries making explicit appreciative comments in the sessions covered by this study.

There were no instances of opposition actors in Australia or Canada making appreciative remarks towards the government or the Prime Minister. In Ireland, there were four examples of leaders welcoming a decision of the Taoiseach in foreign policy, but at the scale of 726 questions in Ireland, this is a very small number.

In the UK, there is some evidence of a more diverse range of behaviours. Opposition backbenchers participated in praising their own side, as expected, but they also welcomed positive policy developments proposed by the government, and also explicitly appreciated the Prime Minister's intervention in particular issues. Still, the numbers remain very small: there were only six instances of own party appreciation in the entire dataset for opposition actors in the UK, and only four examples of explicit appreciation of the Prime Minister. There were no positive remarks about the party from the Leader of the Opposition. Evidence indicates that opposition parliamentarians used questions very sparsely to

make appreciative remarks about their own side, which suggests that they mainly directed their efforts towards conflict.

### **8.5.3. Conclusions**

Evidence of support in questions again illustrates the point that parliamentary questioning mechanisms perform multiple functions. Evidence from this section presents some findings that are in line with expectations, but also some surprising patterns.

Firstly, there are notable differences between countries in the ways in which backbench MPs perform support. Although we might expect government backbenchers in all systems to make explicit appreciative remarks about the government or the Prime Minister, this only applies to the UK. Government backbenchers in the UK performed support both implicitly, by asking 'helpful questions', and explicitly, by making appreciative remarks. Government backbenchers in Australia performed support mainly in an implicit, latent way, by asking helpful questions. As these differences are not linked to procedural rules (rules do not disallow appreciative remarks), the observed patterns suggest notable cultural differences between how support is performed across countries. The performance of support is also potentially connected to the intended audience. At the intra-parliamentary level, latent support might, in effect, be more useful: it is more instrumental to the prime minister to receive a comfortable question from their side after responding to a trying question from the opposition.

But the role of supportive behaviour is also important for signalling to spectators of question time, both inside and outside parliament: signs of hostility from government backbenchers may end up portrayed as divisions within the government party.

Secondly, I expected to see evidence of supportive remarks in questions from opposition parliamentarians referring to their own side, but opposition actors generally made very few explicit appreciative remarks. In Canada and Australia, and in Ireland, appreciative remarks mainly came from MPs in leadership positions, with almost no examples from backbenchers. Opposition backbenchers in the UK made some appreciative remarks towards their own side, but still, there are only six examples. I aimed to explore the degree to which opposition backbenchers made any appreciative remarks towards the government side: there is some evidence of this in the UK, but the numbers remain very small. This section suggests that, overall, opposition actors participated much more prominently in conflict and did not use speaking time to manifest support towards their own side.



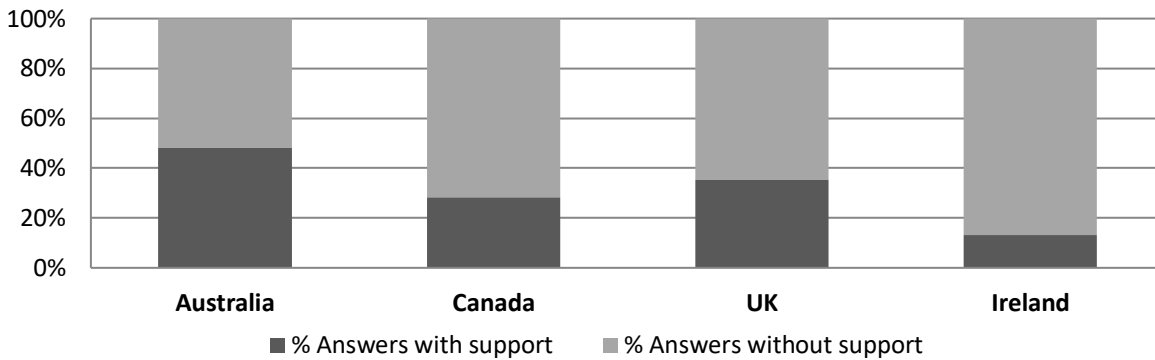
## 8.6. Support in answers

This section explores the degree to which prime ministers used their speaking time to make appreciative remarks and to support their own side. The first measure (Fig. 8.17) records the proportion of answers that contained at least one appreciative remark; the second (Fig. 8.18) counts the total number of appreciative remarks made by prime ministers.

### 8.6.1. Evidence of supportive behaviour in prime ministerial answers

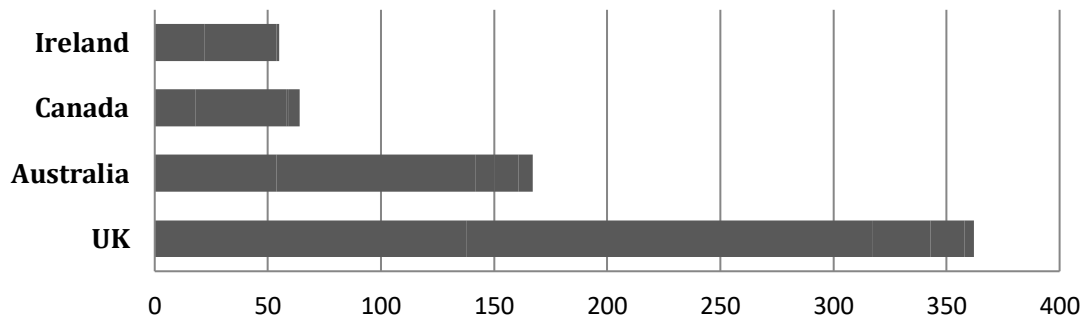
What proportion of answers contains appreciative remarks?

Figure 8.17. Prime ministerial answers containing appreciative remarks (%)



How many appreciative remarks are recorded in prime ministerial answers in each country?

Figure 8.18. Appreciative remarks in prime ministerial answers (N)



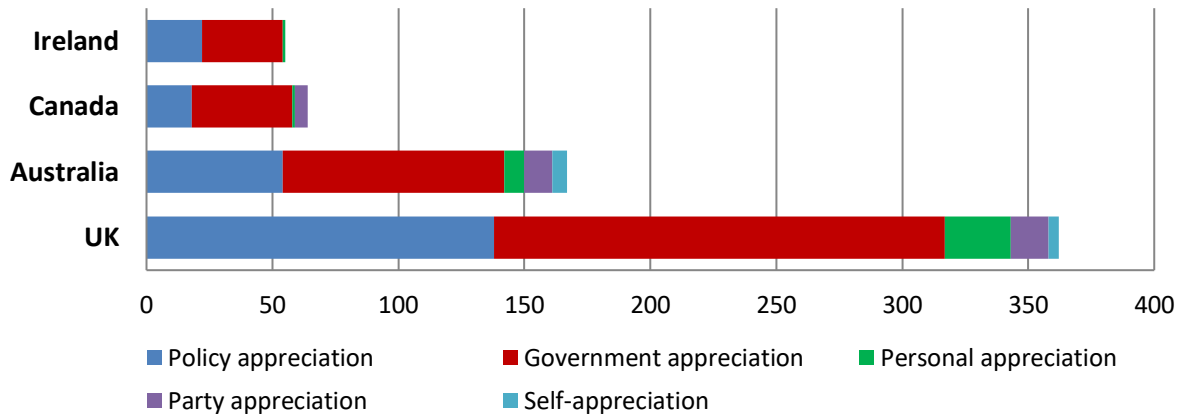
Prime ministers used their speaking time to make supportive comments across all systems, but, as Figure 8.17 shows, this occurred in fewer than 50% of their answers. In terms of the number of appreciative comments, Figure 8.18 shows that such remarks were frequent in Australia and in the UK; David Cameron recorded by far the highest number of positive comments in his answers.

In connection to the section on instances of support in questions, the support function seems to be a strong feature of PMQs, with both the Prime Minister and parliamentarians engaging in support to a significant degree by making explicit appreciative remarks. In all the other cases, explicit support is mainly performed by prime ministers, with parliamentarians making positive comments very rarely.

## 8.6.2. How is support manifested in answers from prime ministers?

Figure 8.19 illustrates the types of appreciative remarks used by prime ministers in their answers.

**Figure 8.19. Types of appreciative remarks in prime ministerial answers (N)**



Compared to the target of their conflictual remarks, which were partisan and personalised, supportive remarks made by prime ministers were predominantly policy and government-focused: they highlighted success of government policy, and sought to praise the government.

### 1. Champions of the government's achievements and policy advocates

Prime ministers actively championed the decisions made by their governments. Endorsing the government was the most frequent form of appreciative comment across all systems, occupying 49% of interventions in the UK, 53% in Australia, 58% in Ireland and 63% in Canada. They explained that the government had delivered on its commitments, endorsed individual ministers, and explained that the government had made the correct decisions. These statements are potentially relevant not only to the parliamentary audience, in order to boost backbench morale (Bates et al. 2014), but also to the extra-parliamentary audience: to the media and to the wider public, considering the public and visible nature of questioning in these countries (Salmond 2014). Examples show various rhetorical strategies used by prime ministers, some of which may be a result of party tactics for putting forward key messages through speeches in parliament (Hazerika and Hamilton 2018). The following examples show how prime ministers underlined the fact that the government had made the right decision under particular circumstances:

**Australia: Julia Gillard:** I again make the point that the course of action the government embarked on has given us the results we wanted to see, which is an end of industrial action and Qantas planes taking back to the sky so that people can proceed on their travel plans with certainty. (31.10.2011)

**Canada: Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, let me assure the leader of the NDP and all members of the House that in this and all related matters, the government will carefully follow the legal prescriptions and the requirements of the Investment Canada Act in pursuing this and other decisions. I can also assure the hon. member that we have had a very successful space sector in this country and the government is committed to that sector being viable and successful in the future. (10.04.2008)

A particular facet of this theme was the 'difficult' or 'tough decisions' narrative which David Cameron used to explain and justify the government's austerity policies. On 16 January 2013, he explained that 'This Government have had to make difficult decisions on public spending and welfare, but we have protected those on the lowest incomes and we have made sure there have been increases in some areas.'

On 3 December 2014, he told the House of Commons that '[W]e have got the deficit down by a third because we have taken tough and difficult decision after tough and difficult decision'. On 2 March 2011, he explained that '[i]f we look at education funding, we can see that funding per pupil is not being reduced. Because of difficult decisions being made elsewhere, which Labour has never supported, we are maintaining per-pupil funding for students throughout our country. That is the right decision, and it is one that the hon. Lady should get behind.'

Presenting the positive consequences of policies was the second most frequent type of appreciative comment across all systems, occupying around 40% of positive interventions in the UK and Ireland, and around 30% in Canada and Australia. Prime ministers used their interventions both retrospectively, to highlight success of policy, but also prospectively, to present the benefits of policies that are about to be introduced, and to promote the government's legislative programme. The following two examples show how prime ministers in Canada and Australia endorsed new legislation:

**Canada: Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, the bill presented today by the President of the Treasury Board will provide the greatest expansion to the Access to Information Act in the history of this Parliament. (11.04.2006)

**Australia: Julia Gillard:** [...] The government does want to see legislation—and it would be the biggest package of legislation to deal with problem gambling ever brought before a national parliament—which would require precommitment technology to be available on every one of Australia's 200,000 poker machines. (20.09.2012)

In Canada and in Ireland, the Prime Minister also explicitly endorsed the government's budget, and, respectively, the programme for government. In the UK, there was a recurring theme of the Prime Minister using the phrase 'long-term economic plan' to present the government's achievements. The 'long-term economic plan' was a key phrase in the Conservative party's communication strategy at the time (Hazerika and Hamilton 2018), and David Cameron used PMQs as a platform to present the party's message:

19.03.2014: [...] Our long-term economic plan is working. An important part of that long-term economic plan is the infrastructure investment that we are making.

14.05.2014 [...] We are investing more in our railways than at any time since Victorian times and more in our roads than at any time since the 1970s. That is key to the success of our long-term economic plan.

The same phrase was also repeatedly used by Conservative backbenchers, showcasing the development of a coordinated party strategy at PMQs, and the partisan dimension of support, as well as the importance of the government's relationship with its backbenchers at Westminster (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018).

## 2. Party leaders

Explicit party appreciation occurred much less frequently. As all Prime Ministers in the cases studied here are party leaders, it is likely that parties have a communication strategy for their speeches, particularly for questions in parliament, which are a routine public appearance of the Prime Minister in the media spotlight. Recurring forms of endorsement, such as David Cameron's reference to the 'long-term economic plan', as well as some recurring forms of criticism, such as Julia Gillard's constant reference to the 'scare tactics' of the opposition, most likely represent examples of the communication strategies of different parties. In Australia, Julia Gillard often referenced 'Labor tradition', 'Labor values' and 'Labor heritage' in discussing government measures:

'To my Labor colleagues I say I am proud of their courage and fortitude in this debate, and they too in turn can be proud that this is a reform with Labor values right at its heart. This is a reform in the Labor tradition of Medicare and superannuation. This is a reform hotly contested at the time, but like Labor reforms of the past—like the Labor reforms of Medicare and superannuation—they are the reforms that have built the nation we are proud to live in today.' (12.10.2011)

This is quintessentially multilateralism that is part of Labor's heritage and Labor's work as we go about our business in the world. (15.10.2010)

David Cameron made very explicit endorsements of his party, and even asked for votes for the Conservative party at the next elections. He also endorsed the party's record in local and regional politics. As a running theme, he also frequently referred to the Conservative party as the only party 'that can be trusted with the NHS.'

This section presented evidence that prime ministers also used their speaking time to perform political support and to acclaim the achievements of their own side. Across systems, supportive remarks by prime ministers predominantly referred to policy and to government decisions, praising the decisions made by the government. This is in contrast to their conflictual remarks, which are personalised and partisan.

## 8.7. Chapter conclusions

This chapter discussed the degree to which questions to prime ministers and answers from prime ministers were used to perform conflict and to express support. The results contribute to theoretical discussions about the functions of questioning mechanisms and functions of parliaments, and also allow us to posit some inferences about potential connections between rules of procedure and behaviour.

**All four parliaments have relatively extensive rules regarding the content of questions, but ultimately the authority of the Speaker is pivotal for how the rules are enforced.**

There is no conclusive evidence that the degree to which rules regarding the content of questions are more permissive or restrictive is associated with either more or less conflict in questions in any of the four cases. The interpretation of the Speaker is crucial in deciding whether a question complies with the rules or not. Despite evidence of highly conflictual behaviour in questions in Canada, Australia and in the UK, Speakers mainly intervened to limit noise in the chamber (contextual conflict), and much less to police language (manifest conflict). Conflictual interventions are allowed, and Speakers only ruled them out of order when explicit unparliamentary language was used. Some provisions are more 'hard rules' than others. For example, in Australia the relevance of the answer to the question was strictly enforced. Similarly, in Ireland, members were often advised by the Speaker not to make statements instead of asking questions.

One plausible explanation for this permissiveness points to institutional culture: conflict may be an established, recognised part of the practice of questioning prime ministers. Speakers allow members to interact freely up to the point where there is a grave transgression of language, but otherwise do not intervene to curb argumentative exchanges. The function of questioning mechanisms in providing an arena for the expression of conflict is an entrenched feature of parliamentary proceedings in these countries.

**Questioning represents an arena for the manifestation of conflict in some parliaments, but to a lesser degree in others.**

In line with expectations, questioning performs a clear conflict function in the UK, Australia and Canada, and much less in Ireland. The cultural element is essential: in these parliaments conflict is tacitly assumed as part of the role of the questioning mechanism. This also confirms the intuition that parliamentarians are socialised in a way of 'doing' questioning (Lovenduski 2012; Hazerika and Hamilton 2018), and that this becomes part of the established practices of interacting with prime ministers. Across systems, conflict in questions was highly personalised: questions were mainly used for conflictual remarks criticising the government or the prime minister, and much less for technical policy criticism.

The behaviour of parliamentary actors was mostly in line with expectations associated with their government/opposition status. Leaders of the Opposition were the most conflictual actors across all systems – as their exchange with the Prime Minister is the centrepiece of PMQs and an important part of questioning in Australia and Canada, their role is to lead the opposition's attack against the government.

The most notable differences were in the behavioural patterns of backbench MPs across systems, particularly government backbench MPs. There were very few instances of explicit conflictual remarks directed at the opposition in questions from government backbenchers in Australia. Considering the famously adversarial nature of the Australian parliament, this is surprising. As discussed below, government backbenchers in Australia mainly contributed to support, and did so in an implicit way. Government backbenchers in the UK participated in conflict to criticise the opposition, as expected. But

they also made a few critical remarks referring to policy, or to the government, which brings further evidence to the distinctiveness of backbench behaviour in the UK indicated in previous chapter. This type of behaviour is unique in the systems analysed here, and suggests that government backbenchers in the UK can actively choose to support the government, but may also choose to express disagreement. We would normally expect government backbenchers to be supportive of the government, particularly in a public forum such as PMQs or Question Time: government parliamentarians have incentives to contribute to a public image of a cohesive government party. Questions that are too critical may lead to the impression of intra-party disagreements, and would weaken the government's image compared with the opposition.

### **The expression of support presents notable cultural differences among countries.**

Explicit manifestation of support was strikingly rare in all cases aside from the UK. As these differences cannot strictly be linked to any procedural rules, which do not disallow appreciative remarks, this suggests notable cultural differences in how support is performed through questions across countries.

The main actors expected to participate in supportive behaviour are government backbenchers, given the importance of displaying party cohesion and support for the prime minister during questioning. Government backbenchers in the UK were the main actors performing explicit support, in the form of explicit appreciative remarks in questions. Government backbenchers in Australia performed support mainly in an implicit, latent way, by asking 'helpful' questions. Strategically, the latter is more useful to the prime minister: as the Speaker alternates between the government and the opposition, the prime minister is presented with a helpful question after dealing with a question from the opposition. Explicit support for their own parties was very rare among opposition actors in all systems, which suggests that conflict is a more important function for the opposition.

### **Questioning is a test, but also a platform for prime ministers**

In parliaments with such high levels of conflict, prime ministers face a great deal of hostility from the opposition. They must be able parliamentary performers to defend the government from these attacks. Questioning is a permanent test of their leadership and rhetorical abilities.

But questioning also provides them with a platform, given that it is their most frequent and watched public appearance in the UK, Canada and Australia. Prime ministers do not just answer questions that are put to them: they use their speaking time forcefully to defend policy decisions and promote the government, and to disparage the opposition. They do this for a parliamentary audience that expects them to be able public performers, but also for the media and public audience that keeps score on which side 'won' during questioning. Prime ministers do not hold back: their attacks are often fiercely personalised and partisan. Compared to questioners, who are occasionally told off by Speakers, prime ministers are immune from any reprimand for their behaviour.

Prime ministers can be more, or less adversarial than questioners. The explanation for levels of conflict may be mainly cultural: in parliaments with an adversarial culture, as in Canada and Australia, where Question Time performs a conflict-facilitating function, time limits constrain the degree to which conflict may be deployed in answers. By contrast, in Ireland, where the tone of questioning is much less adversarial, long time limits for answers are not associated with more conflictual remarks.

## Chapter 9. Territorial Representation

In seeking to investigate how oral questioning mechanisms contribute to the functions performed by parliaments, the previous three chapters analysed the extent to which questions are used for accountability, and how, as well as the extent to which they are used for conflict and support. This chapter further explores the contribution of questioning mechanisms to functions of parliaments, particularly the extent to which they contribute to the linkage function. Representation, or linkage, is a key function of legislatures and an important part of the work of MPs. This chapter focuses on a particular facet of linkage: territorial representation, i.e. the degree to which MPs use oral questions to represent territorial interests.

The first question, therefore, concerns the extent to which questions are used for territorial representation:

1. How much evidence is there of explicit territorial references in oral questions in the countries investigated?

The second question is how territorial representation is done:

2. What do MPs seek to do when they make explicit territorial references in an oral question? Do they discuss issues of local relevance? Do they use a local issue as a starting point for inquiring about an issue with broader national relevance? What do they seek to achieve with these questions?

Connectedly, a third question concerns the relationship between territorial representation and other functions of oral questioning mechanisms:

3. To what degree is territorial representation a distinct function, and to what degree is it associated with other functions, particularly conflict and support? Are territorial references used in conjunction with conflictual or appreciative remarks?

The analysis in this chapter includes questions both to prime ministers and to ministers, with the purpose of comparing individualised procedures, where MPs may only question the prime minister, with collective procedures, where they may direct their questions to the prime minister or to a minister.<sup>34</sup> In doing this, I aim to observe the extent to which, in collective mechanisms, MPs choose to direct questions with territorial references to the ministers or to the prime minister. This indicates whether in such mechanisms territorial representation is mainly a function of questions to ministers or of questions to the prime minister.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly, I explain what is meant by ‘territorial representation’, and discuss measurements. The subsequent section describes the institutional incentives for territorial representation in the four case study countries, and sets out expectations for how MPs might behave under the specified conditions. I then discuss the empirical findings for each case study country. The final section discusses the results in connection to the expectations presented in the preliminary sections, as well as the implications of these findings for the procedural features of parliamentary questioning mechanisms.

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<sup>34</sup> The chapter focuses on the mechanisms presented so far: Question Period in Canada and Question Time in Australia as collective mechanisms; PMQs in the UK and Oral Questions to the Taoiseach as individualised mechanisms. It does not include Departmental Question Times in the UK or in Ireland in order to compare territorial references in questions to ministers, as the purpose is to investigate dynamics in collective procedures where ministers are present together with prime ministers.

## 9.1. Concepts and measurements

In this chapter, 'territorial representation' is used to mean explicit mentions of sub-state territorial units: either electoral constituencies or regions. Both electoral constituencies and regions are politically relevant sub-state territorial units, but there are important differences between them. Constituencies refer to territorial units delineated for electoral purposes. Regions are sub-state territorial units with a degree of administrative and/or legislative autonomy. In the cases of Canada and Australia, this refers to provinces, territories and states, which are territorial units within the federation, with their own legislative assemblies and governments. In the case of the UK, the notion of region as used in this chapter refers strictly to the constituent nations, which also have their own legislatures and governments (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, but not England).<sup>35</sup> Building on the scheme proposed by Martin (2011b) to measure constituency focus in parliamentary questions, and on the coding scheme discussed in the Methodology chapter, the analysis in this chapter focuses on explicit mentions of territorial units in questions. Such a mention in a question counts as a territorial reference.

This approach builds on the assumption that performing territorial representation through explicit mentions of territorial units ensures visibility for the act of representation: given the public nature of Question Time, an explicit mention of a territorial unit, for example mentioning the constituency, is likely to attract more attention than less explicit forms of territorial representation.

Previous studies indicated that one of the purposes of asking parliamentary questions is seeking publicity and building reputation (Wiberg 1995; Chester and Bowring 1962). MPs might hence make explicit reference to their constituency in a question in order to attract publicity in the local media. In a survey conducted among MPs in the UK House of Commons in 1989, Franklin and Norton (1993, p.105) found that 'Defending or promoting constituency interests' and 'Making ministers aware of points of concern to constituents' were listed by MPs as reasons for using oral questions. Other studies also listed personal publicity and showing interest for the concerns of constituents as functions of parliamentary questions (Wiberg and Koura 1994; Wiberg 1995). In an unpublished study of Prime Minister's Questions in the UK, Shephard (1999) listed 'constituency representation' as one of the functions of PMQs, and suggested measuring this through the frequency with which MPs mention their constituencies.

The public and visible nature of oral questions suggests that MPs may have an incentive, in pursuing territorial representation, to make explicit reference to their constituency, or to a region, when asking questions. If their aim is to put on record the fact that they raised constituency issues, and thus to gain publicity at the local level and strengthen their local link, the public nature of questioning is an incentive for making explicit territorial references. Such explicit references are a form of signalling interest to constituents (Zittel et al. 2019). Aside from the purpose of gaining publicity and signalling to constituents, explicit mentions of territorial matters may attract more attention to an issue, as the prime minister or minister answering the question must react to it, and promise to take action.

This study recognises that there may be less explicit, or latent ways in which MPs perform territorial representation, for example by asking questions with direct policy relevance to constituencies, or by taking policy positions that are in line with public opinion in the constituency, as discussed in Chapter 2

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<sup>35</sup> The literal notion of 'region' differs among the four case study countries. It is used in this chapter to mean sub-national territorial units with a degree of administrative and legislative autonomy. It refers strictly to the units mentioned in this section: states and territories in Canada and Australia, and the constituent nations of the UK. It does not encompass 'regions' as areas of administration, such as the West Midlands, South West England, etc.



(Soroka et al. 2009). My research focuses only on explicit territorial references as a way of visible 'signalling' of interest and preoccupation with local issues.

As discussed in the introduction, the second aim of the chapter is to investigate *how* territorial representation is done. To this aim, I investigate whether questions with an explicit territorial reference are used for bringing up local issues, or whether they are used to link local issues to a policy issue with wider national relevance. The analysis in the chapter therefore relies on the following measures:

**1. Explicit territorial reference:** explicit mention of a member's constituency or region, or of a geographic unit associated with the member's constituency or region; use of the phrases 'my constituency/my electorate'/'my constituent(s)', and derivatives.

**2. Purpose of explicit territorial reference:**

**Local:** the question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance. The question is explicitly focused on the local level: the questioner describes a local issue and ends her intervention with a specific question focusing on a local issue. There are no references to wider, national-level debates.

**Local – National:** the question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance in connection to an issue with wider national relevance. The focus is on the national relevance of the local issue: the questioner may begin her intervention describing a local issue, but the intervention also contains references to broader, national-level policy issues. Following this discussion of local issues and references to national policy, the question either a) inquires about national policy in a way that is also relevant to the local issues described; or b) inquires about national policy exclusively.

As explained in the Methodology chapter, these definitions were developed following several iterations of pilot coding and consultations, in order to ensure construct validity. In so far as qualitative content analysis allows, and as the reliability test in Chapter 3 showed, the distinction between local and local-national questions captures meaningful distinctions in the data to a good degree. It captures 'purely local' questions, and it also shows questions where a local example is used as a starting point for a conversation on policy with broader national relevance. The measurement focuses on manifest content, but in seeking to capture how MPs use territorial references and for what purpose, it inevitably touches on latent meanings of communication. Consequently, some examples may not fall precisely into one of these categories: some local questions may touch on broader national issues – for example in cases of criticising the local effects of the government's economic policy. In such cases, the question remains primarily local in its intention, but also seeks to make a broader point. The distinction presents some limitations, but remains valuable for going beyond previous measurements of territorial representation by seeking to capture the purposes of mentioning a territorial reference in a parliamentary question.

In order to analyse further how territorial representation is done, and building on the analysis in Chapter 8, I also investigate the association between territorial references in questions and conflictual or appreciative remarks. Territorial representation in questions naturally co-occurs with accountability to a great degree: actors ask prime ministers to provide information relevant to territorial matters, or to take action to resolve local issues. As discussed in Chapter 7, demands for action in connection to local issues are one of the manifestations of accountability, as are information or reaction-seeking questions that relate to local issues. But to what degree do parliamentarians use territorial references for purely representational purposes, to discuss local issues, or local issues with national relevance, and to what degree do they use them in an instrumental way, as part of conflict and support strategies?

The first set of analyses undertaken for this chapter, and for Chapter 8, suggested important patterns of association between territorial references in questions and conflictual and supportive remarks. This prompted an investigation into these patterns. Considering the importance of local representation in the work of MPs, this analysis focuses on the degree to which territorial representation is a free-standing activity, and the degree to which territorial references are used in order to pursue conflict or support. To this aim, I look at the co-occurrence of territorial references and conflictual or appreciative remarks.

### 9.1.1. Institutional framework

In order to determine whether oral questions might be used for territorial representation in the systems analysed, the first step is to map out the incentives associated with the institutional framework in each system:

- Does the institutional framework create incentives for MPs to pursue territorial representation through parliamentary activities?
- How would we expect parliamentary actors to behave under the specific institutional features in each country?

Table 9.1 summarises the institutional features associated with incentives for territorial representation in the countries investigated in this study:

- The electoral system, and the type of electoral districts in operation.
- Territorial arrangements: the degree to which there is devolution of powers to sub-state territorial units.
- The type of parliament and whether the second chamber has a territorial role.

**Table 9.1. Institutional features related to territorial representation**

	<b>UK</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Australia</b>
<b>Electoral system family lower chamber</b>	Plurality/Majority	Proportional Representation	Plurality/Majority	Plurality/Majority
<b>Electoral system first chamber</b>	First-past-the-post	Single Transferable Vote	First-past-the-post	Alternative Vote
<b>Constituency</b>	Single-member district	Multi-member district	Single-member district	Single-member district
<b>Territorial arrangements</b>	Asymmetric devolution*	Unitary	Federal	Federal
<b>Type of parliament</b>	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral
<b>Type of second chamber</b>	Appointed/Elected/Hereditary	Partly elected, partly appointed by the prime minister	Appointed to represent provinces	Directly elected to represent states
<b>Territorial role for second chamber?</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes

Source: International IDEA 2019; Interparliamentary Union 2018

\* Legislative and executive powers are devolved to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, but not to England.

Based on Table 9.1, we would expect the institutional framework in all four systems to provide MPs with incentives to perform territorial representation in oral questions. Behavioural expectations based on these features are discussed in the following sections.

## **Electoral incentives and expectations**

Firstly, all the systems included in this study create electoral incentives for parliamentarians to seek to create a constituency link. Three of the systems (UK, Canada and Australia) have majoritarian electoral systems with single-member districts, where we would expect members to cultivate a constituency link (Carey and Shugart 1995). Ireland's PR-STV system asks voters to choose among individual candidates in multi-member districts (3–5 members), which means that there is often competition not only among candidates from different parties, but also among candidates from the same party. Intra-party competition and the personalised nature of the electoral competition in multi-member districts means that TDs have an incentive to cultivate a constituency link in order to ensure their chance of re-election (Wood and Young 1997; Laver and Marsh 1993; Farrell and Sinnott 2010).

As a starting point, I expect that, by creating incentives for cultivating a constituency link and for seeking publicity for the purpose of re-election, all four electoral systems create incentives for MPs to pursue territorial representation through oral questions. Moreover, previous studies indicate that in all four systems constituency work is an important part of the role of MPs, which creates a further incentive for local issues to be brought up in oral questions.

## **Territorial arrangements and expectations**

Two of the systems are federal: Canada and Australia. As explained in Chapter 6, prime ministers in both countries have a role in managing the federation. This suggests that there may be an incentive for MPs to ask questions in connection to states or provinces at Question Time or Question Period, given the publicity allowed by these parliamentary opportunities. But this is clearly also likely to be influenced by the existence of other mechanisms through which state interests are represented at the federal level.

Both systems have inter-governmental mechanisms to ensure the communication of state interests, in the form of the Council of Australian Governments and First Ministers Conferences respectively (Parkin 2008; Government of Canada 2018). In Australia, the upper chamber is meant to represent the states. However, the Australian Senate does not, in practice, perform a territorial role in terms of integrating territorial issues into its functions and procedures; its only real territorial role is rather to facilitate territorial representation within parliamentary party groups (Russell 2001). The Australian party system is federal, with the main parties (the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal National Coalition) having state branches that are fully integrated into the federal parties. In addition to intergovernmental mechanisms, intra-party mechanisms also ensure communication between states and the federal level (Parkin 2008). In Australia, there are no regional parties similar, for example, to the Bloc Québécois in Canada, that would claim to represent territorial interests.

In Canada, senators are appointed by the Prime Minister to represent the provinces, but the territorial role of the Senate is very weak. Given the appointed nature of the chamber, the link between the Senate and the provinces has always been disputed, and calls for reform have focused on giving it a proper territorial role (Russell 2000; 2001). The party system includes federal level parties (including the Conservatives and Liberals) as well as parties that only operate at the province level (Bickerton and Gagnon 2014). The relationship between federal parties and their equivalents in provinces is confederal: their connections are loose and they maintain distinct organisations and memberships.<sup>36</sup> The channels for communicating provincial interests to the central level are mainly the formal, inter-governmental

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<sup>36</sup> The only exception is the New Democratic Party, which has a federal structure and whose province branches are integrated into the main federal party.

forums of First Ministers' conferences, ministerial meetings and bilateral meetings between the Prime Minister and premiers (Government of Canada 2018). The Bloc Québécois, which is a regionalist party, has a strong presence in the lower chamber.<sup>37</sup> It only runs candidates in Quebec, and its main aim is to promote the interests of the province in the House of Commons.

Given the existence of intergovernmental mechanisms to manage relations between the federal government and the provinces, and the absence of any obvious incentive for MPs to perform regional representation in the lower chamber, we would expect few references to provinces in questions during Question Period, aside from in questions from the Bloc Québécois. Similarly, in Australia, we would not expect to see many references to state-level issues at Question Time. The existence of these formal and informal mechanisms would render province or state representation at Question Time or Question Period useless, but there may be issues that members feel need the publicity and exposure that Question Time allows. Given the Prime Minister's role in managing the federation in both cases, I aim to observe whether they are at all questioned in this capacity.

The UK territorial constitution provides asymmetric devolution of power to constituent nations. The upper chamber does not have a territorial role. As discussed in Chapter 6, the Prime Minister also has the role of managing relations between the devolved administrations and the centre. The Joint Ministerial Committee system provides opportunities for communication between the devolved administrations and the centre, but has often been criticised for being inefficient (for example, Institute for Government 2018). MPs also have opportunities to question ministers responsible for devolution – questions may be addressed to the Secretary of State for Scotland, for Wales, or for Northern Ireland at Departmental Question Time (Bates et al. 2018). But given the Prime Minister's role in managing the Union, we would expect at least some mention of issues that are particular to Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales during PMQs. Given the presence of MPs from regional parties (the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the Democratic Unionist Party) in the House of Commons,<sup>38</sup> I expect questions in connection to regional issues to come mainly from these MPs.

Ireland is a unitary state. There are no regionalist parties represented in the lower chamber. We would expect little to no evidence of territorial representation in connection to sub-state territorial units.

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<sup>37</sup> Bloc Québécois was the third largest party in the Canadian House of Commons during Stephen Harper's premiership: 51 out of 308 seats.

<sup>38</sup> The distribution of seats in the House of Commons during the period analysed (2010-2015) was the following: DUP (8 seats); SNP (6 seats); Plaid Cymru (3 seats).

### **9.1.2. Types of actors and expectations**

Based on the literature on parliamentary roles (Searing 1994; Blomgren and Rozenberg 2012), the actors who are most likely to perform territorial representation in the form of constituency representation are backbench MPs.

- I expect to find overall higher frequency of territorial references in systems where backbenchers ask many questions (the UK, Canada and Australia), than where they do not. Given the prevalent presence of party leaders at Questions to the Taoiseach during the sessions analysed here, I expect overall less evidence of explicit territorial references in Ireland.
- I expect to see fewer territorial references in questions from MPs in leadership roles (the Leader of the Opposition, other party leaders and opposition frontbenchers).
- I expect MPs from regional parties to engage in regional representation, and leaders of regional parties to be the main actors involved in regional representation.

In the following sections I present data on the frequency of territorial references in questions in the four case study countries, and discuss how territorial representation is performed by different actors, as well as the degree to which it is performed in connection with conflict and support.

## 9.2. Territorial representation in questions

Table 9.2 displays the frequency of questions that include a territorial reference across systems.

**Table 9.2. Questions to ministers and prime ministers with explicit territorial references**

Country	N	Questions with territorial reference	%
Australia	540	44	8%
Canada	1067	36	3%
UK	879	241	27%
Ireland	726	3	0%

The UK comes first by far, with 27% of questions containing an explicit territorial reference. There is much less evidence of explicit territorial representation in Canada and in Australia, and almost none in Ireland, which is in line with the fact that party leaders are the main actors who ask questions during Oral Questions to the Taoiseach.

Table 9.3 shows that, in line with expectations, backbenchers are the main actors who engage in territorial representation across all cases. The higher participation of party leaders in Canada is primarily accounted for by the interventions of the leader of Bloc Québécois, as will be discussed in section 9.5.

**Table 9.3. Questions with territorial references to ministers and prime ministers by types of parliamentary actors**

	Canada			Australia			UK		
	Questions with territorial reference	N total	%	Questions with territorial reference	N total	%	Questions with territorial reference	N total	%
Government backbencher	0	77	0%	18	264	7%	145	368	39%
Opposition backbencher	26	728	4%	20	70	29%	94	319	29%
Opposition party leader	10	160	6%	0	13	0%	2	13	15%
Opposition frontbencher	0	21	0%	6	129	5%	0	0	0%
Leader of the Opposition	0	81	0%	0	64	0%	0	179	0%
<b>N</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>27%</b>

In order to begin to explore how territorial references are used, Table 9.4 shows the distribution between mentions of constituencies and mentions of regions (as defined in section 9.1) across countries. Territorial representation predominantly involves mentions of constituencies in the UK and in Australia, but to a much lesser degree in Canada, where regions are mentioned more often. Explicit mentions of the constituent nations play a very small role in the UK, compared to mentions of constituencies. In Canada, the higher number of questions relating to regions is again accounted for by questions from Bloc Québécois, as will be discussed in section 9.5. The fact that regions are overall scarcely mentioned bears out the point set out in the opening sections: the representation of sub-national territorial units is done through other channels, and only exceptionally in questions to the prime minister. Subsequent sections explore these patterns and particularities for each country, and also investigate how MPs use territorial references in their questions.

**Table 9.4. Mentions of constituencies and regions in questions to prime ministers and ministers**

	Canada	Australia	UK
<b>Constituency</b>	9	35	230
<b>Region</b>	27	9	11
<b>N</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>241</b>

### 9.3. UK

#### 9.3.1. Evidence of territorial representation in questions to the prime minister

The UK presents the highest number of questions with a territorial reference. Out of the total of 879 questions, 241 (27%) included a territorial reference. This means that, on average, there were more than eight questions with a territorial reference in each PMQs session.

**Table 9.5. Representation by type of actor in the UK**

	Constituency	Region	N	N Questions	%
<b>Government backbencher*</b>	145	0	145	368	39%
<b>Opposition backbencher</b>	85	9	94	319	29%
<b>Opposition party leader</b>	0	2	2	13	15%
<b>Leader of the Opposition</b>	0	0	0	179	0%
<b>N</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>%</b>	95%	5%	100%		

\*Includes both Conservatives (N = 131 questions) and Liberal Democrats (N = 14 questions).

In line with expectations, backbenchers were the main actors who used territorial references: 60% of questions with a territorial reference come from government backbenchers, and 39% from opposition backbenchers.

The Leader of the Opposition did not make any references to his constituency. As discussed in previous chapters, leaders of smaller opposition parties did not intervene often during the PMQs sessions analysed: the sample only includes 13 such questions. There are two examples of leaders of regional parties mentioning territorial references – both refer to regional issues. One question came from the leader of the Scottish National Party in the House of Commons, Angus Robertson, asking the Prime Minister about the government’s plans to build defence ships in Scotland. The second came from Nigel Dodds, the leader of the DUP, asking the Prime Minister to liaise with authorities in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland in connection to the spread of the Ebola virus. On the backbench side, mentions of regions came from DUP and SNP parliamentarians, demonstrating that MPs from regional parties are the ones who engage in regional representation, as expected. Given the predominance of backbench questions, the following sections will focus on these, and explore their variation.

### 9.3.2. How are territorial references used in questions?

The notably high frequency of territorial references in backbench questions prompts a curiosity about *how* these references are used. Table 9.6 describes how backbenchers use territorial references: whether to talk about local issues or to link local matters to national issues, and whether they use territorial references in conjunction with conflictual or appreciative remarks.

**Table 9.6. UK government and opposition backbenchers: Questions with territorial references, conflictual and appreciative remarks**

	Questions with territorial reference (N)	(of which) Questions with territorial reference and conflictual remarks	% questions conflict	(of which) Questions with territorial reference and appreciative remarks	% questions support	Questions not performing conflict or support	%
<b>Government backbenchers (N=139)*</b>							
Local focus	60	10	17%	5	9%	45	75%
Local linked to national	79	23	29%	27	39%	32	40%
<b>Opposition backbenchers (N= 94)</b>							
Local focus	41	13	33%	3	8%	25	60%
Local linked to national	53	37	70%	2	4%	16	30%

\*Includes both Liberal Democrat and Conservative backbenchers; excludes questions coded as 'other' (N = 6), which used a territorial reference but could not be classified into either category.

Table 9.6 indicates that the balance between local and local-national questions was quite even between the two groups. Questions containing territorial references were often associated with conflict and support, but there were also 'purely local' questions, as well as questions linking local issues to national issues without conflictual or supportive remarks. Local questions were much less associated with either conflict or support than questions linking local issues to national issues: 75% of local questions from government backbenchers and 60% from opposition backbenchers contained no conflictual or appreciative remarks.

#### 1. Questions with purely local focus

As shown in Tables 9.5 and 9.6, government backbenchers were the main actors who used territorial references in their questions, and a significant proportion of their questions with a local focus were purely 'local' questions, not associated with either conflictual or appreciative remarks; this also applied to opposition backbenchers.



Locally focused questions took similar patterns and performed similar micro-level functions for both sets of actors. For example, some questions asked the Prime Minister to take action to help solve a situation in connection to the member's constituency. The purpose of these questions is to bring a local issue to the attention of the Prime Minister and to help get support to resolve the issue. For example, Conservative MP Stephen Mosley asked David Cameron if he would call for

'the electrification of the Crewe to Chester railway line, which would provide a major and immediate boost to people in Chester and beyond in north Wales? That would also eventually link us to the much needed High Speed 2.' (13.07.2011).

Another example is a question from David Morris, MP for Morecambe and Lunesdale, asking David Cameron to help get a crossing outside a local school after five children had been involved in an accident outside the school:

'[...] Five children in my constituency have been involved in an accident on a crossing outside St Peter's school in Heysham. I know this is a county council matter, but I would like the Prime Minister to assist me in trying to get a crossing outside St Peter's school. (4.07.2012)

Other types of local questions referred to cases of individual constituents who were in a difficult situation, for example not being able to access adequate treatment for a medical condition, either because their families were struggling financially or because the treatment was not available in the UK. This type of question asks the Prime Minister to intervene and provide a commitment to help resolve problems that affect individual constituents.

Another type of question asked the Prime Minister to comment on local developments in the member's constituency: for example, achievements of a local school or the progress of local authorities with environmental policy. Others asked the Prime Minister explicitly to comment on what a member had achieved at the local level: for example, in a question on 15 October 2014, Nigel Adams asked David Cameron to comment on the success of the recent job fair organised in his constituency of Selby and Ainsty, mentioning the help from Selby college and the staff at Selby Job Centre Plus. Bringing up such local issues at PMQs is meant to raise publicity for local events and for the member. In a question on 14 December 2011, Julian Sturdy, the MP for York Outer, commented on the success of tourism in York and asked David Cameron to 'ensure that northern tourist attractions in particular are promoted in the run-up to the Olympic games'.

In purely local questions from backbenchers, we distinguish two main micro-level functions, which apply to questions from both government and opposition MPs. The first function is to draw attention to local issues in order to ask the Prime Minister for assistance. Many of these questions contained requests for serious matters that affect the member's constituency or individual constituents. The second is to seek publicity for various local events, as well as for the MPs' activity at the local level.

## **2. Questions linking local and national issues**

Both sides used questions linking local issues to national issues. These questions took diverse forms. In the case of opposition backbenchers, questions mainly referred to requests for policy to be reviewed, with an emphasis on its consequences at the local level. Examples included welfare reforms, immigration policy, or regulating private sector rents. Another example asked the Prime Minister to work with a cross-party group of MPs to discuss steel production in the UK in light of the announcement that Tata Steel was going to sell its long products business:

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** Today, Tata has announced that it hopes to sell its long products business, including the integrated steel site in Scunthorpe. People are understandably concerned about that. Will the Prime Minister meet me and a cross-party group of MPs whose communities are affected by the decision,

in order to make sure there is a bright future for long product steel in the UK, which underpins so much of British manufacturing? (15.10.2014)

In the case of government backbenchers, a few of these questions requested the Prime Minister to act to bring forward legislation or to make policy changes to help solve a local issue that would have wider national relevance. Other questions used local examples to ask the Prime Minister to take action in connection to the EU.

On both sides, these questions were used to perform local representation by bringing local-level issues to the attention of the Prime Minister in the context of an issue with broader implications. They still serve the purpose of local representation, but have a wider scope than purely local questions that concentrate on localised issues.

### **3. The dynamics of conflict and support**

As the previous chapter showed, during the period analysed, opposition backbenchers used conflictual remarks in 176 questions. Table 9.6 indicates that 50 questions with territorial references were used in conjunction with conflictual remarks, amounting to 28% of the total number of questions with conflictual remarks by opposition backbenchers. In the case of government backbenchers from the Conservative Party, Chapter 8 showed that they used conflictual remarks in 58 questions, 30 of which (54%) contained a territorial reference. This suggests that using territorial references together with conflictual remarks may be a strategy of conflict for government backbenchers to a much larger degree than for opposition backbenchers.

This difference in strategies may be explained by the types of conflict associated with each class of actors presented in Chapter 8. Firstly, as government backbenchers primarily use conflictual remarks to attack the opposition, local references may be practical for showcasing the poor record of the opposition party in local or regional politics. But using local references may also be an alternative avenue for criticising the government or policy. By contrast, opposition backbenchers address a broad range of aspects of prime ministerial or government decisions in their conflictual remarks. For some of these issues, local references may be useful, but there is a much wider scope of policy that may not be related to local politics, or for which local references may not be relevant.

With respect to the support function, Chapter 8 showed that government backbenchers are the main actors who use questions to support the government. Opposition actors very rarely use questions to make appreciative comments about their own side, or about the government. During the period analysed, government backbenchers asked 71 questions with explicit appreciative remarks – as Table 9.6 indicates, 33 of these also contained a territorial reference. These patterns are explored further in the following sections.

#### **Conflict and support in questions linking local issues to national policy**

The main ground for tactical use of conflict and support are questions linking local issues to national issues. Table 9.6 shows that opposition backbenchers often used questions linking local examples to national policy issues in order to pursue conflict: 70% of these questions contained a conflictual remark. These questions used territorial references to exemplify the negative effects of a policy or government decision on the members' constituencies. A typical question usually started by discussing negative consequence at the local level, then presented a critical remark towards the Prime Minister or the government for a decision in national policy that produced these negative effects:

**Mrs Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab):** This morning we learned that the Teesside airport is up for sale and it seems that, as unemployment is sky-rocketing in the north-east, our planes may be grounded. Is not the loss of infrastructure and jobs in the north-east further evidence that this Government's economic plan is a catastrophic failure? (13.10.2010)

A similar type of question involved criticising government policy in connection to negative effects on individual constituents:

**Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab):** My constituent Jackie contacted me to ask how she is to manage with a 3% tax on her pension, no pay increase until 2013, and rocketing fuel and food bills. How is she to feed her family? Why is the Prime Minister making people like Jackie pay for his Government's failure? (30.11.2011)

Government backbenchers also used local-national questions in order to pursue conflict, primarily in order to criticize the main opposition party, either for its policies, or for its actions in local politics. Such questions were used by Conservative backbenchers during 2011 to highlight decisions by Labour-led councils and to ask David Cameron about the Localism Bill, giving him the opportunity to explain and promote the bill. Other questions of this type referred to Conservative backbenchers criticising the Labour-run Welsh government and its management of NHS Wales:

**Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con):** A typical council tax payer in my Aberconwy constituency will now pay £124 more than they did in 2010 because the money made available to the Labour Welsh Government has been used to fund their pet project to secure their majority in the Assembly. Does the Prime Minister share my concern that hard-working families in Wales are being used in order to fund the Labour party's pork-barrel policy in Cardiff Bay? (13.02.2013)

An important proportion of local-national questions were used by government backbenchers to support the government by making reference to positive effects of the government's decisions on the constituency. MPs praised the government's decisions and highlighted their positive consequences:

**Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con):** Is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister aware that in Watford in the last quarter of 2012, for which the numbers have just come out, 327 new companies were incorporated? That is a record and is way beyond anything in history. I think he will agree that that shows that the Government's policy of encouraging private enterprise is succeeding. (5.09.2012)

Connectedly, other questions highlighted issues with local relevance and prompted the Prime Minister to make a policy announcement, or to promote existing policy. In this case the praise is less explicit: MPs offered the Prime Minister the opportunity to announce upcoming policy measures or to explain recent decisions. The focus of the question is always on the national level effects: the MP starts with a local example, extrapolates it to a national policy issue, and asks the Prime Minister for updates on that particular policy.

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** I have been working with local businesses, my councils and other organisations to help promote, expand and grow the Carlisle economy. Clearly, given the economic background, it is imperative that we grow both the local and national economy. Will the Prime Minister tell us what new measures the Government will introduce to help promote such growth? (7.09.2011)

**Mr David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con):** Public sector workers in my constituency work extremely hard to deliver essential public services, and I know that my right hon. Friend agrees that we value those services tremendously. Will he reassure those workers and confirm that the Government's reforms—very necessary reforms that they are—will ensure that those services are sustainable and remain among the very best? (2.11.2011)

## Conflict and support in purely local questions

Some questions with purely local focus also contain elements of conflict. Opposition backbenchers used conflict in local questions much more often than government backbenchers: 33% of their questions with local focus contained a conflictual remark, compared to only 16% for government backbenchers. These questions used local examples to criticise the prime minister, the government, or particular aspects of policy, and showcase the damage that particular decisions had done at the local level.

In the case of government backbenchers, some local questions were used to criticise the main opposition party. But unlike their counterparts in other systems, government backbenchers in the UK also made critical comments about the government in connection to local issues. Four out of the nine questions contained genuine critical remarks from MPs about a government department or agency, or about particular policies that would have produced negative effects at the local level, for example spending decisions that would affect local developments. This suggests that government backbenchers may use local questions as a means for criticising the government, as exemplified by the following two questions containing critical remarks about government departments:

**Sir Peter Luff (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** Droitwich Spa boxing academy, run entirely by volunteers, trains talented boxers and provides a highly valued community resource, turning round the lives of many disruptive and troubled young people. It is a shining example of the big society. Does the Prime Minister understand my deep concern that the blinkered decision of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to insist on a draconian interpretation of the VAT rules for its new building will result in the academy's closure? (3.12.2014)

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** On 3 September I wrote to the prisons Minister requesting a meeting to discuss the future of HMP Wellingborough. I received no response to that request. This week, I received a letter from the prisons Minister saying that the site of Wellingborough prison was to be sold. I do not understand that, as Wellingborough prison was the third cheapest in the country to run. Would the Prime Minister meet me and concerned constituents to discuss the matter? (18.11.2013)

As discussed in Chapter 8, open criticism from the government side may risk creating an image of a divided government, so government backbenchers have serious reasons to avoid appearing explicitly critical; at the same time, MPs have a strong link to their constituencies, and the imperative to speak for the constituents' concerns creates an opportunity to voice criticism.

As Table 9.6. shows, opposition backbenchers used appreciative remarks in their questions very sparsely. In the case of local questions, there were only three questions in the data that presented appreciative comments. Two of them made genuine appreciative remarks towards government decisions, and one was used for own party appreciation. In the case of local-national questions, the two examples in the data refer to instances where opposition backbenchers made appreciative remarks towards their own party. The various types of territorial references in questions by backbenchers are summarised in Table 9.7:

**Table 9.7. Uses of territorial references in questions by backbenchers in the UK**

	<b>Local issue</b>	<b>Local issue linked to a national issue</b>
<b>Government backbenchers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands for action to be taken to resolve a local issue</li> <li>• Request for information on an issue with effects on the constituency</li> <li>• Issues concerning individual constituents</li> <li>• Request for comment - praise of local constituency event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support the government by making reference to positive effects of the government's strategy/approach/decisions on the constituency.</li> <li>• Prompt for policy announcement</li> <li>• To criticise the opposition party</li> </ul>
<b>Opposition backbenchers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands for action to be taken to resolve a local issue</li> <li>• Demand for action and policy criticism</li> <li>• Issues concerning individual constituents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy criticism with local implications</li> <li>• Policy criticism with local implications, exemplified by an individual constituent's case</li> <li>• Demand for policy review</li> </ul>

### 9.3.3. Conclusions

The main pattern of the UK case is the high frequency of explicit territorial references in questions to the Prime Minister. As roughly one in four questions addressed to the Prime Minister contained a territorial reference, territorial representation is clearly one of the functions of PMQs.

In line with expectations, backbenchers were the main actors who engaged in territorial representation. Although backbenchers on both sides used questions more often in order to link local issues to national issues, purely local questions were also frequent, and much more frequent than in all other cases, as explained in subsequent sections. Conflict and support were associated with territorial representation to a considerable degree. Territorial questions provided means for the opposition to criticise the government, but also for government backbenchers to attack the opposition's record in local politics, or to build a case to criticise their own side using local examples.

## 9.4. Australia

### 9.4.1. Evidence of territorial representation in questions

Turning to Australia, only 44 questions out of the total of 540 (8%) questions to ministers and tot the Prime Minister contained an explicit reference to a region or a constituency; 22 (9%) of these were addressed to the Prime Minister, out of the total of 248. Compared to the UK, this clearly indicates overall less evidence of explicit territorial references. Notably, questions referring to constituencies were much more frequent than questions referring to states. Table 9.8 shows that questions with a territorial reference were addressed to the Prime Minister and to ministers in equal proportion.

Question Time in Australia involves a strong backbench presence, with 13% of the total 540 questions coming from opposition backbenchers, and 46% from government backbenchers. In line with the expectations associated with a mechanism with strong backbench presence, we observe territorial representation coming mainly from backbenchers, who accounted for nearly all questions with a territorial reference, as shown in Table 9.9. Opposition backbenchers used territorial references in their questions much more frequently than government backbenchers: out of the total of 70 questions they asked during the recorded period, 20 (29%) contained a territorial reference, compared to only 18 out of 264 (7%) in the case of government backbenchers.

**Table 9.8. Territorial unit mentioned by question addressee in Australia**

	Constituency	State	N
<b>Government minister</b>	17	5	22
<b>Prime Minister</b>	18	4	22
<b>N</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>44</b>

**Table 9.9. Australia: Territorial unit mentioned by type of actor**

	Constituency	State	N	N Total	% questions with territorial reference
<b>Government backbencher*</b>	13	5	18	264	7%
<b>Opposition frontbench</b>	5	1	6	129	5%
<b>Opposition backbencher</b>	17	3	20	70	29%
<b>Opposition party leader</b>	0	0	0	13	0%
<b>Leader of the Opposition</b>	0	0	0	64	0%
<b>N</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>8%</b>

\*Includes questions from the independent members supporting the government: three questions, one mentioning the member's electorate, and the other two mentioning the state.

### 9.4.2. How are territorial references used?

Table 9.10 shows that questions were used predominantly to link local issues to national issues; there were very few questions with exclusively local relevance. Hence members generally used territorial references in order to contribute to a wider conversation at the national level.

**Table 9.10. Types of representation in Australia**

	Questions with territorial reference (TOTAL)	Local focus	(of which) Local focus with conflictual remark	Local issue linked to national issue	(of which) Local-National with conflictual remark	Other purpose
<b>Government backbencher</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Opposition frontbencher</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Opposition backbencher</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

Evidence presented in the previous chapter showed that questions from backbenchers in Australia contained very few explicit appreciative remarks. It also showed that some conflictual questions are used to exemplify negative effects of government decisions at the local level, or to use local examples in order to criticise government policy – particularly in connection to the carbon tax. In the case of opposition backbenchers, out of the 12 questions linking local issues to national issues, seven contained a conflictual remark; and four of the eight local questions also contained conflictual remarks. Opposition frontbenchers also participated in the opposition’s concerted attack against the government’s carbon tax, and used local references in conjunction with conflictual remarks. There were no conflictual remarks in questions from government backbenchers.

#### 1. Opposition backbenchers and frontbenchers

In line with the tendency also observed in the case of opposition backbenchers in the UK, opposition backbenchers in Australia asked more questions linking local issues to national issues than questions addressing purely local issues, although the numbers are considerably smaller. There were a few instances of questions demanding that action should be taken to resolve a local issue, but their main purpose for using territorial references was to contribute to the opposition’s forceful attack on the government’s proposed carbon tax.

Out of the eight questions referring to local issues, four were addressed to the Prime Minister. One of these asked her to intervene to resolve an issue at the local level:

**Mrs GASH:** My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the comments of Natalie Osborne of Kiama in my electorate following the destruction of her nature strip by the National Broadband Network installers. [...] Does the Prime Minister guarantee that all damage to property will be made good to the satisfaction of the householders at the expense of the NBN Company? (25.11.2011)

Opposition backbenchers also made conflictual remarks in these questions, as Table 9.10 shows. For example, one of the questions to the Prime Minister criticised a policy decision with negative consequences at the local level:

**Mr TUDGE (Aston):** My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her decision to cut \$107 million from Victorian hospitals, causing beds to close across Victoria, including five palliative care beds from Wantirna Health in my electorate. How can the Prime Minister justify cutting \$107 million from Victorian hospitals, while at the same time spending the same amounts on carbon tax promotion? Surely, hospital beds are more important than promoting the carbon tax. (7.02.2013)

In questions that sought to link local issues to national issues, opposition backbenchers continued the opposition's campaign against the carbon tax, using local examples to highlight potential negative effects, particularly the increase in energy bills. For example, an opposition backbencher asked the Prime Minister to apologise to a family in his electorate because the carbon tax had resulted in an increase in their electricity bills. Another used a similar example of a local company in their electorate whose electricity bill had increased as a result of the carbon tax. A third example asked the Prime Minister why a local business had to bear the consequences of the carbon tax. All these questions used local cases to criticise policy at the national level. Conflict was a dominant function of questions from opposition backbenchers during the period analysed, and frontbenchers also participated in the coordinated attack against the carbon tax.

Opposition frontbenchers also raised questions with a territorial element: five were addressed to the Prime Minister, and one to a minister. These questions linked local issues to national issues – three include instances of policy or government criticism with local implications. These critical questions all refer to the carbon tax, using local examples to highlight its negative effects. Using territorial references was thus a distinct strategy in the campaign against the carbon tax: for the opposition, territorial questions had the function of contributing to their attack strategies.

## **2. Government backbenchers**

Similar to opposition backbenchers, government backbenchers asked more questions linking local issues to national issues than questions addressing purely local issues. As territorial references only occurred in 7% of government backbench questions, this pattern remained occasional, not systemic.

Questions focusing on local issues asked the Prime Minister or ministers to take action in order to resolve a local issue, for example asking the Prime Minister to commit to setting out funds in order to complete a dual carriageway on the Pacific Highway from Hexham to the Queensland border, considering the accidents produced as a consequence of the highway being single-laned (21.10.2010). In a question to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, a government backbencher requested information about the steps that the government was taking to rebuild Queensland following recent natural disaster. This type of question allows the government to set out how it has adequately handled an issue and made the right decisions.

Quite a few of these questions were 'Dorothy Dixers' – questions prompting statements from the Prime Minister or from ministers. Out of the questions linking local issues to national issues, the questions addressed to the Prime Minister were prompts for policy statements, asking her how the government had dealt with recent natural disasters affecting the member's electorate:

**Ms LIVERMORE:** My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline the government's response to recent natural disasters, particularly in my community of Rockhampton? (9.02.2011)

**Mr RIPOLL:** My question is to the Prime Minister. What action is the government taking to rebuild my community and how will the government ensure that we get value for money? (9.02.2011)



Similar to the question to the Prime Minister, government backbenchers asked the minister responsible for regions and regional development about the government's response and strategy referring to natural disasters, but with applicability to the local area. Even though they do not contain explicit appreciative remarks, these questions perform a *latent support function*, as discussed in the previous chapter, by prompting the Prime Minister or a minister to explain how a particular issue has been dealt with. Questions linking local issues to national policy issues are thus associated with the support function in the latent form performed by Australian backbenchers, as discussed in Chapter 8.

### **9.4.3. Conclusions**

In line with expectations, as Question Time in Australia involves a strong backbench presence, backbench MPs account for nearly all questions with a territorial reference.

Nonetheless, the numbers are much smaller compared to the UK, so reliably discerning patterns is more difficult. Backbenchers from both sides used territorial references in questions mainly in order to link local issues to national issues – either to prompt the minister or the Prime Minister to present the government's decisions, in the case of government backbenchers, or to attack the government by using local examples to criticise the carbon tax. Opposition frontbenchers joined this charge against the government, using all their questions with territorial references to attack the carbon tax. This is in line with the fact that backbenchers in Australia predominantly used their questions to contribute to the arguments made by their own side. Territorial representation is strongly associated with conflict and support, which brings further evidence to the argument made in Chapters 5 and 8 that behaviour during Question Time in Australia suggests a high degree of intra-party coordination.

Although territorial representation seems not to be a prominent function of Question Time in Australia, territorial representation may also be performed in less explicit ways, for example by bringing up topics that are relevant to the member's electorate without an explicit mention of the electorate, or by bringing up issues regarding federal relations generally. Such questions cannot be fully captured using the data presented in this chapter.

## 9.5. Canada

### 9.5.1. Evidence of territorial representation in questions

There is overall very little evidence of explicit use of territorial references during Question Period in Canada: there are only 36 questions with a reference to a territorial unit, out of the total of 1067 in the sample (3%). Questions referring to provinces were much more frequent than questions referring to constituencies. As Table 9.11 shows, questions containing territorial references were predominantly addressed to ministers: 26, compared to 10 addressed to the Prime Minister.

In terms of which actors use territorial references, the patterns we observe are in line with expectations: Table 9.12 shows that opposition backbenchers were the main actors involved. There were no mentions of territorial issues from government backbenchers, who, as discussed in Chapter 5, play a minor role during Question Period in Canada. Compared to their high level of participation, opposition backbenchers sparingly use territorial references. Out of their 728 questions during the period analysed, only 26 (4%) contained an explicit territorial reference.

Party leaders also engage in some territorial representation. The 10 questions recorded in Table 9.12 were all from the leader of Bloc Québécois, and referred to issues with relevance to the province of Quebec. As in the UK, there is no evidence of explicit mention of territorial issues by the Leader of the Opposition or other frontbenchers from the main opposition party.

**Table 9.11. Canada: Representation by question addressee**

Territorial unit	Government/Minister	Prime Minister	N
Constituency	8	1	9
Province	18	9	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>36</b>

**Table 9.12. Canada: Territorial unit mentioned by type of actor**

	Constituency	Province	N	N Total	% questions with territorial references
Government backbencher	0	0	0	77	0%
Opposition backbencher	9	17	26	728	4%
Opposition party leader	0	10	10	160	6%
Opposition frontbencher	0	0	0	21	0%
Leader of the Opposition	0	0	0	81	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>3%</b>

## 9.5.2. How are territorial references used?

**Table 9.13. Canada: Types of representation**

	Questions with territorial reference (N)	Local focus	(of which) Local focus and conflictual remark	Local issue linked to national issue	(of which) Local-national and conflictual remark	Other
<b>Opposition backbencher</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Opposition party leader</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 9.13 shows that the small number of questions with a territorial reference mainly took a local focus, and were used less for linking local issues to a national issue. Evidence in the previous chapter showed that questions from backbenchers in Canada contained very few explicit appreciative remarks. There is some evidence that questions with territorial references were used for pursuing conflict: half of those from the Leader of the Bloc Québécois were critical, with three such questions addressed to the Prime Minister and two to ministers. Questions from opposition backbenchers also contained some conflictual remarks directed to the Prime Minister and to ministers, and this particularly occurred in questions linking local issues to national issues.

### 1. Opposition backbenchers

Compared to the behaviour of opposition backbenchers in Australia, who mentioned local issues mainly in connection to national issues, and in order to attack the government on its proposed carbon tax, opposition backbenchers in Canada predominantly used their questions to discuss local issues. During the period analysed, they asked 16 questions referring explicitly to local issues: 15 of these were addressed to a minister, and just one was addressed to the Prime Minister. Hence there were barely any territorial questions from backbenchers to the Canadian Prime Minister – in stark contrast to the UK.

The single such question came from a backbencher from Bloc Québécois (Paul Crête, on 29 January 2008). This asked Stephen Harper to allocate assistance for workers in the forestry and manufacturing sectors, and demanded that the government ‘introduce the assistance plan proposed by the Bloc Québécois without further delay’, hence acting as a vehicle to promote the party’s policy.

A majority of the questions to ministers asked the minister or the government to intervene to fix a local situation that required their intervention, for example in ensuring that transport links are allocated adequate funding, as in the following two questions from Bloc Québécois backbenchers:

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, despite the promise made by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, there was nothing in the budget for the construction of a year-round maritime link for the Magdalen Islands, although amounts have been allocated for the Newfoundland and Labrador link. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is good at making promises but does not keep them. Can the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities guarantee that the Magdalen Islands will finally, by next winter, have the permanent maritime service called for by the entire population of the Magdalen Islands? (18.06.2008)

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the future of rail transport is still under threat in Gaspé. Even though representations were made to the former government, very few guarantees were given to the public. A petition currently circulating in the region calls on the federal government to intervene. The Matapédia-Chandler line is for sale. Can the Minister of Transport tell us what he plans to do to ensure that the train will continue to be operational in Gaspé? (2.05.2006)

Opposition backbenchers asked nine questions linking local issues to national issues: eight of these were addressed to ministers, and one was addressed to the Prime Minister. Similar to the UK and to Australia, almost all questions linking local issues to national issues were used for criticising a minister for a decision of national policy that had implications at the local level. The question to the Prime Minister related to the passage of the Specific Claims Tribunal Act<sup>39</sup>, which referred to changes in the Aboriginal claims system. The Prime Minister was asked to intervene in reaction to protests from native communities in response to the bill:

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Where is the leadership, the intervention, on native land claims not covered by Bill C-30? Native protests in Caledonia and Brantford continue. Development is halted. The Conservative government stays completely silent. My community is now directly soliciting the Prime Minister's intervention, looking to him for leadership. What does he intend to do? (13.05.2008)

The behavioural patterns of opposition backbenchers in Canada suggest that they used territorial references in association with conflictual remarks; but that they also asked genuine questions asking for local issues to be rectified.

## 2. Opposition party leaders

As already indicated, the 10 questions from party leaders mentioning territorial references were all from the leader of Bloc Québécois. Three of them were addressed to ministers, and seven to the Prime Minister. The questions to the Prime Minister referred to interactions between the provinces and the federal level; between regional governments (specifically, the government of Quebec) and the federal government. For example, two questions referred to the allocation of funds for the regions in the federal budget, demanding that the Prime Minister should respect the priorities set up by the government of Quebec:

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if he is not listening, shall I repeat it and then ask another one? It is really not my fault if he is not following what is going on in the House. I said that all premiers of Quebec since Jean Lesage—regardless of political allegiance—have demanded that in the area of regional development, the federal government respect the priorities set by the Government of Québec. Does the Prime Minister support Quebec's request? Does he intend to incorporate it into the federal regional development act? (2.05.2006)

Two further questions referred to fiscal policy tax transfers, again asking the Prime Minister to cooperate with the government of Quebec. Other questions referred to cooperation between the federal and the regional government with respect to environmental policy, for example:

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the present government rejected the Liberals' plan to implement the Kyoto protocol, but has yet to introduce its own plan. So, no one knows how the federal government plans to go about attaining the Kyoto objectives. This attitude is causing some concern. The Quebec environment minister has even sent a letter to his federal counterpart expressing his

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<sup>39</sup> On the date of the question, 13 May 2008, Bill C-30 had just passed the House of Commons and was introduced in the Senate. Parliament of Canada: Library of Parliament (2008)  
[https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en\\_CA/ResearchPublications/LegislativeSummaries/392LS592E](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/LegislativeSummaries/392LS592E)  
(Accessed 1/05/2019)

concerns on the matter. Could the Prime Minister tell us exactly when he intends to unveil his own plan to achieve the Kyoto objectives? (25.04.2006)

As discussed in Chapter 5, the allocation of questions at Question Period prioritizes opposition party leaders at the beginning of the session, and they get to interact directly with the Prime Minister. Given the strong role of BQ in representing provincial interests, it makes sense that the leader would use their questions to the Prime Minister to advance the interests of the province.

### **9.5.3. Conclusions**

There is little evidence of territorial representation in the form of explicit territorial references in Canada, with only 3% of questions containing an explicit territorial reference. The frequency of questions concerning provinces is explained by the strong presence of the Bloc Québécois, whose members account for nearly all such questions.

The Canadian institutional framework would suggest potential for frequent constituency questions, given the single-member district electoral system, the traditional strong constituency link, and the prominent role of (mainly opposition) backbenchers in Question Period. This study refers to manifest mentions of territorial references, and hence to manifest mentions of a member's constituency. As the main previous study of the Canadian case has shown (Soroka et al. 2009), constituency representation at Question Period may also take less explicit forms, such as bringing up topics that are relevant to the constituency, or taking policy positions that are in line with public opinion at the constituency level without actually mentioning the constituency.

The results presented in this section suggest that territorial or constituency representation is a markedly less important function of Question Period in Canada than it is of PMQs in the UK. It is also possible that territorial representation could take different forms in Canada compared to the equivalent procedure in the UK, but this is impossible to determine without further study. It is notable that most questions with territorial relevance are addressed to ministers, which also suggests that territorial representation is not a priority function when addressing questions to the Prime Minister.

## 9.6. Ireland

### 9.6.1. Evidence of territorial representation in questions

There were very few instances of territorial references in questions in Ireland. Only three such mentions were recorded in questions by TDs, and these did not serve the purpose of representation. They were cursory mentions.

The first came from Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor, who mentioned to the Taoiseach:

'Despite what has been said this morning, I ask the Taoiseach to continue to promote Ireland as a tourist destination and to assure President Obama and Queen Elizabeth that they will be more than welcome to visit our constituency in Dún Laoghaire.' (20.02.2011)

Gerry Adams mentioned to the Taoiseach that:

'While I represent a constituency in the State, I am from the North. County Mayo is no longer under the control of the English Crown. Where I come from is, even in a conditional way, covered by the new dispensation we have carved out.' (18.05.2011)

The final one made reference to a case in Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett's constituency:

'What of the man in Dún Laoghaire for whom the Taoiseach obtained a wheelchair a few years ago? He needs a new wheelchair and has been banging down my constituency office door, pleading for one. Where is his Clearing House Group?' (1.10.2013)

### 9.6.2. How do these patterns relate to the particularities of the Irish case?

Considering the implications of the PR-STV electoral system and the importance of constituency work in Ireland (Farrell and Sinnott 2010; Gallagher and Komito 2010), the absence of questions with explicit territorial references is certainly puzzling. The main plausible explanation is the participation in Questions to the Taoiseach: as leaders are the main actors, questioning is more focused on national-level policy, and much less on constituency issues. This argument is backed up by the data presented in Chapter 6, which shows that the Taoiseach was predominantly asked questions on foreign affairs, EU affairs, and general macro-level domestic issues. This tendency is also observable in the other cases: party leaders do not engage in constituency representation. The only exceptions were regional party leaders – in the UK and in Canada – and their questions discussed regional issues.

At the procedural level, this suggests that questioning mechanisms that prioritise participation from party leaders contribute much less to territorial representation than procedures with a strong backbench presence. This is in line with the expectations set out at the beginning of the chapter.

## 9.7. Chapter conclusions

This chapter analysed the extent to which oral questions to prime ministers (and to ministers under collective mechanisms in Australia and Canada) are used for territorial representation, focusing on explicit mentions of territorial units in questions. It also looked at the degree to which questions that contain territorial references are used for conflict or support. The evidence found across countries was mixed.

### **There is significantly little evidence of explicit territorial references in questions in all countries aside from the UK**

PMQs is used as a venue for performing territorial representation much more than Question Time in Australia, Question Period in Canada, or Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland: linkage, in the form of territorial representation, is a function of PMQs much more than of the other mechanisms. The UK is the only case where there is a large enough number of questions with a territorial reference to reliably discern patterns, and it presents a distinct style of performing territorial representation. MPs frequently mention their constituencies, and do so in an explicit way. Under similar conditions of spontaneous questioning as in Canada and Australia (i.e. prior notice not required for the topic of questions) the fact that MPs in the UK raise purely local issues without connection to conflict or support much more often suggests that they have more leeway to act independently. Aside from using questions to contribute to their own side's argument, they also act as constituency MPs and bring up issues with local relevance.

With respect to whether, in collective procedures, territorial representation is a function of questions to the prime minister or to ministers, Canada and Australia appear to be dissimilar, although in both cases the relevant number of questions was small. In Australia the split of questions with an explicit territorial reference addressed to ministers and to the Prime Minister was equal. In Canada, questions with territorial references were mainly addressed to ministers, which suggests that territorial matters are not a priority when addressing the Prime Minister; putting the Prime Minister on the spot on national level policy issues is more important.

### **Backbenchers are the main actors who perform territorial representation**

In line with expectations, backbenchers were the main actors who used explicit territorial references in their questions. Across systems, there were very few territorial references in questions from MPs in leadership roles. In Ireland, where the main questioners are party leaders, there was almost no evidence of territorial references in questions. Where party leaders engaged in territorial representation, this resulted from a very small number of questions from leaders of regional parties in Canada (the Leader of Bloc Québécois) and in the UK (the leaders of the Scottish National Party and the Democratic Unionist Party).

### **MPs may use territorial references for different purposes**

#### ➤ **Territorial representation is not always isolated from other strategic uses of questions.**

Firstly, MPs use territorial references in questions to contribute to the case made by their own side. In Australia, a notable pattern was the use of local references as an attack strategy on the government's carbon tax, in questions from opposition backbenchers and frontbenchers. This type of highly coordinated 'opposition mode' (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018) behaviour is not found in any other of the systems analysed here. The use of territorial references in this case is purely instrumental to a party strategy.

The most interesting patterns of association between conflict and support and territorial representation were in the UK, where actors from both sides used territorial references to make critical or appreciative remarks, mainly in questions that linked local issues to national issues. Government backbenchers mainly used conflictual remarks to attack the opposition, and used local references to showcase the poor record of the opposition party in local or regional politics, such as decisions taken by Labour-led councils or Labour's management of the NHS in Wales.

For government backbenchers, local references may also be an alternative avenue to criticise the government: using local cases gives them an opportunity to show criticism and also pursue their constituency role, without damaging the government's image at PMQs. Government backbenchers also use local representation as part of their support strategy, by showcasing positive consequences of government decisions at the local level.

As opposition backbenchers generally use conflictual remarks to target a broad range of issues referring to prime ministerial or government decisions, local references may be useful to a degree, but there is a much wider scope of policy that may not be related to local politics, or for which local references may not be relevant.

➤ **But territorial references are also used for purely representational purposes**

This analysis also identified purely local, constituency-focused questions that are not associated with either conflict or support. These purely local questions perform other micro-level functions: demands for action in connection to local issues; but also publicity-seeking in the form of asking the Prime Minister to comment positively on events in the constituency or to visit the member's constituency. The latter is mainly associated with constituency representation, and particularly with constituency representation in the UK.

## **Procedural conclusions**

The analysis allows us to posit some conclusions about procedural rules and how they are associated with territorial representation. In systems that create institutional incentives for MPs to engage in territorial representation, and where questioning mechanisms are public, high-profile occasions:

- Questioning mechanisms that allow more participation from backbenchers will encourage territorial representation, and contribute to the territorial representation aspect of linkage.
- Backbench MPs will potentially engage more in territorial representation if they have more room to act independently during questioning, and less if they are required to use questions as instructed by their parties.
- Questioning mechanisms that allow more participation from MPs in leadership roles will display less evidence of territorial representation, and contribute less to the territorial facet of linkage.



## Chapter 10. Conclusions

In this thesis I asked how prime ministers are questioned by parliaments in parliamentary democracies: what mechanisms are available in different parliaments, how these mechanisms operate, and what functions they perform. In this final chapter I review the empirical evidence and findings presented in the thesis, discuss how they relate to existing academic literature, present potential policy implications, discuss the limitations of the inferences that can be made from this research, and consider future directions of research.

### 10.1. Research findings

Using a two-stage research strategy combining a cross-national survey and a comparative case study design, this thesis offers the first comprehensive mapping of the mechanisms through which parliamentary actors may question prime ministers across parliamentary democracies, as well as a detailed documentation of the operation of such mechanisms in Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the UK. In this section I review the main findings of the empirical chapters and discuss how they contribute to our understanding of the relationship between prime ministers and parliaments.

The first question proposed at the outset concerned the variation of questioning mechanisms across systems. **Chapter 4** provided extensive documentation of types of mechanisms in 31 countries and illustrated their diversity. I found that all parliaments included in the study provide a mechanism for routine questioning of the prime minister: this relationship is a key component of the politics of parliamentary democracies, so regularised contact is necessary. Collective plenary procedures are the most common type, found in 21 out of 31 countries. Individualised mechanisms remain less frequent, but the UK is not unique in allowing regular individualised questioning of the prime minister; similar mechanisms operate in Norway, Sweden, Portugal and Croatia. The majority of plenary procedures allow moderate exposure of the prime minister, in terms of frequency of questioning, the spontaneity of questioning, and the degree to which follow-up questions create potential for probing. Committee questioning, as in the UK Liaison Committee, is much less common, and Japan remains outstanding by organising the questioning of the prime minister primarily in committees. Most countries also provide a questioning mechanism convened exceptionally, usually in the form of urgent questions, to allow parliamentarians a ‘fire alarm’ mechanism to summon prime ministers to explain a particular situation.

The second question asked the degree to which different questioning mechanisms perform accountability, and how; and the degree to which they contribute to other functions of parliaments. Using content analysis of parliamentary debates in a comparative case study design, **Chapters 5-9** investigated accountability, conflict, support, and territorial representation in questions to prime ministers in the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia.

**Chapter 5** introduced the features of the questioning mechanisms in the four countries and the rules and conventions that govern them. Written rules of procedure and conventions have a key role in regulating questioning, but party control also plays a role. In Ireland the Prime Minister is questioned primarily by party leaders, who act as spokespersons for their parties. The Leader of the Official Opposition plays a prominent role in all four countries, and Leaders are the ‘first movers’ in questioning the Prime Minister. The rules of procedure in Canada explicitly privilege the opposition, and allow very little participation from government backbenchers. Australia allows a more balanced participation from both leaders and backbenchers, but the UK remains the most balanced in terms of allowing both opposition and government backbenchers to question the Prime Minister, and allowing the most extensive participation

from government backbenchers out of the four mechanisms. Parties manage questioning strategies: this takes a pronounced form in Canada and Australia, with parties in effect handing lists of questioners to the Speaker in Canada, and determining topics of questions behind the scenes in Australia. This also results in tactical and coordinated behaviour during questioning. In the UK, party coordination mainly concerns preparing the Leader of the Opposition, and to a much lesser degree coordinating backbenchers. Sequence also matters: the Canadian Prime Minister almost never interacts with government backbenchers, whereas in the UK and in Australia the Speaker alternates between opposition and government members, which gives prime ministers in the two countries a question from their own side to fall back on after a question from the opposition.

The analysis in **Chapters 6 and 7** highlighted important differences in the practice of accountability in the four countries. The first focus concerned the degree to which mechanisms target prime ministerial responsibilities. Questioning in Ireland closely targeted prime ministerial responsibilities, whilst questioning in the UK mainly focused on topical affairs, with considerably less focus on direct personal prime ministerial responsibilities. I posited that these discrepancies are driven primarily by the procedural difference in the openness of questioning, and by the role of the questioning mechanism in the political system: PMQs is the venue for topical affairs, whilst Oral Questions to the Taoiseach is the mechanism for close scrutiny. The topics on which prime ministers were asked questions in collective procedures in Canada and Australia also differed, as did the degree to which questions targeted prime ministerial responsibilities. Question Period in Canada covered prime ministerial responsibilities to a considerably larger degree than Question Time in Australia, where the main focus was on topical issues. This contrast suggests that collective mechanisms may also allow focus on prime ministerial responsibilities. **Chapter 6** also showed that, during the period studied, prime ministers were overall asked more about their own actions and decisions in individualised mechanisms, and were asked to speak more for the government in collective mechanisms.

**Chapter 7** showed that the performance of accountability involves information-seeking, but also securing commitments, asking the prime minister to express personal views, and attributing responsibility. It also takes both retrospective and prospective forms: prime ministers are not only asked to explain and justify past decisions, but also to set out what steps they or the government intend to take in response to particular situations. The analysis of the behaviour of actors provided three main conclusions that may be linked to procedural features, but also to theoretical debates about the functions of parliamentary questioning mechanisms. Firstly, MPs in leadership roles performed relatively similar forms of accountability across all cases that allow spontaneous questioning. Leaders of the Opposition had an incisive style of accountability and focused more on asking the Prime Minister to respond to accusations than other party leaders and frontbenchers in all systems except for Ireland. The main behavioural differences appear at the backbench level: UK backbenchers displayed a much more diverse range of behaviours in questions than their counterparts in the other countries. Aside from information-seeking questions that are meant to help the Prime Minister to make a positive statement about the government's achievements, government backbenchers in the UK also made genuine requests for information about policy; demanded action in connection to constituency issues, and even asked the Prime Minister to respond to accusations. Backbench behaviour in other systems appears more cohesive. For example, the prevalence of information-seeking questions in the case of government backbenchers in Australia suggested a high frequency of 'helpful' questions.

Thirdly, procedural rules are important in constraining forms of questioning. The requirement to submit questions in writing in advance, and the requirement that supplementary questions must be connected to the questions submitted in writing, means that a majority of questions were primarily information-seeking in Ireland.

**Chapter 8** found that questioning performs a clear conflict function in the UK, Australia and Canada, and much less in Ireland. In terms of the patterns of conflict, questions are mainly used for political conflictual remarks criticising the government or the Prime Minister, and much less for policy criticism.

In terms of the behaviour of different actors, the chapter confirms some expectations, but also shows surprising findings. The behaviour of parliamentary actors is mostly in line with their government/opposition status. Again, the most notable differences are in the behavioural patterns of backbench MPs across systems, particularly government backbench MPs. There are very few instances of explicit conflictual remarks directed at the opposition in questions from government backbenchers in Australia. Considering the famously adversarial nature of the Australian parliament, this is surprising. Government backbenchers in the UK participated in conflict to criticise the opposition, as expected. But they also made some critical remarks referring to policy, or to the government, which brings further evidence to the distinctiveness of backbench behaviour in the UK.

Evidence suggests important cultural differences in the ways in which support is performed across systems: explicit manifestation of support was very rare in all cases aside from the UK. Government backbenchers in the UK are the main actors performing explicit support, in the form of explicit appreciative remarks in questions. Government backbenchers in Australia perform support mainly in an implicit, latent way, by asking 'helpful' questions. Opposition MPs generally made very few appreciative remarks towards their own side, which suggests that, overall, opposition actors participate much more prominently in conflict and do not use speaking time to manifest support towards their own side.

As prime ministers face high levels of conflict during questioning, these occasions are an important test of their leadership and rhetorical abilities. But questioning also provides them with a platform, and across all four systems prime ministers used their speaking time forcefully to defend policy decisions and promote the government, and to disparage the opposition. Their conflictual remarks against the opposition were often fiercely partisan and personalised, whilst their supportive remarks referred to policy and the government. Compared to questioners, who were occasionally told off by Speakers, prime ministers appeared to be immune from any reprimand for their behaviour.

**Chapter 9** showed that, although all four systems provide institutional incentives for MPs to perform territorial representation through oral questions, PMQs is used as a venue for performing territorial representation much more than Question Time in Australia, Question Period in Canada, or Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland. Territorial representation is not always isolated from other strategic uses of questions, and is associated with conflict and support. But territorial references were also used for purely representational purposes: MPs asked purely local, constituency-focused questions that were not associated with either conflict or support. Territorial references were also used for inquiring about policy issues with broader national relevance by making use of local examples. Overall, PMQs appears to perform a much wider variety of functions than the other four mechanisms.

## 10.2. Contributions to academic literature

As the previous section demonstrates, this thesis makes an important addition to the literature on prime ministers, and on executive-legislative relations, which had not systematically addressed the relationship between heads of government and parliaments. As noted in **Chapter 2**, the literature offered useful points of reference on various matters connected to this topic, but the overall image of how this relationship operates remained largely fragmented. Previous studies had charted the frequency of interventions by prime ministers in parliament in the UK, Canada, Ireland and Italy (Dunleavy et al. 1990, 1993; Burnham et al. 1994; Elgie and Stapleton 2004; Rush 2014; Furlong 2004; Crimmins and Nesbitt-Larking 1996). PMQs had received significant attention in academic literature in the UK (Chester and Bowring 1962; Franklin and Norton 1993; Harris 2001; Bull and Wells 2012; Lovenduski 2012; Bates et al. 2014; Bevan and John 2016; Waddle et al. 2019) but it had not been integrated into a comparative study with questioning mechanisms in other countries. By mapping the mechanisms through which the prime minister - parliament relationship takes place across 31 countries, and by documenting its functioning in four countries, this thesis offers the first comprehensive account of this crucial component of executive-legislative relations in parliamentary democracies.

This thesis primarily contributes to the legislative studies literature that seeks to classify types of parliamentary mechanisms. Comparative studies of parliamentary mechanisms in both academic and practitioner literature had done considerable work to map the terrain with respect to oversight and accountability mechanisms generally (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2004; 2012; Yamamoto 2008; Russo and Wiberg 2011). But the specific mechanisms concerning the interaction with the head of government had been overlooked. By offering a systematic cross-country account of mechanisms, the survey data and typologies in **Chapter 4** present an important new mapping of a severely under-studied terrain, and a point of reference for the practitioner strand in legislative studies concerned with strengthening parliaments and with enhancing the effectiveness of parliamentary mechanisms. From a theoretical perspective, **Chapter 4** also provides the first descriptive typology of questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers.

### **Behaviours of parliamentary actors and modes of executive-legislative relations**

The second contribution relates to the modes of executive-legislative relations (King 1976; Andeweg and Nijzink 1995; Russell and Cowley 2018), both by focusing specifically on the relationship between prime ministers and different sets of parliamentary actors, and by deepening our understanding of specific modes by comparing the behaviour of different actors in different political systems.

**Chapters 6-9** contribute to the comparative literature on the behaviour of parliamentary actors, and on the roles of government and opposition in different parliamentary procedures. They describe the behaviour of parliamentary actors in backbench or leadership positions in four countries, and highlight important differences, particularly with respect to the diversity of behaviours displayed by backbenchers in the UK compared to their counterparts in Australia and Canada. This adds new, comparative insights regarding the behaviour of leaders and backbenchers in non-legislative activities, adding to previous studies of PMQs (Bates et al. 2014). For the UK, this also complements an important body of literature concerning the behaviour of backbenchers (for example Cowley 2002, 2005; Cowley and Stuart 2014; Russell et al. 2017; Russell and Gover 2017).

In particular, this thesis illustrates how interactions between prime ministers and parliamentarians, as facilitated by questioning mechanisms, map onto modes of executive-legislative relations (King 1976; Andeweg and Nijzink 1995; Russell and Cowley 2018), and suggests particular sub-types of each mode.

Most countries analysed here display a strong ‘opposition mode’ of prime minister-parliament relations in the form of concerted attacks of the opposition frontbench and backbench against the head of government. The opposition mode is particularly strong in Canada, Australia, and in the UK, with interactions characterised by conflictual questions deployed by opposition leaders and supported by backbenchers. In its classical, conflictual form, this mode appears weakest in Ireland, where levels of conflict were much lower during Enda Kenny’s premiership. The opposition focused their questions on detailed scrutiny rather than on adversarial remarks, pointing towards a non-conflictual variant of the opposition mode.

The intra-party mode, defined as the relationship between the government and its backbenchers (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018), is present in procedures where government backbenchers have extensive access to questioning the prime minister, and takes two forms: a ‘latent’ and an ‘explicit’ support mode. The latent intra-party support mode is illustrated by government backbenchers in Australia, where the evidence in **Chapters 7 and 8** suggested that they primarily support the government through information-seeking, helpful questions, but do not make overtly appreciative remarks. A similar latent mode prevails in Canada, where government backbenchers are reduced to asking ‘helpful’ questions to ministers at Question Period, and rarely question the prime minister. There is some evidence of this mode at PMQs in the UK, with backbenchers asking helpful questions. However, the intra-party mode takes primarily an explicit support form in the UK: government backbenchers make clear appreciative remarks in their questions, offering their support for the government, for policy, and for the prime minister.

As we would expect, the non-party mode, understood as instances of parliamentarians working across party lines (King 1976; Russell and Cowley 2018), applies much less to plenary questioning mechanisms that include prime ministers than to other parliamentary setting such as Select Committees (Benton and Russell 2012; Russell et al. 2015). As Uhr (2009) pointed out in connection to the New Zealand parliament, some procedures - particularly Question Time - are more conducive to opposition mode behaviour. There are cases of criticism of government policy coming from government backbenchers in the UK, but such examples remain rare. As illustrated by **Chapters 7 and 9**, PMQs displays evidence of what King (1976) originally termed the ‘Private Member mode’. Backbenchers from both government and opposition in the UK do not just use their questions to the prime minister to support their own side, but also demand action for their constituencies. **Chapter 9** found that territorial representation is an important part of the work of parliamentarians at PMQs, and that many such questions are purely local questions in connection to a member’s constituency. As evidence in **Chapter 5** suggests, this may be due to the lower degree of party control at PMQs in the UK, compared to Canada and Australia, which allows backbenchers more room for manoeuvre.

Beyond the group-level interactions conceptualised by King (1976), Andeweg and Nijzink (1995), and Russell and Cowley (2018), questioning mechanisms also illustrate the dynamics of individual-level interactions centred on political leaders, as exemplified by the key interaction between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition.

### **Functions of legislatures**

The third contribution to legislative studies concerns the functions of questioning mechanisms and functions of parliaments, covered in **Chapters 6-9**. This thesis described how questioning mechanisms in four countries contribute to varying degrees to key functions of legislatures: accountability, conflict management, support, and territorial representation. This connects a previously understudied crucial

area of parliamentary activity (questioning prime ministers) to the roles performed by parliaments in different political systems.

An overview of the four cases suggests that various combinations of functions are possible: Oral Questions to the Taoiseach contributes significantly to the legislature's accountability function, with particular emphasis on personal prime ministerial accountability; and the UK's PMQs presents by far the most diverse range of functions, with a relatively weaker emphasis on personal prime ministerial accountability, but important contributions to conflict management, support, and territorial representation.

Three of the four parliaments contribute significantly to the conflict management function of legislatures. The high levels of adversarial behaviour indicate that Question Time in Australia, Question Period in Canada and PMQs in the UK perform a crucial 'tension release' or 'safety valve' function (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Pakenham 1970) in these parliaments, providing parliamentarians with an opportunity to express criticism. As part of parliament's legitimation and system maintenance functions (Pakenham 1970; Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Kreppel 2010), questioning mechanisms in the UK, Canada and Australia provide an arena for parliamentarians to express support for the government. To the extent that the adversarial nature of Question Time in Australia and PMQs in the UK is cultural, and MPs are trained into a 'way of doing' questioning (Lovenduski 2012), these mechanisms also contribute to parliament's role as a training ground and learning space for the socialisation of political elites (Norton 1990; Mezey 1979; Pakenham 1970; Lowenberg and Patterson 1979).

The contribution of questioning mechanisms to linkage and representation varied significantly across the four countries: whilst PMQs performs an explicit territorial representation function, this function is much weaker in the questioning mechanisms in Canada and Australia, and virtually non-existent in Ireland.

This thesis has focused primarily on measuring observable behaviour during questioning, and on inferring intra-parliamentary consequences of behaviour; but questioning undoubtedly also contributes to other functions of parliaments that reach beyond the parliamentary arena, and the behavioural patterns identified in the thesis indicate their presence. As questioning is a public-facing, high-profile parliamentary activity, both prime ministers and parliamentarians may use this opportunity to signal their positions on various issues to the media and to the public. Their conflictual and supportive remarks, as well as their statements on policy reach beyond the partisan game of questioning. Question Time contributes to parliament's leadership testing and recruitment functions by exposing political leaders to scrutiny for their performance both from parliamentarians, but also from the wider public.

### **Accountability and prime ministerial responsibility**

Connectedly, the thesis contributes to the literature on the practices and processes of political accountability (Mulgan 2003; Bovens 2007, 2010; Olsen 2013; Mansbridge 2014) by looking at the parliamentary accountability of heads of government. **Chapters 6** and **7** document the practice of accountability extensively in four countries, by looking at how prime ministers are held to account on their responsibilities, and how responsibility is attributed to them, as well as at the types of accountability performed by different parliamentary actors. As discussed in **Chapter 2**, the principal-agent model of executive-legislative relations (Bergman et al. 2003, Laver and Shepsle 1999) was largely silent about the precise accountability relationship between parliament and the prime minister. By documenting practices associated with the parliamentary accountability of heads of government, this research finally sheds light on this 'missing link' in the chain of delegation (Bergman et al. 2003) between parliaments and cabinets in parliamentary democracies.

**Chapter 6** exposes the tension between collective, prime ministerial, and individual ministerial authority in parliamentary systems, and documents the practices of accountability in connection to it. The evidence presented in **Chapter 6**, pointing towards predominantly individualised language in questions, and the attribution of responsibility to the prime minister for a wide variety of topics, raises interesting constitutional implications for the UK.

The fact that parliamentarians choose to hold the prime minister *personally* accountable for issues spanning across all areas of policy indicates the potential emergence of a doctrine of ‘prime ministerial responsibility’, akin to the German constitutional principle of ‘Kanzlerprinzip’, which explicitly attributes responsibility to the Chancellor for all matters related to federal policy. This leads to important normative questions regarding whether prime ministers should predominantly be held accountable for this overarching steering role as heads of government. A more explicit recognition of this emerging principle could clarify the place of prime ministerial authority alongside ministerial responsibility and collective cabinet responsibility, and could thus bring more clarity to the ambiguous position of the prime minister in the UK constitution.

However, the main constitutional lesson of Chapter 6 is that there is still insufficient recognition of the need for prime ministers to be held to account for matters for which they are personally or jointly responsible for, such as appointments in the political system. Emphasis on their steering role should not obscure these matters, as this risks leaving important accountability gaps. Building on evidence from **Chapters 6-8**, the next section details how the rules of procedure of questioning mechanisms can be designed to target specific aspects of prime ministerial responsibility.

### 10.3. Policy implications

The findings in this thesis are potentially of interest to practitioners and proponents of parliamentary reform. Considering the long-standing interest of both academics and practitioners in designing parliamentary mechanisms that are effective in performing their roles, the primary question of interest is how to design and/or reform mechanisms in order to achieve specific goals. To that effect, this thesis provides comparative evidence of what types of mechanisms exist in different countries, how they operate, and what outcomes they produce in terms of how prime ministers are questioned and held to account, and also identifies key procedural features that affect the process of questioning.

A first potential question for reformers would be how to design procedural rules that may lead to more focus on personal prime ministerial responsibilities during questioning. **Chapter 6** showed that the degree to which questioning is more or less spontaneous has an effect on the types of topics raised in questions. Spontaneous questioning was predominantly associated with topical affairs in Canada, Australia and in the UK. The requirement to submit written questions in advance in Ireland limited questions to topics that fell primarily within the prime minister’s remit. Based on evidence from Ireland presented in **Chapter 6**, to design a mechanism that creates more focus on prime ministerial accountability, the following procedural features would be beneficial:

- 1) Questions should be submitted in writing in advance of the session, and they must take a specific, information-seeking form.
- 2) Questions should be vetted to comply with these requirements.
- 3) Any follow-up questions asked during the session should be connected to questions submitted in writing, and otherwise ruled out of order.

A second question concerns whether one mechanism is sufficient to ensure adequate scrutiny of the prime minister, or whether several are necessary. This study has shown that there are potential connections between the types of questioning allowed by different mechanisms. Whether a country should implement one or several questioning mechanisms depends on what the aims are: for example to create a forum for discussing current, topical affairs with the head of government; or to create a mechanism that is more honed on questioning prime ministerial responsibilities. Multiple combinations of mechanisms are possible. For example, questioning may be carried out through a routine mechanism that allows parliamentarians to discuss topical, current affairs with the prime minister. This could be either individualised, as PMQs in the UK, or collective, as Question Time in Australia. In either case, countries may then wish to introduce an additional, complementary mechanism to target prime ministerial activity specifically. This could take the form of an individualised committee mechanism, like the Liaison Committee in the UK, or an individualised plenary mechanism with more closed questioning, like Oral Questions to the Taoiseach in Ireland. If the key concern is that a particular mechanism only facilitates political exchanges on topical affairs, and not enough scrutiny of prime ministerial responsibilities, the solution would be either to restrict that mechanism to limit the kinds of exchanges that are possible within it, or to introduce an alternative mechanism to supplement the accountability function. As noted in **Chapter 6**, the absence of a mechanism that targets prime ministerial activity and responsibilities does create accountability gaps. Allowing a regular conversation with the political leader, but not addressing their responsibilities, is potentially problematic.

Connectedly, a third question that has often preoccupied proponents of reform in the UK and in Canada is the adversarial nature of questioning, and particularly how to discourage it. **Chapter 8** shows that having extensive rules regarding the content of questions does not inherently limit conflictual language in questions. If proponents of reform consider conflictual language to be detrimental to the quality of debate and of accountability, one solution would be to ensure more forceful enforcement of the rules by the Speaker.

A fourth question concerns patterns of participation: how to regulate participation to control which actors get to question prime ministers, considering the scarcity of plenary time. The first issue is what principle should guide the regulation of participation: should it privilege the opposition? Should it ensure balance between government and opposition actors? What kind of balance between backbenchers and MPs in leadership roles is appropriate?

As discussed in **Chapter 4**, organising participation concerns two procedural variables:

- a) **Question allocation method**: whether to restrict access by requiring members to submit questions in writing before the session; or to allow question allocation to be negotiated during the session.
- b) **Question allocation criteria**: whether to allocate questions proportionally to party groups, to privilege the opposition, or to allow more balanced questioning by alternating between government and opposition actors; and whether to allocate special rights to parliamentarians in leadership positions.

**Chapter 5** has shown that rules and conventions determine to a large degree who gets to participate in questioning. This may lead to imbalances: in Canada, the explicitly recognised privilege to the opposition leads to less questioning from government backbenchers. In turn, government backbenchers only perform a support function and ask helpful questions, instead of assuming a role in scrutinising the government. Evidence from the UK showed that the principle of alternating between the government and opposition allows equal interventions from government and opposition backbenchers.



Finally, evidence presented in **Chapters 5 and 8** suggests that time limits for questions and answers are an important dimension to take into account when designing a questioning mechanism. In Canada, short time limits for questions are considered problematic, as they limit questions to brief, often political snipes, without allowing more in-depth questions on particular issues. The same applies to short time limits for answers, with prime ministers and ministers limited in what they are able to cover within 35 seconds. Longer time limits also pose problems: in Ireland, where questions are often the length of short speeches, the Speaker intervened to ask members to pose a question, rather than to enter into a debate. As this dimension clearly produces important effects on the dynamics of the debate, careful consideration of time limits would be required in introducing new procedures or reforming existing ones.

#### **10.4. Limitations of research methods and findings**

Considering the absence of a systematic comparative analysis of the mechanisms that parliaments use to question prime ministers, this thesis assumed an exploratory mission. The two-pronged approach using a cross-national survey of rules and exploratory case studies aimed to go as far as possible within the time available in terms of breadth and depth, but nonetheless the design presents us with some limitations.

##### **Survey**

Firstly, the nature of the survey is cross-sectional, so it does not offer information about how rules of procedure have developed or changed over time. It covers variation across countries at a particular point in time: 2017-18 when the research was conducted. But evidence shows that procedures are often reformed, and a few changes happen each year. For example, in 2017 the German Bundestag introduced a monthly 'Questions to the Federal Chancellor' as an individualised mechanism. Another example concerns the weekly appearances of Justin Trudeau to answer questions alone since April 2017; and in Norway the standing orders were recently changed to allow more open questioning. Information captured in the survey was periodically updated during the research period when changes occurred.

Secondly, more could be done to explore how written rules apply in practice across countries. As noted in **Chapter 3**, the quality of replies from parliamentary officials varied. Whilst all countries for which a reply was received cover all the survey questions, there may be additional details that were not covered through correspondence. This applies to France and Italy, where satisfactory contact with officials could not be established by the time this research was completed. This leaves a gap in terms of understanding questioning procedures in more depth in two large European democracies. The gap can be mitigated by following up on contacts and correspondence in a future stage of preparing the thesis for publication.

Thirdly, the survey went as far as possible in covering a significant number of variables relevant to the process of questioning. It has done so by building on dimensions developed by the literature, but also remaining attentive to additional dimensions revealed in rules of procedure and by corresponding with officials. The study also uncovered dimensions which fell slightly outside its initial scope, but would add useful insights to the functioning of questioning mechanisms. One such dimension is the degree of informal involvement of political parties in the questioning process. Investigating the mechanisms through which parties achieve this would require additional research, for example through interviews with party officials in the countries of interest. Whilst the survey was helpful in uncovering the presence of party coordination and strategic behaviour, it did not go far enough in investigating how this operated.

## Case Study Design

The case study research design aimed to cover significant ground in looking at the practice of questioning. Aside from coding debates and using secondary literature, information and behavioural patterns uncovered were cross-checked with parliamentary officials. The research design employed in the case studies offers a basis for making descriptive inferences related to each case, and allows some ground for cross-case comparisons. The nature of the case studies is illustrative and exemplary: they indicate how types of mechanisms operate in particular countries. But the degree to which we can generalise from this is limited. Whilst studying individualised mechanisms in Ireland and the UK went some way into illustrating how such types operate, it would be difficult to generalise to other countries that also operate individualised procedures.

The sessions which were coded cover the entire time span of each premiership, and were randomly stratified by year, which makes us confident that the analysis reflects behavioural patterns that applied for the entire duration of each premiership studied. However, the analysis focuses on one premiership in each country, which limits the extent to which findings reflect the behaviour of actors over time. For example, in the case of the UK, previous studies suggest that PMQs reached a peak of adversarialism during David Cameron's premiership (Bull and Wells 2012). Connectedly, this analysis does not allow us to draw precise causal connections between procedural rules and behaviour; it only allows us to observe behaviour under specific conditions, and to discuss potential connections between procedural rules and aspects of behaviour. In some cases, the coding may be capturing effects of significant debates happening at the time. For example, in Australia, the Gillard government's carbon tax was very controversial throughout her premiership. This raises the question of whether, under different circumstances, we would observe similar levels of conflict in questions and answers.

## Content analysis

Some of the limitations of this study are connected to the limitations of qualitative content analysis generally. As discussed in **Chapter 3**, extensive steps were taken to ensure a thorough and comprehensive development of the coding scheme, ensuring that threats to validity and reliability were mitigated. This process was negotiated successfully, as shown in the process of reliability testing and repeated iterations of pilot coding. Nonetheless, qualitative content analysis inherently involves a degree of interpretation by coders, and some coding categories may only capture pure semantic and presentational differences.

It is likely that some behavioural patterns also reflect the individual style of different actors. This analysis seeks to map behavioural patterns in order to illustrate how parliamentary questions may be used for different purposes; the degree to which they are used for these purposes may differ between individuals in the same role. For example, it is likely that other Leaders of the Opposition in Australia may be less conflictual than Tony Abbott was during Julia Gillard's premiership. Moreover, it is likely that some actors are less confrontational in particular interactions than in others: for the UK, Waddle et al. (2019) suggest that David Cameron was less adversarial at PMQs in his second premiership when he was facing Jeremy Corbyn as Leader of the Opposition. A replication of this study over time within a single country would provide further evidence of the extent to which behavioural patterns are influenced by individual style.

## 10.5. Directions for future study

This thesis has covered ground in advancing our understanding of how prime ministers are questioned in parliaments in parliamentary democracies, but some notable gaps remain, and offer starting points for future study of this key component of democratic politics. To advance the study of prime ministers and parliaments, further exploration can be undertaken with respect to the operation of rules, the behaviour of parliamentary actors, and the functions and roles of questioning mechanisms that concern prime ministers.

The first key direction of study concerns the operation of rules. As noted in section 10.3, the dimensions identified in the survey could offer a starting point for a comparative large N longitudinal study of questioning mechanisms, tracking how they have changed over time. This would be a notable addition to the legislative studies strand concerned with the origins of legislative institutions and trends in procedural changes over time (for example Sieberer et al. 2011; Sieberer et al. 2016; Spirling 2014; Zubek 2015; Goet et al. 2019). Such analysis would help uncover trends: for example, evidence presented in **Chapter 4** noted that some countries, such as Germany and Norway, have recently introduced individualised mechanisms similar to the UK PMQs. Further longitudinal research could also investigate such instances of procedural learning between countries. As noted in section 10.3, the degree to which this study managed to cover aspects of practice at the large N level varies. A more in-depth discussion with parliamentary officials in each country would fill any gaps of knowledge left by this study.

The case studies offered important in-depth descriptive insights into how questioning mechanisms operate, and identified some aspects that might have broader comparative relevance. A key insight was that understanding the operation of mechanisms needs to go beyond written rules. Questioning in Canada and Australia is managed by parties: there are specialised party committees that specialise in coordinating the questioning strategy of each party. Firstly, this could be studied further in each of the case study countries. To my knowledge, there is no existing study regarding intra-party mechanisms and tactics at questioning mechanisms. An in-depth qualitative study of these mechanisms, using interviews with parliamentarians involved in tactics committees, would offer meaningful insights into how questioning mechanisms operate, beyond what can be inferred from the rules. Secondly, as this has wider comparative relevance, a survey similar to the one used in this study – contacting practitioners in each country – could be used to map the degree to which such intra-party mechanisms also exist in other countries. A cross-country study of formal and informal intra-party mechanisms for coordinating behaviour during questioning would offer important insights into executive-legislative relations, but also to the literature on intra-party organisation and parliamentary party groups.

Turning to behavioural patterns, the second key direction concerns how different actors understand their roles and use their speaking time. **Chapters 6-9** offered insights into how various actors behave and the types of questions they ask. This analysis of manifest content of parliamentary speech illustrates patterns of behaviour, but it does not offer sufficient ground to infer what drives these patterns. What motivates actors to ask different types of questions? Clearly, a part of this variation is accounted for by government and opposition roles, but other factors such as seniority, electoral incentives, career goals, or personal style and perception of role may also play an important part. Research into the motivations for asking different questions could take various forms: a mix of survey and in-depth interview methods would bring further insights into what drives questioning behaviour in particular countries. This would add new insights to the literature concerned with the behaviour of actors during questioning, which has so far not included in-depth qualitative studies.

**Chapter 8** has provided evidence that the conflictual nature of questioning mechanisms may be a recognised, established cultural feature. But what exactly explains this? Studies on the UK have suggested that parliamentarians are socialised in a conflictual, adversarial style of questioning (Lovenduski 2012). **Chapter 8** demonstrated that this also seems to be accepted by Speakers, who allow conflictual interactions to a significant degree. Further research could be done through interviews to explore the conflictual culture of Question Time, but also to explore other aspects of culture in connection to questioning.

The third key direction concerns the functions of mechanisms in political systems. This thesis explored the functions of different mechanisms and described how they are carried out, but has not sought explicitly to evaluate whether they are better or worse at performing their intended roles. This would be an important mission for future studies. The notion of 'effectiveness', understood as the degree to which a particular mechanism performs its intended role adequately, and produces the desired effects, is of interest in both academic and practitioner legislative studies. In the case of mechanisms for questioning prime ministers, measuring effectiveness firstly requires defining the role of the mechanism, as well as the observable effects of its functioning. If the primary function is to hold prime ministers to account for matters that are within their remit, and for their decisions, the discussion in **Chapter 6** proposed that this ought to involve a productive exchange of information with the prime minister, concerning primarily issues for which they are personally or jointly responsible. An effective mechanism would, in this sense, need to facilitate a dialogue that involves primarily exchanges of information, and which facilitates focus on matters for which prime ministers are personally or jointly responsible.

This thesis has showed that questioning mechanisms may perform different functions. Consequently, the key challenge in measuring effectiveness will be to determine whether the mechanism in question is less effective at performing accountability in the narrow sense defined here because it performs other functions better. The first step, therefore, for future studies, is conceptual: to define effectiveness in terms of the function that is measured, and to set out the observable implications of that function. The next step would be to trace the presence of such observable implications in the content of interactions that take place within a particular mechanism. Using individual case studies, this would help to establish the degree to which mechanisms in different systems achieve the aim of holding the prime minister accountable. This descriptive analysis could then offer a basis to ask causal questions regarding the factors that make a questioning mechanism more, or less effective.

## Appendix 1A. List of rules of procedure

The year indicates the latest update of the rules, where that indication was available.

No.	Legislature/Chamber	Rules of procedure and reference
1.	Australia: House of Representatives	Standing Orders (2017) <a href="http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/House_of_Representatives_Standing_Orders">http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/House_of_Representatives_Standing_Orders</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
2.	Austria: National Council	Federal Law on the Rules of Procedure of the Austrian National Council (2016) <a href="https://www.parlament.gv.at/ENGL/PERK/RGES/GOGNR/">https://www.parlament.gv.at/ENGL/PERK/RGES/GOGNR/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
3.	Belgium: House of Representatives	The Rules of Procedure of the Belgian House of Representatives (2014) <a href="https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/reglement/reglement_UK.pdf">https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/reglement/reglement_UK.pdf</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
4.	Bulgaria: National Assembly	Rules of procedure (2017) <a href="http://www.parliament.bg/en/rulesoftheorganisations">http://www.parliament.bg/en/rulesoftheorganisations</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
5.	Canada: House of Commons	House of Commons Standing Orders (2019) <a href="http://www.parl.gc.ca/about/house/standingorders/toc-e.htm">http://www.parl.gc.ca/about/house/standingorders/toc-e.htm</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
6.	Croatia: Parliament	Standing Orders <a href="https://www.legislationline.org/download/action/download/id/2056/file/Croatia_StandingOrdershtm/preview">https://www.legislationline.org/download/action/download/id/2056/file/Croatia_StandingOrdershtm/preview</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
7.	Czech Republic: Chamber of Deputies	Rules of procedure (2015) <a href="http://www.psp.cz/en/docs/laws/1995/90_index.html">http://www.psp.cz/en/docs/laws/1995/90_index.html</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
8.	Denmark: Folketing	Standing Orders (2016) <a href="https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/~media/pdf/publikationer/english/standing_orders_of_the_danish_parliament.ashx">https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/~media/pdf/publikationer/english/standing_orders_of_the_danish_parliament.ashx</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
9.	Finland: Eduskunta	Rules of procedure (2015) <a href="https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/tietoeduskunnasta/Documents/RulesofProcedure_20150416.pdf">https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/tietoeduskunnasta/Documents/RulesofProcedure_20150416.pdf</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
10.	France: National Assembly	Rule of procedure (2010) <a href="http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/langues/welcome-to-the-english-website-of-the-french-national-assembly">http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/langues/welcome-to-the-english-website-of-the-french-national-assembly</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
11.	Germany: Bundestag	German Bundestag Rules of Procedure (2017) <a href="https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/index.php?sid=1dcd39e2dd195828ca18e8a2542009b3&amp;navi=1&amp;subnavi=50&amp;anr=10080000">https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/index.php?sid=1dcd39e2dd195828ca18e8a2542009b3&amp;navi=1&amp;subnavi=50&amp;anr=10080000</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
12.	Greece:Hellenic Parliament	Rules of procedure <a href="http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/">http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/</a> <a href="http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/Kanonismos-tis-Voulis/">http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/Kanonismos-tis-Voulis/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
13.	Hungary:House of the National Assembly	Act of the National Assembly (2014) <a href="http://www.parlament.hu/web/house-of-the-national-assembly">http://www.parlament.hu/web/house-of-the-national-assembly</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
14.	Iceland: Althingi	Standing orders (2011) <a href="https://www.althingi.is/english/about-the-parliament/standing-orders-of-the-althingi-/">https://www.althingi.is/english/about-the-parliament/standing-orders-of-the-althingi-/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)

15.	Ireland: Dáil Eireann	Standing Orders (2016) <a href="http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/about/publications/standingorders/">http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/about/publications/standingorders/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
16.	Israel: Knesset	Rules of procedure (2012) <a href="http://knesset.gov.il/rules/eng/contents.htm">http://knesset.gov.il/rules/eng/contents.htm</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
17.	Italy: Chamber of Deputies	Rules of procedure (2012) <a href="http://en.camera.it/4?scheda_informazioni=31">http://en.camera.it/4?scheda_informazioni=31</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
18.	Japan: Diet	Rules of procedure <a href="http://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/law/diet/index.htm">http://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/law/diet/index.htm</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
19.	Latvia: Saeima	Rules of procedure <a href="http://www.saeima.lv/en/about-saeima/work-of-the-saeima/rules-of-procedure/">http://www.saeima.lv/en/about-saeima/work-of-the-saeima/rules-of-procedure/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
20.	Luxembourg: Chamber of deputies	Rules of procedure (2019) <a href="http://www.chd.lu/wps/portal/public/Accueil/OrganisationEtFonctionnement/RoleInstitutionnel/CadreJuridiqueChambre(Fr)">http://www.chd.lu/wps/portal/public/Accueil/OrganisationEtFonctionnement/RoleInstitutionnel/CadreJuridiqueChambre(Fr)</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
21.	Macedonia: Assembly	Rules of procedure <a href="http://www.sobranie.mk/rules-procedures-of-the-assembly-ns_article-rules-of-procedure-of-the-assembly-of-the-republic-of-macedonia.nsp">http://www.sobranie.mk/rules-procedures-of-the-assembly-ns_article-rules-of-procedure-of-the-assembly-of-the-republic-of-macedonia.nsp</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
22.	The Netherlands: House of Representatives	Rules of procedure (2018) <a href="https://www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/services-public/rules-procedure">https://www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/services-public/rules-procedure</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
23.	New Zealand: House of Representatives	Standing Orders (2014) <a href="https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/parliamentary-rules/standing-orders/document/00HOHPBReferenceStOrders4/standing-orders-of-the-house-of-representatives-2014">https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/parliamentary-rules/standing-orders/document/00HOHPBReferenceStOrders4/standing-orders-of-the-house-of-representatives-2014</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
24.	Norway: Storting	Rules of procedure (2018) <a href="https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/Parliamentary-procedure/">https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/Parliamentary-procedure/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
25.	Portugal: Assembly of the Republic	Rules of procedure (2018) <a href="http://www.en.parlamento.pt/Parliament/">http://www.en.parlamento.pt/Parliament/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
26.	Romania: Chamber of Deputies	Rules of procedure (2017) <a href="http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act4_1&amp;par1=0">http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act4_1&amp;par1=0</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
27.	Slovakia: National Council of the Slovak Republic	ACT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (1996) <a href="https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/en-US/NRSR/Dokumenty/rules_of_procedure.pdf">https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/en-US/NRSR/Dokumenty/rules_of_procedure.pdf</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
28.	Slovenia: National Assembly	Rules of procedure (2017) <a href="https://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/en/Home/ODrzavnemZboru/PristojnostiInFunkcije/RulesoftheProcedureText!/ut/p/z1/04_Si9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8zinfyCTD293Q0N3MOczAw8QwJcXE0tLlWsgk31wwkpiAJKG-AAjgb6BbmhigBFIUkx/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/">https://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/en/Home/ODrzavnemZboru/PristojnostiInFunkcije/RulesoftheProcedureText!/ut/p/z1/04_Si9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8zinfyCTD293Q0N3MOczAw8QwJcXE0tLlWsgk31wwkpiAJKG-AAjgb6BbmhigBFIUkx/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
29.	Spain: Congress of Deputies	Rules of Procedure <a href="http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso/Hist_Normas/Norm/standing_orders_02.pdf">http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso/Hist_Normas/Norm/standing_orders_02.pdf</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)

<b>30.</b>	Sweden: Riksdag	Rules of procedure: <a href="http://www.riksdagen.se/en/documents-and-laws/">http://www.riksdagen.se/en/documents-and-laws/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)
<b>31.</b>	UK: House of Commons	Standing Orders of the House of Commons (2018) <a href="https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/commons/standing-orders-public11/">https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/commons/standing-orders-public11/</a> (Accessed 22/08/2019)

## Appendix 1B. Example of questionnaire sent to parliamentary officials BELGIUM

### 1. Types of mechanisms in the House of Representatives that allow questioning of prime ministers

<b>Oral questions</b>	Yes
<b>Statements followed by questions</b>	Unclear. The prime minister makes an annual statement to the Chamber of Representatives. The rules of procedure do not specify whether members may address questions after the statement.
<b>Questioning by committees</b>	Unclear. The Rules of Procedure mention a procedure for oral questions in committee, but it is not clear whether prime ministers may be addressed questions in committee.

**Summary of findings: Description of mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question the prime minister, as described in the Rules of Procedure.**

#### Question Time

**Setting:** Plenary

**Questioning:** collective – the prime minister appears together with other ministers

**Regularity:** weekly, at least once a week

**Duration:** one hour

**Attendance of the prime minister:** Unclear. The official record of debates shows that the prime minister occasionally attends Question Time.

#### Rules regarding questions

Questions must be submitted before 11am on the day when Question Time takes place. The President of the Chamber calls members to ask questions, and must alternate between government and opposition. Members have two minutes to ask a question, which is followed by a response which must not exceed two minutes. The member is then only allowed to make a one minute rejoinder, but cannot ask further questions.

#### Questionnaire – Part I

Based on the list included above, are there any mechanisms missing? Are there other mechanisms that allow parliamentarians to question the prime minister?

The rules of procedure also mention a procedure for oral questions in committee. Can prime ministers be called to answer questions in committee? Is this procedure ever used for questioning prime ministers?

Can the prime minister be asked questions in the Senate?

The prime minister makes an annual statement to the Chamber of Representatives, but the rules of procedure do not specify whether members may address questions after the statement. Can prime ministers be addressed questions after their statement?



Is this description of Question Time accurate?

### **Questionnaire – Part II**

How often does the prime minister attend Question Time? Are there any conventions regarding their attendance? Do they attend on specific occasions?

What is the role of political parties in the procedure of questioning? For example, do political groups have any internal mechanisms for determining which members ask questions?

What is the role of the President of the Chamber in the conduct of the procedure?

Is the prime minister's appearance in parliament a high profile event? Is it reported in the media?

In addition to all of the above, are there any other aspects regarding the relationship between the prime minister and the Chamber of Representatives that would be relevant, and are not covered here?

## Appendix 1C. Research Offices Contacted for Survey

Country	Legislature/Chamber	Contact office	Replied
Australia	House of Representatives	Department of the House of Representatives - Chamber Research Service	Yes
Austria	National Council	Information Office/Info team	Yes
Belgium	Chamber of Representatives	General information office	Yes
Bulgaria	National Assembly	Information and Administrative Center	Yes
Canada	House of Commons	Information Service	Yes
Croatia	Parliament	Information and Documentation Department	Yes
Czech Republic	Chamber of Deputies	General information office	Yes
Denmark	Folketing	Danish Parliament Information Centre	Yes
Finland	Eduskunta	Information Office	Yes
France	National Assembly	Information Office	Incomplete
Germany	Bundestag	Public information service	Yes
Greece	Hellenic Parliament	Press and Parliamentary Information Office	Yes
Hungary	National Assembly	Information Centre	Yes
Iceland	Althingi	Althingi Administration	Yes
India	Lok Sabha	Speaker's Research Initiative	No
Ireland	Dail Eireann	Library and Research Service	Yes
Israel	Knesset	Knesset Research and Information Center	No
Italy	Chamber of Deputies	Library of the Chamber of Deputies	Incomplete
Japan	House of Representatives	National Diet Library: Research and Legislative Reference Bureau	Yes
Latvia	Saeima	Visitor and Information Centre	Yes
Luxembourg	Chamber of Deputies	Information Service	Yes
Macedonia	Assembly/Sobranie	Preparation of Statistic Materials and Documentation and Library Department	Yes
Netherlands	House of Representatives/Tweede Kamer	Clerk of the Procedure Committee	Yes
New Zealand	House of Representatives	Parliamentary Information Service	Yes
Norway	Storting	Parliamentary Library	Yes
Portugal	Assembly of the Republic	Legislative and Parliamentary Information Division	Yes
Romania	Chamber of Deputies	Information Office	Yes
Slovakia	National Council	Info/Communications with Media and Public	No
Slovenia	National Assembly	Public Relations Office	Yes
Spain	Congress of Deputies	Documentation Department	Yes
Sweden	Riksdag	Riksdag Information Service	Yes
Switzerland	National Council	Parliamentary Library/Information Office	Yes

## Appendix 2. Preliminary Case Selection Research

Variables	UK	Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Ireland	Belgium	France
Type of parliament	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral	Unicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral
Territorial arrangements	Asymmetric devolution	Federal	Federal	Unitary	Unitary	Federal	Unitary (with some degree of administrative devolution)
Electoral system family	Plurality/Majority	Plurality/Majority	Plurality/Majority	Mixed	PR	PR	Plurality/Majority
Electoral system	FPTP	FPTP	AV	MMP	STV	List PR	Two-Round system
Questioning mechanisms	5	3	2	3	6	8	4
Questioning mechanisms for the prime minister	4	2	2	3	4	3	2
Accountability type	individualised	collective	collective	collective	individualised	collective	collective
Type of instrument	individualised	collective	collective	collective	individualised	collective	collective
Notice required	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Follow-up questions	initial questioner initially, other members subsequently	initial questioner only	any members present	any members present	initial questioner initially, other members subsequently	initial questioner initially, other members subsequently	Not allowed
Probing	extended	restricted	open	open	extended	extended	closed
Frequency of questioning of the prime minister	once a week	every sitting day	every sitting day	every sitting day	twice a week	once a week	twice a week
Average number of questions to the prime minister per questioning session in the period analysed	27	5	7	2	12	7	2

**Sources: General:** International IDEA (2019); Interparliamentary Union (2018); **UK:** MPs' Guide to Procedure House of Commons (2018); Kelly (2015); House of Commons Hansard; **Canada:** House of Commons Hansard; O'Brien and Bosc (2017); **Australia:** House of Representatives Hansard; Wright and Fowler (2012); **New Zealand:** New Zealand House of Representatives Hansard; House of Representatives Rules of Procedure; McGee (2017); **Ireland:** Dáil Debates Transcripts; Dáil Standing Orders; MacCarthaig (2005); **Belgium:** Rules of Procedure of the Belgian House of Representatives; Belgium House of Representatives (2019) Debates Transcripts; **France:** National Assembly Rules of Procedure (2010); National Assembly debate transcripts; Averages are author's calculation based on parliamentary debates transcripts cited above.

## Appendix 3.

### A. Options for sampling sessions

Sources: Author's calculations based on Döring and Manow (2016) and Casal Bertoa (2016); Interparliamentary Union (2018).

#### Collective mechanisms

##### Two minority governments

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
Canada	Stephen Harper I	2006-2008	32	2	Conservative	Minority	General election
Australia	Julia Gillard	2010-2013	36	3	Labor	Minority	Resignation

##### Two single-party majority governments

###### Option 1

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
Canada	Stephen Harper III	2011-2015	53	4	Conservative	Single-party majority	General election
Australia	Tony Abbott	2013-2015	23	1	Liberal–National Coalition	Single-party majority	Resignation

###### Option 2

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
Canada	Justin Trudeau	2015-incumbent	incumbent	incumbent	Liberal	Single-party majority	N/A
Australia	Tony Abbott	2013-2015	23	1	Liberal–National Coalition	Single-party majority	Resignation

#### Individualised procedures

##### Premierships brought in by a general election

###### Option 1

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
UK	David Cameron I	2010-2015	59	5	Conservative	Coalition	General election
Ireland	Enda Kenny I	2011-2016	59	5	Fine Gael	Coalition	General election

## Option 2

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
UK	David Cameron II	2015-2016	14	1	Conservative	Single-party majority	Resignation
Ireland	Enda Kenny II	2016-2017	13	1	Fine Gael	Coalition	Resignation

## Shorter premierships brought in by resignation of the previous prime minister

Country	Premiership	Time in office	duration (months)	duration (years)	Prime Minister's party	Type of government	Reason for termination
UK	Gordon Brown	2007-2010	34	2	Labour	Single-party majority	General election
Ireland	Brian Cowen	2008-2011	33	2	Fianna Fail	Coalition	General election

## B. Final list of cases: distribution of party seats in the lower house of parliament during the period analysed

Source: International Parliamentary Union (2018)

### Ireland: Distribution of seats in the Dail after the 2011 election

Party	Status	Seats
Fine Gael	Government	76
Labour Party	Government	37
Fianna Fail	Opposition	20
Independents	Opposition	15
Sinn Fein	Opposition	14
Socialist Party (PS)	Opposition	2
People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA)	Opposition	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>166</b>

### Australia: Distribution of seats in the House of Representatives after the 2010 election

Party	Status	Seats
Australian Labor Party (ALP)	Government	72
Liberal Party	Opposition	44
Liberal National Party of Queensland	Opposition	21
The Nationals	Opposition	7
Independents	Government	4
Greens	Opposition	1
Country Liberal Party (CLP)	Opposition	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>

**Canada: Distribution of seats in the House of Commons after the 2006 election**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Seats</b>
Conservative Party	Government	124
Liberal Party	Opposition	103
Bloc Québécois (BQ)	Opposition	51
New Democratic Party (NDP)	Opposition	29
Independents	Opposition	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>308</b>

**UK: Distribution of seats in the House of Commons after the 2010 election**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Seats</b>
Conservative Party	Government	306
Labour Party	Opposition	258
Liberal Democrats	Government	57
Democratic Unionist Party	Opposition	8
Scottish National Party	Opposition	6
Sinn Fein	-	5
Plaid Cymru	Opposition	3
Social Democratic and Labour Party	Opposition	3
Greens	Opposition	1
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	Opposition	1
The Speaker	-	1
Independents	Opposition	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>650</b>

#### Appendix 4. Final list of sessions for coding

The random generation was done using a random calendar date generator: <https://www.random.org/calendar-dates/>. The validity of each date (i.e. whether it falls during the session, whether a question time is held on the date) is checked using Hansard. If the date was not valid, another random date was generated instead. The start and end dates are the start and end dates for each premiership.

I stored each questioning session as a text file, which was then uploaded to NVivo. To store information on the session, I created nodes in NVivo for:

1. **Date of the session**, e.g. 15.09.2012
2. **Premiership**: Julia Gillard, Stephen Harper, David Cameron, Enda Kenny
3. **Country**: Australia, Canada, UK, Ireland
4. **Questioning mechanism**: Question Time, Question Period, Prime Minister's Questions, Oral Questions to the Taoiseach

Country	Premiership	Time in office	Duration (m)	Duration (y)
UK	David Cameron	2010-2015	59	5
<b>Year and sessions</b>				
<b>2010/11</b>	13/10/2010; 24/11/2010; 01/12/2010; 16/02/2011; 02/03/2011; 27/04/2011; 11/05/2011; 18/05/2011			
<b>2011/12</b>	13/07/2011; 07/09/2011; 02/11/2011; 30/11/2011; 14/12/2011; 22/02/2012; 21/03/2012; 16/05/2012			
<b>2012/13</b>	27/06/2012; 04/07/2012; 05/09/2012; 21/11/2012; 16/01/2013; 13/02/2013; 24/04/2013			
<b>2013/14</b>	09/10/2013; 06/11/2013; 19/03/2014; 14/05/2014			
<b>2014/15</b>	15/10/2014; 03/12/2014; 04/03/2015			

Country	Premiership	Time in office	Duration (m)	Duration (y)
Canada	Stephen Harper I	2006-2008	32	2
<b>Year and sessions</b>				
<b>2006/7</b>	11/04/2006; 25/04/2006; 02/05/2006; 04/05/2006; 10/05/2006; 13/06/2006; 18/09/2006; 25/09/2006; 03/10/2006; 18/10/2006; 24/10/2006; 08/11/2006; 21/11/2006; 06/12/2006; 30/01/2007; 01/02/2007			
<b>2007/8</b>	15/02/2007; 20/02/2007; 20/03/2007; 26/03/2007; 29/03/2007; 25/04/2007; 08/05/2007; 18/06/2007; 23/10/2007; 29/01/2008			
<b>2008</b>	06/03/2008; 10/04/2008; 13/05/2008; 18/06/2008			

Country	Premiership	Time in office	Duration (m)	Duration (y)
Australia	Julia Gillard	2010-2013	36	3
<b>Year and sessions</b>				
<b>2010/11</b>	18/10/2010; 21/10/2010; 28/10/2010; 15/11/2010; 17/11/2010; 25/11/2010; 09/02/2011; 22/02/2011; 22/03/2011; 23/03/2011; 30/05/2011; 15/06/2011; 22/06/2011			
<b>2011/12</b>	04/07/2011; 06/07/2011; 17/08/2011; 25/08/2011; 14/09/2011; 20/09/2011; 12/10/2011; 31/10/2011; 15/02/2012; 28/05/2012			
<b>2012/13</b>	16/08/2012; 20/09/2012; 10/10/2012; 26/11/2012; 07/02/2013; 13/03/2013; 05/06/2013			

Country	Premiership	Time in office	Duration (m)	Duration (y)
Ireland	Enda Kenny	2011-2016	59	5
Year and sessions				
2011/12	20/04/2011; 18/05/2011; 15/11/2011; 14/12/2011; 20/09/2011; 25/10/2011; 18/10/2011; 11/10/2011			
2012/13	15/05/2012 ; 22/05/2012; 12/06/2012; 18/09/2012; 25/09/2012; 09/10/2012; 16/10/2012			
2013/14	25/06/2013; 01/10/2013; 22/10/2013; 26/11/2013; 17/12/2013; 28/01/2014			
2014/15	13/05/2014; 21/10/2014; 24/06/2014; 20/01/2015; 17/02/2015			
2015/16	09/06/2015; 21/04/2015; 29/09/2015; 19/01/2016			

#### List of sessions for pilot coding April 2018 (Excluded from final sample)

Selecting sessions for pilot coding: 4 sessions chosen randomly, that were then excluded from the selection for the final analysis.

The random generation was done using a random calendar date generator:

<https://www.random.org/calendar-dates/>

Country	Premiership	Time in office	Sessions for pilot coding
UK	David Cameron	2010-2015	9 June 2010
			16 May 2012
			26 June 2013
			7 May 2014
Ireland	Enda Kenny	2011-2016	29 November 2011
			21 February 2012
			5 March 2013
			10 February 2015
Canada	Stephen Harper I	2006-2008	14 February 2007
			17 April 2007
			15 May 2007
			9 April 2008
Australia	Julia Gillard	2010-2013	10 May 2011
			25 May 2011
			13 February 2012
			1 November 2012
			25 May 2013



## Appendix 5. Reliability Test: Kappa scores and percentage agreement for qualitative codes

- **Kappa score:** Cohen's kappa coefficient, used for calculating inter-coder agreement. Ranges from -1 to 1, where 0 represents the amount of agreement that can be expected from random chance, and 1 represents perfect agreement between coders. (Krippendorff 2012; McHugh 2012)
- **Percentage agreement:** number of coding units where coding was agreed, divided by the total number of coded units for each code.

	Percentage agreement (%)	Kappa score	Inter-coder agreement: Kappa score interpretation:
Average for all NVivo nodes & sources (unweighted)	94	0.7108	Good
Average for all NVivo nodes & sources (weighted by source size)	94	0.7075	Good
<b>Questions codes</b>			
Average for territorial representation	99	0.2587	Fair
Average for accountability: request for information; request for an explanation; demand for action; request for statement; request for response to an accusation	89	0.7084	Good
Average for accountability: request for comment; request for opinion	85	0.3349	Fair
Average for political conflict (question)	90	0.7145	Good
Average for political support (question)	96	0.1298	Poor
Average for type of accountability	80	0.6014	Good
Average for type of question	95	0.8329	Very good
Average for topic and subtopic (all)	99	0.8701	Very good
<b>Answers codes</b>			
Average for political conflict (answer)	96	0.7872	Good
Average for political support (answer)	94	0.4128	Moderate

### Kappa score benchmarks (Krippendorff 2012; McHugh 2012)

Poor agreement = less than 0.20

Fair agreement = 0.20 to 0.40

Moderate agreement = 0.40 to 0.60

Good agreement = 0.60 to 0.80

Very good agreement = 0.80 to 1.00

## Appendix 6. Coding scheme: Final list of codes used in the analysis

### Quantitative coding categories: used for counting units in the data

Code and coding categories	Definition
<b>Type of question</b>	<b>This code identifies the type of question, as classified by the rules of procedure.</b>
<b>Question with notice (submitted in writing)</b>	The question has been submitted in writing and is printed on the order paper. Applies to 1) questions submitted in writing in Ireland; 2) PMQs in the UK, in cases where a question was submitted in writing for the ballot and was printed in Hansard in the form in which it was submitted.
<b>Question without notice</b>	The question is spontaneous (was not submitted in writing before the session). Applies to all initial questions by a parliamentarian in the UK, Canada, Australia, where questions do not require written notice.
<b>Supplementary question</b>	A subsequent, follow-up question to an initial question by the same questioner, or by a different questioner on the same topic.
<b>Type of actor</b>	<b>This code identifies the author of an intervention, as mentioned in the official transcript.</b>
<b>Prime Minister</b>	The Prime Minister
<b>Leader of the Opposition</b>	The Leader of the Official Opposition, as noted in the official transcript of the debate.
<b>Opposition frontbencher</b>	Parliamentarians in shadow frontbench roles in an opposition party, but primarily in the main opposition party. Where this was not mentioned in the official transcript, the link for each MP's name provided a link to their profile listing their parliamentary roles during the period investigated.
<b>Other opposition party leader</b>	Other opposition party leaders. To apply this code, I did background research on the parties in parliament during the premierships analysed, and identified all parliamentarians who were leaders of opposition parties other than the main opposition party.
<b>Opposition backbencher</b>	Parliamentarians from an opposition party who did not occupy a frontbench role in one of the parties.
<b>Government backbencher</b>	Parliamentarians from the government party, or from the major coalition party in the case of a coalition government, who do not hold government positions.
<b>Coalition party backbencher</b>	In cases of a coalition government, this code identifies MPs from the junior coalition party.
<b>Question addressee</b>	<b>This code identifies the addressee of the question.</b>
<b>Prime Minister</b>	The question is explicitly addressed to the prime minister and answered by the prime minister.
<b>Minister</b>	The question is explicitly addressed to a government minister and answered by the minister.
<b>Prime Minister (answered by Minister)</b>	The question is explicitly addressed to the prime minister but it is answered by a minister.
<b>Government (answered by Prime Minister)</b>	The question is explicitly addressed to the government generically but it is answered by a minister.

## Qualitative coding categories: used for measuring the presence and frequency of concepts in the data

Code and coding categories	Definition	Examples
<b>Form of address (prime ministerial accountability)</b>		
<b>Individualised accountability</b>	The question explicitly identifies 'the prime minister' as the subject and asks them to give information, to explain their personal actions, or to take personal action to resolve an issue; in some cases the issue may simply be attributed to the prime minister.	<b>Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the Prime Minister indicated in her previous answer that it is proper to contact Fair Work Australia when previously she has said it was improper to do so, what is preventing her from contacting Fair Work Australia to ask them to resolve the unacceptable delay in the investigation of the member for Dobell, which is now in its fourth year?
<b>Collective or role accountability: Government</b>	The question explicitly identifies 'the government' or a government minister as the subject and explicitly refers to an action that the government or a minister has taken, or that is attributed by the questioner to the government or to a minister, and requires the prime minister to give information, to explain or to express a view with respect to that particular action.	<b>Mr LYONS (Bass):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the government's My School website giving parents better information about the performance of their child's school, and how will both My School and the government's National Plan for School Improvement help Australia win the education race?
<b>Collective or role accountability: Party</b>	The question explicitly identifies 'a political party' as the subject and explicitly refers to an action that the party has taken, or that is attributed by the questioner to the political party, and requires the PM to give information, to explain or to express a view with respect to that particular action.	<b>Mr Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):</b> Twenty years ago this week, the giant Ravenscraig steelworks in my constituency was forced to close. Thousands of steelmaking jobs were lost, and sadly many of my former steelworking colleagues never found work again. Twenty years on, will the Prime Minister apologise for his party's shameful role in the demise of the Scottish steel industry?
<b>Questions: Accountability</b>		
<b>Request for information</b>	The question requires the prime minister to provide a specific piece of information.	<b>Ms ROWLAND (Greenway):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the government's plan to build a stronger and smarter economy and how the passage of the Australian Education Bill through the House brings us one step closer to this?
<b>Request for explanation</b>	The question requires the prime minister to explain or justify a decision, statement or action, either their own, or of the government, a minister, or a political party.	<b>John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):</b> Why has the Prime Minister told members of his party behind closed doors that forcing through same-sex marriage legislation was a terrible mistake?

<b>Request for a statement</b>	The question requires the prime minister to make a formal statement. This code differs from a request for information in that the word 'statement' is mentioned and the prime minister is required formally to make a statement before parliament.	Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, about an independent inquiry into the killings in Ballymurphy in 1971; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
<b>Demand for action</b>	The question requires the prime minister to take concrete action to resolve an issue mentioned in the question. The question sets out a problematic situation and requires the prime minister to take action.	<b>Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD):</b> Following the threat of a legal challenge, NHS England has scrapped its processes for approving drugs for rare conditions, which is affecting 200 children in the country, including six-year-old Sam, in my constituency, who has Morquio. Will the Prime Minister today instruct the Health Secretary to re-establish the highly specialised commissioning service so that we can approve these drugs and ensure that children get the drugs they need immediately, before a new process is put in place?
<b>Reaction-seeking: Request for comment or opinion</b>	The prime minister is asked to express a view on a matter presented in the question.	<b>Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab):</b> The Prime Minister is rightly shocked by the revelations that many food products contain 100% horse. Does he share my concern that, if tested, many of his answers may contain 100% bull?
<b>Request for response to an accusation</b>	The question sets out a problematic situation and identifies a guilty party, to whom blame is attributed. The prime minister is required to respond to this attribution of blame.	<b>Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):</b> The Prime Minister said that his economic policy would eradicate the deficit in this Parliament. All he can claim today is that after four years it came down by a third, but in the past few months it has been going up. Will he accept that the big fall in real wages since the election is a large part of the explanation for why his economic policy has fallen so far short on its central objective?
<b>Questions: Conflict</b>	To qualify for one of these codes, the question must contain:	
<b>Policy criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about policy. The remark must refer to technical aspects of policy, e.g. negative consequences, faulty design.	<b>Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab):</b> Does the Prime Minister agree that the £11.5 million wasted on a botched and abandoned reorganisation of south-west London's NHS services would have been better spent providing more GPs so that my constituents do not have to wait over two weeks to see a doctor?

<b>Government criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about the government or a minister. The remark must explicitly identify 'the government' or an individual minister as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the government collectively or by a minister.	<b>Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of the July 2010 economic statement, in which she promised Australians that the net debt would peak this year at less than \$90 billion. With net debt at the end of December 2012 already at \$164 billion, almost twice the peak level promised, why should anyone believe that this government will ever pay off the record net debt that it has run up in just five years?
<b>Prime minister criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about the prime minister. The remark must explicitly identify 'the prime minister' as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by him or her.	<b>Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her promise, made precisely two years ago today, that: 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' Will the Prime Minister now apologise to Australia's forgotten families for this breach of faith?
<b>Party criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about a political party. The remark must explicitly identify a political party as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the political party.	<b>Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):</b> Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. Elections Canada found that the Conservatives broke the law and tried to bilk taxpayers for more money than they were entitled to and that they exceeded their spending limits during the last election. We said so publicly and we will say it again outside.
<b>Questions: Support</b>	To qualify for one of these codes, the question must contain:	
<b>Policy appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about policy. The remark must refer to technical aspects of policy, e.g. positive consequences; good design.	<b>Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con):</b> This morning, more people went to work than ever before in the history of our nation. Is the Prime Minister aware that in Dover and Deal unemployment has fallen by 37%, thanks to our welfare reforms and thanks to our long-term economic plan?
<b>Government appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about the government. The remark must explicitly identify 'the government' as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the government.	<b>Gavin Barwell:</b> [...] Despite the urgent need to reduce the deficit, the Government took the right decision not just to protect but to increase the overseas aid budget. What capacity does that give us to respond to the urgent humanitarian situation on the Libyan border?
<b>Prime minister appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about the prime minister. The remark must explicitly identify 'the prime	<b>Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con):</b> My constituents very much welcome the fact that the

	minister' as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by him or her.	Prime Minister is leading by example in these difficult economic times by taking a 5% reduction in his prime ministerial salary. Is he aware that the chief executive of Suffolk county council is paid a salary of £220,000 a year?
<b>Party appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about a political party. The remark must explicitly identify a political party as the subject and refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the political party	<b>Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con):</b> As the Conservative party and only the Conservative party will deliver a referendum and a renegotiation on Europe, will the Prime Minister tell us his intentions of bringing to this House the red line issues that will feature in his renegotiations, and can he give us a preview of some of those issues today?
<b>Conflict: Answers</b>	To qualify for one of these codes, an answer must include:	
<b>Policy criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about policy. The remark must refer to technical aspects of policy, e.g. negative consequences, faulty design.	<b>The Prime Minister (David Cameron):</b> First of all, let us deal with Labour's new energy policy. Let us spend a little bit of time on it. First of all, let us examine the fact that the right hon. Gentleman is committed to a new decarbonisation target that would add £125 to the bills of everyone in the country. Perhaps he would like to mention that when he next gets to his feet.
<b>Previous government criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about the previous government. The remark must explicitly identify the previous government as the subject, and/or refer to an action or decision undertaken by the previous government.	<b>The Prime Minister (David Cameron):</b> [...]. In the entire period of the last Labour Government, I think they electrified just 13 miles of track—an absolutely pathetic record for a Government who had 13 years to do something about it.
<b>Personal criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about another individual, usually the questioner. The remark must explicitly identify an individual as the subject, and/or refer to an action or decision undertaken by the individual in question.	<b>Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):</b> [...] More importantly, the Leader of the Liberal Party is going to vote against fixing the fiscal imbalance. Why? Because he wants all of Canada's money to go to the federal government for it to run provincial jurisdictions.
<b>Party criticism</b>	An explicitly critical remark about a political party. The remark must explicitly identify a political party as the subject and/or refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the political party.	<b>Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):</b> Mr. Speaker, the NDP voted against the softwood lumber agreement that was supported not only by all the companies in Quebec, but also by the unions. This industry is facing serious problems, which is why we included significant measures in the budget to help it. Furthermore, these measures have been welcomed by the industry. The NDP voted against it. The NDP does not represent the interests of Quebec.

<b>Support: Answers</b>	To qualify for one of these codes, an answer must include:	
<b>Policy appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about policy. The remark must refer to technical aspects of policy, e.g. positive consequences; good design.	<b>Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):</b> Mr. Speaker, the bill presented today by the President of the Treasury Board will provide the greatest expansion to the Access to Information Act in the history of this Parliament. This bill is broad and includes the independent officers and senior officials of Parliament and of the major crown corporations, including Canada Post, Via Rail, CBC and several other institutions and foundations. It is important.
<b>Government appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about the government. The remark must explicitly identify 'the government' as the subject and/or refer to an action or decision undertaken by the government.	<b>Julia Gillard:</b> [...]I am always very concerned for the working person involved and for their family, which is why as a government we made sure during the global financial crisis that we supported jobs—we understood their importance to working people. With this group—the Hastie Group—which has entered voluntary administration, it is a complex situation. The government is working closely with the insolvency practitioners involved to ensure timely assistance to the employees as the situation evolves.
<b>Personal appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about another individual, usually the questioner. The remark must explicitly identify an individual as the subject, and/or refer to an action or decision undertaken by the individual in question.	<b>Ms GILLARD (Prime Minister):</b> I thank the member for La Trobe for her question and I thank her for her continuing concern for people in her constituency and her focus on their opportunity, on jobs, on their ability to start and succeed in a small business and also on the things that go to support the modern families who live in her electorate with the pressures of day-to-day life.
<b>Party appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about a political party. The remark must explicitly identify a political party as the subject and/or refer to an action, statement or decision undertaken by the political party.	<b>The Prime Minister (David Cameron):</b> It is obviously important that all such issues are properly looked into, but I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend. We are frequently in agreement, but on this issue, I believe that, if people in Essex want good value for money, it is important that they back the Conservatives.
<b>Self-appreciation</b>	An explicitly appreciative remark about oneself. The remark must explicitly identify the prime minister him/herself as the subject and/or refer to their own actions, statements and or decisions.	<b>The Prime Minister (David Cameron):</b> What a contrast: this is a Prime Minister and this is a Government who have turned our economy around, sorted out our public finances and got the economy growing.

<b>Territorial representation:</b>		
<b>Explicit mention of territorial reference</b>	Explicit mention of a member's constituency or region, of a geographic unit associated with the member's constituency or region; use of the phrases 'my constituency/my electorate'/'my constituent(s)', and derivatives.	<b>Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con):</b> Given the record number of small businesses today in Chiswick, Brentford, Isleworth and Hounslow; given that small and medium-sized businesses represent 99% of the business community; and given that Saturday is small business Saturday, will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging everyone to shop small and shop local on Saturday, and will he make small businesses a priority in our long-term economic plan?
<b>Purpose of using explicit territorial reference:</b>		
<b>LOCAL: To ask about local issues</b>	The question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance. The question is explicitly focused on the local level issue: the questioner describes a local issue and ends her intervention with a specific question focusing on a local issue. There are no references to wider, national-level debates.	<b>Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab):</b> Skelmersdale in my constituency is the second largest town in the north-west without a railway station—a station that would bring social and economic benefits to the town, as we have heard happened in Shrewsbury. As the Prime Minister is in spending mood, albeit a little bit further south, I wonder whether he could give the people of Skelmersdale an early Christmas present with the promise of a railway station.
<b>LOCAL NATIONAL: To use local issues as a starting point to ask about national issues</b>	The question mentions a territorial unit in order to discuss an issue with local relevance in connection to an issue with wider national relevance. The focus is on the national relevance of the local issue: the questioner may begin her intervention describing a local issue, but the intervention also contains references to broader, national-level policy issues. Following this discussion of local issues and references to national policy, the question either a) inquires about national policy in a way that is also relevant to the local issues described or; b) inquires about national policy exclusively.	<b>Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie):</b> My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to this electricity bill from Bernadette and Mike Thompson who live with their six-year old son Alexander in Lugarno in the electorate of Banks. Given that this bill has gone up by over \$400, to \$1,157, will the Prime Minister apologise to the Thompsons and other families, particularly those in Greater Western Sydney where the carbon tax has contributed up to 80 per cent of their recent price rises?
<b>Topic</b>	Questions are assigned a topic and subtopic based on the Comparative Agendas Project.	



## List of topics and sub-topics from the Comparative Agendas Project used in the analysis in the thesis.

This list includes all codes of topics and sub-topics that were relevant and that applied to questions in the sample and used in the analysis in the thesis. For a full list of the Comparative Agendas Project topics and sub-topics, see links in Bibliography. The coding numbers also correspond to the numbers in the Comparative Agendas Project codebooks.

Topic	Subtopic
1 Macroeconomics	100 General domestic macroeconomic issues and government's economic plan 101 Inflation, prices, and interest rates 103 Unemployment rate - statistics 105 National Budget and Debt 107 Taxation, Tax policy, and Tax Reform 108 Industrial policy
10 Transportation	1000 General - national transport policy and strategies 1003 Airports, Airlines, Air Traffic Control and Safety 1005 Railroad Transportation and Safety 1006 Truck and Automobile Transportation and Safety 1007 Maritime Issues 1010 Public Works (infrastructure development)
12 Law, Crime, and Family Issues	1201 Agencies dealing with Law and Crime 1202 White Collar Crime and Organized Crime 1203 Illegal Drug Production, Trafficking, and Control 1206 Juvenile Crime and the Juvenile Justice System 1207 Child Abuse and Child Pornography 1208 Family Issues 1209 Police, Fire, and Weapons Control 1210 Criminal and Civil Code 1212 Cybercrime and stalking 1299 Other
13 Social Welfare	1300 General - welfare state 1302 Poverty and Assistance for Low-Income Families 1303 Elderly Issues and Elderly Assistance Programs (Including Social Security Administration) 1304 Assistance to the Disabled and Handicapped 1305 Social Services and Volunteer Associations (Charities)
14 Community Development, Housing and Planning	1400 General - construction industry 1401 Housing and Community Development 1403 Urban Economic Development and General Urban Issues 1405 Rural Economic Development 1409 Housing Assistance for Homeless and Homeless Issues
15 Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	1501 Banking System and Financial Institution Regulation 1521 Small Business Issues 1523 Domestic Disaster Relief 1524 Tourism 1525 Consumer Safety and Consumer Fraud 1526 Sports and Gambling regulations
16 Defence	1600 General - Defence spending

	<p>1602 [Country] and Other Defence Alliances [Country] Security Assistance</p> <p>1604 Military Readiness</p> <p>1605 Arms Control and Nuclear Nonproliferation</p> <p>1606 Military Aid and Weapons Sales to other Countries</p> <p>1608 Manpower, Military Personnel and Dependents (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines), Military Courts</p> <p>1609 Veterans Issues</p> <p>1610 Military Procurement and Weapons System Acquisitions and Evaluation</p> <p>1612 Reserve Forces and Reserve Affairs</p> <p>1619 Direct War Related Issues</p> <p>1627 Domestic and International Terrorism</p> <p>1699 Other</p>
17 International Trade	<p>1700 General</p> <p>1704 International Private Business Investment</p> <p>1802 Trade Negotiations, Disputes, and Agreements</p>
17 Space, Science, Technology and Communications	<p>1706 Telephone and Telecommunication Regulation</p> <p>1707 Broadcast industry regulation</p> <p>1709 Computer Industry and Computer Security</p> <p>1798 Research and Development</p>
19 International Affairs	<p>1900 General foreign policy</p> <p>1901 Foreign Aid</p> <p>1906 International Finance and Economic Development - IMF</p> <p>1911 Africa</p> <p>1912 Ireland - Northern Ireland</p> <p>1919 Asia, Pacific Rim, Australia , and Japan</p> <p>1920 Middle East</p> <p>1921 United States</p> <p>1922 Russia</p> <p>1925 Human Rights</p> <p>1926 International Organisations - Commonwealth</p> <p>1926 International Organisations - UN</p> <p>1926 International Organisations - UNESCO</p> <p>1926 International Organizations - Commonwealth Parliamentary Association</p> <p>1926 International Organizations - Eastern Partnership</p> <p>1927 Terrorism and Hijacking</p> <p>1929 Diplomats, Embassies, Citizens abroad</p> <p>Passport issues</p> <p>1929-2 - High level diplomatic talks</p> <p>1999 Other</p>
1910 European Union	<p>1910-1 European Council meetings</p> <p>1910-2 EU regulations</p> <p>1910- 3 Brexit</p>
2 Civil Rights, Minority Issues and Civil Liberties	<p>2 - Australia (indigenous affairs)</p> <p>2000 General - UK Human Rights Act</p> <p>201 Canada - Native Affairs</p> <p>201 Ethnic Minority and Racial Group Discrimination</p> <p>202 Gender and sexual orientation discrimination</p>

	<p>210 Canada - Preservation of French Language and Culture</p> <p>211 Multiculturalism issues</p> <p>212 Canada - Charter of Rights and Freedoms</p> <p>230 Immigration</p>
20 Government Operations	<p>2000 General</p> <p>2001 Intergovernmental Relations (Local Government and Local Authorities)</p> <p>2001-2 UK Devolution</p> <p>2002 Government Efficiency and Bureaucratic Oversight</p> <p>2003 Postal Service Issues (Including Mail Fraud)</p> <p>2005 Nominations and appointments</p> <p>2007 Government Procurement, Procurement Fraud and Contractor Management</p> <p>2008 Government Property Management</p> <p>2011 Executive-Legislative Relations and Administrative Issues, Powers of the House of Lords and the House of Commons</p> <p>2012 Regulation of Political Parties, Donations and Campaigns, Political Advertising, Voter Registration</p> <p>2032 Prime Ministerial and Ministerial Scandals and Resignations</p>
21 Public Lands, Water Management, Colonial and	<p>2103 Natural Resources, Public Lands, and Forest Management</p> <p>2104 Water Resources Development and Research</p>
23 Culture and Entertainment	<p>2301 National Culture and Heritage Issues</p> <p>2302 Sports</p> <p>Church and religious leaders</p>
25 Intergovernmental Relations and Trade (Canada)	<p>2500 Intergovernmental relations</p> <p>2505 Regional Development Arrangements and Programs</p>
26 Constitutional Issues	<p>2601 Canada - Quebec Issues</p> <p>2601 Ireland - Constitutional Issues</p>
3 Health	<p>3000 General - Health funding</p> <p>3000 General government health policy management</p> <p>301 Comprehensive Health Care reform</p> <p>302 Insurance Reform, Availability, and Cost</p> <p>306 Regulation of Prescription Drugs, Medical Devices, and Medical Procedures</p> <p>307 Health Facilities Construction and Regulation</p> <p>310 Medical Fraud, Malpractice, and Physician Licensing Requirements</p> <p>322 Facilities Construction, Regulation, and Payments</p> <p>325 Health Manpower and Training</p> <p>331 Prevention, Communicable Diseases and Health Promotion</p> <p>332 Infants and children</p> <p>333 Mental Health</p> <p>341 Tobacco Abuse, Treatment and Education</p> <p>342 Alcohol abuse and treatment</p> <p>398 Research and Development</p>
4 Agriculture	<p>4000 Agriculture General policy</p> <p>401 Agriculture trade</p>

	<p>402 Government Subsidies to Farmers</p> <p>404 Food inspection and safety</p> <p>407 Fisheries (Canada)</p>
5 Labour and Employment	<p>501 Worker Safety and Protection</p> <p>502 Employment Training and Workforce Development</p> <p>503 Employee benefits</p> <p>504 Employee Relations and Labour Unions</p> <p>505 Fair Labour Standards</p> <p>506 Youth Employment and Child Labour</p> <p>508 Parental Leave and Child Care</p> <p>529 Migrant and Seasonal workers</p>
6 Education	<p>6000 General government education policy</p> <p>601 Higher Education</p> <p>602 Elementary and Secondary Education</p> <p>603 Education of Underprivileged Students</p> <p>606 Special Education</p>
7 Environment	<p>700 - General environmental policy</p> <p>701 Drinking Water Safety</p> <p>704 Hazardous Waste and Toxic Chemical Regulation, Treatment, and Disposal</p> <p>705 Air Pollution, Global Warming, and Noise Pollution</p> <p>709 Species and Forest Protection</p>
8 Energy	<p>800 General</p> <p>801 Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Issues</p> <p>803 Gas and Oil</p> <p>806 Alternative and Renewable Energy</p>
99 Miscellaneous	

## Appendix 7. Chapter 5: Examples of questioning tactics

### Section 1. Australia: Points of Order on relevance of answers

5.06.2013

**Mr Abbott:** Speaker, on a point of order: relevance. It was a very simple question: when was the Prime Minister or her office told? I think she owes it to the parliament to give us an answer to this question—

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

10.10.2012

**Mr Pyne:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order. The question was: isn't it true that if you cut the carbon tax you would cut electricity prices? The Prime Minister is making absolutely no attempt to answer that question at all. It is just the usual slag and bag—

**The SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

13.03.2013

**Mr Pyne:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister has to answer the very simple question: can she confirm that there have been more illegal boat arrivals in the last nine months than in the entire period of the Howard government?

15.02.2012

**Mr Abbott:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order: it was a very simple question. Where in the election campaign was the Prime Minister up-front with the Australian people about her intention to break a promise?

**The SPEAKER:** The Prime Minister will address the substance of the question.

16.08.2012

**Mr Pyne:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question could not have been any more straightforward and tight. The Prime Minister only needs to say whether it would increase or decrease electricity prices. That is the question she has to answer.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call and will return to the question before the chair.

## Section 2. Australia: Examples of helpful supplementary questions from government backbenchers

10.10.2012

**Mr CHEESEMAN**\_(Corangamite) (14:16): My question is to the Treasurer. What does yesterday's International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook say about the global economy and Australia's performance?

**Mr SWAN**\_(Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:17): I thank the member for Corangamite for his very important question. The IMF's World Economic Outlook does predict a slowing down in global growth in 2012 and 2013. The recession in Europe and moderating growth in the United States will have an impact in this region as well. Australia is not immune from these developments, and in addition to that we face the challenges of a higher dollar and a cautious consumer, which is putting some pressure on a number of industrial sectors. [...]

**Mr CHEESEMAN**\_(Corangamite) (14:20): Madam Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer spoke about the facts of our economic performance. What do these mean for businesses and working people in my electorate, and why is it important to stick to the facts when talking about our economy?

26.11. 2012

**Mrs D'ATH** (Petrie) (14:23): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the International Monetary Fund's latest annual assessment of Australia? What does this say about the resilience of our economy?

**Mr SWAN** (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:24): I thank the member for Petrie for that very important question, because there has been a very strong endorsement of the resilience of the Australian economy by the IMF in their annual report—a very comprehensive report on the resilience of the Australian economy. I would just like to quote a few things that the IMF had to say about our economy. They said there was a well-coordinated response to the global financial crisis, and they went on to say:

Five years on, both the economy and the financial sector continue to outperform most of their peers.

The IMF then went on to say, in praising the adept handling of the fallout from the global financial crisis:

... prudent economic management, and strong supervision of the financial sector, has kept Australia on the dwindling list of AAA rated countries.

So what the IMF is saying is that, unlike the rest of the world, the economy here has been very resilient—so much so that we have had 21 years of growth. [...]

**Mrs D'ATH** (Petrie) (14:27): Madam Speaker, I rise to ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer has spoken about why a resilient economy is important for delivering the big reforms for the country. Can he outline what this means for people in my electorate?

### **Section 3. Australia: Questions repeated throughout the session**

#### **30.05.2011: repeated questions from the opposition on calling an election in connection with the carbon tax**

**Leader of the Opposition: Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. Now that we have a 'yes' campaign on a carbon tax, when will the Prime Minister finally admit that, yes, she did break her promise not to have a carbon tax, and when will she finally say 'yes' to an election so that the people will have their say on her toxic tax?

**Opposition Backbencher: Mr FLETCHER** (Bradfield) (14:20): My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware that in withdrawing from the 10-state emissions trading scheme in the United States—the scheme she has previously cited in support of her carbon tax—New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has said that the scheme 'does nothing more than tax electricity, tax our citizens and tax our businesses, with no discernible or measurable impact upon our environment'? Given that the Prime Minister won an election based on the promise of no carbon tax, when will she do the right thing and ask the Australian people whether they say yes to a carbon tax, by calling an election before its introduction?

**Opposition Frontbencher: Mrs MIRABELLA** (Indi) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the Australian Food and Grocery Council's modelling that suggests that food and grocery prices will rise by between three and five per cent under a \$26 per tonne carbon tax. Given that the Prime Minister won an election based on a promise of no carbon tax, when will she do the right thing and ask Australia's already struggling, forgotten families whether they say yes to a carbon tax by calling an election before its introduction?

### **Section 4. Canada: Questions from the Leader of the Opposition**

#### **All questions addressed to the prime minister**

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Official Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the moment of silence we have just observed illustrates that today is a day of mourning for us all. As the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie said, our thoughts go out to the families and victims of the tragedy at Dawson College. Sadly, this tragedy has shown us that our country cannot tolerate complacency toward firearms in Canada. The Prime Minister is getting ready to abolish our gun control system, but he says now is not the time to talk about it. Today the Prime Minister must talk about it. He must explain to us how his proposal to weaken our gun laws will better protect Canadians.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first I want to express my condolences and those of the government to the victims and families of the event that occurred in Montreal. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who are still in hospital. Our thoughts go out to all the victims and the entire student body shaken by these events. This government is determined to have more effective legislation that will prevent such a tragedy and such an act from occurring in the future. I call on the opposition to support our bill in order to implement mandatory sentences for crimes committed with firearms.

[English]

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is all very well to talk about having more effective laws, but 5,000 times every day law enforcement officers in Canada use the very system that the Conservatives want to destroy. The police themselves tell us they need that system to protect lives and increase public safety. Does the tragedy of Dawson College not prove to the Prime Minister and his colleagues the need to strengthen and improve our gun laws rather than abolish them in the name of a false efficiency?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the events at Dawson College tell us precisely that, that today's laws did not protect us. We take no pleasure on this side of the House from having warned the previous government repeatedly over the past decade that the gun registry would not prevent this kind of occurrence. I spoke to the acting commissioner and the deputy commissioner of the RCMP today. I asked them to accumulate all the facts and to bring them to the Minister of Public Safety, so that the government can strengthen its future actions to ensure that we reduce all possibility of obviously unstable individuals such as this getting a hold of firearms.

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are all in favour of strengthening that what we can do to control arms, but we need to be using every last tool available to save lives. We should be strengthening rules. We should not be tossing some of them out. The Prime Minister's right to bear arms constituency is blinding him to a very important tool that protects our kids from being shot. Will the Prime Minister finally listen to Premier Charest and the millions of other Canadians who want him to revise his position on gun control, bring in other laws if he wishes, but keep an important tool that has been proven by the police that it works and can help the public safety of Canadians?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the Leader of the Opposition feels the necessity of justifying a decade of wrong approaches and wasted effort in terms of a gun control policy that does not work. The government will not repeat those mistakes. We will pursue new policies that will reduce the possibility of crime and these types of actions.

## **Two questions addressed to the prime minister, the final question addressed to a minister**

**6.12.2006**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the disappointing performance of the government is leaving me all choked up. Again today it is hard to believe that the Prime Minister only found out about the inaccuracies in Commissioner Zaccardelli's testimony on Monday. Canadians want to know when the Prime Minister first found out about these inaccuracies in the commissioner's testimony.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I became aware of the differences in the story when everybody else did and that was when the commissioner made his comments on Monday and yesterday. However, let me just say that the RCMP is one of the most respected and important institutions in the country and I hope all members of the House understand that. Today, Commissioner Zaccardelli submitted his resignation to me and I have accepted it. The commissioner has indicated to me that it would be in the best



interests of the RCMP to have new leadership in that this great organization faces challenges in the future. I would like to thank the commissioner for his long and dedicated service to the RCMP and to the country. I am prepared to table the letter and my response in the House right now.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. I have a copy of a letter from the former RCMP commissioner to the Standing Committee on Public Safety dated November 2, in which he indicated that he intended to clarify his initial testimony. The Prime Minister's national security adviser was aware of the letter's contents and surely informed the Prime Minister. In view of the November 2 letter, how can the Prime Minister continue to say that he only learned of the contradictions in the former commissioner's testimony this week?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the apparent contradictions in the testimony came out yesterday. Once again, the RCMP commissioner has submitted his resignation to me, I have accepted it and thanked the commissioner for his service to the country and to the RCMP

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not answer my question. What about this letter of November 2? Let me ask the question of his minister since he is unable to answer. Given that the Prime Minister's national security adviser must have known about these inaccuracies, how could the Minister of Public Safety have said, only on Monday, referring to the commissioner, "He still has the confidence of the government?"

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as with most people in the chamber and most Canadians who were watching at the time, we all found out about the glaring contradictions when they came out on Monday. A letter was written to the public safety committee by the commissioner asking for permission to come to that committee and address those concerns, and that is what took place.

## **Section 5: Canada: questions from other party leaders and members**

### **Example 1 4.06.2006**

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, spring money for farmers is like choice in day care. Earlier today the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development had an epiphany in the House and admitted that there is a shortage, that the waiting lists are too long, and that some families have no option. Why is the government taking \$1 billion out of existing child support systems and killing a plan with all the provinces that would have created the many thousands of day care spaces that the government today admitted in the House do not exist?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, not only is this government spending more on child care than the previous government, it is spending a lot more than the previous government. One of the unfortunate things under the existing agreements is that the provinces have been given one additional year. That in a sense is unfortunate because the agreements signed by the old government do not create any targets for child care spaces. The program we intend to proceed with will establish 125,000 spaces over five years. More

importantly, since the member raised farmers, our program will give farm families real child care money and theirs would have given them nothing.

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we will see. In the meantime, this government does not understand that the country needs a real daycare program. The NDP abandoned children in November. Now the Bloc Québécois is capitulating to the Conservatives. Nevertheless, the Liberal Party will steadfastly defend the interest of children. We are sticking to our guns. Can the government explain why it took a billion dollars away from benefits paid to families to finance this disappointing plan in the budget?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the funds allocated to families and children in this budget are much higher than before. The Leader of the Opposition said we will see. And we will see the creation of 125,000 new daycare spaces across Canada in the next five years. If the Liberals here and in the Senate cooperate, we will provide a universal allowance of \$1,200 for every single child under the age of six, in every family, this year.

**Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives inherited the best fiscal record of any incoming government. They had an opportunity to invest in the children of this country and they failed. They delivered a Mike Harris style budget and they failed to create a single child care space in Canada. The minister herself has stated that her plan “may not be the ideal”. I guess the Prime Minister forgot to muzzle that comment. If both the minister and the parliamentary secretary do not believe in their plan, how do they hope to convince Canadians that they do have choice for child care in this country?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are people out there who would like the government to pay for everything for them. What we are trying to do is provide parents with young children, who are at their lowest earning years and who have high expenses, with the resources to access the choice in child care that suits their needs. We are also trying to make sure that they have 125,000 new spaces from which to choose when they are making that decision.

**Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the minister has become a stooge of Mike Harris. I know the Conservatives have trouble counting past five, but let me tell them that under the Liberal government we created 6,000 child care spaces that no longer exist because of the fact that they have provided no money. It is clear that the minister has no plan and no policy. Day after day she repeats the same lines from the PMO. Canadian parents want action and they want it now. Will the minister admit that the tax credit that is being offered has absolutely no benefit to non-profit day care centres to create accessible, affordable--

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the facts are that our plans for the universal child care benefit have been endorsed by many in communities right across the country. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has said that the one group that will benefit immensely from this budget is Canadian households with young children. Economically they will rocket ahead, thanks to the government's fulfillment of its promise to provide all families with \$100 a month for each child under the age of six. That is a strong endorsement.

**Example 2: 10.04.2008**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, allow me, first, to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry for exercising the government's authority, as we and others have urged, and rejecting the takeover of RADARSAT by an American firm. Now the hard work starts because we must ensure that the highly paid and important jobs in this globally competitive industry are not only protected, but that we see serious development and investment. The federal government will need to end the years of underfunding, underinvestment and lack of strategy that we have seen in our space sector. Will the Prime Minister commit to funding the next generation of space radar technologies that can put us and keep us on the leading edge?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me assure the leader of the NDP and all members of the House that in this and all related matters, the government will carefully follow the legal prescriptions and the requirements of the Investment Canada Act in pursuing this and other decisions. I can also assure the hon. member that we have had a very successful space sector in this country and the government is committed to that sector being viable and successful in the future.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we hope the government will not change its mind, but we have to give it credit for listening to the NDP and others and for refusing to allow the Americans to take control of RADARSAT. However, that is not enough. The government has to go even further and stop repeating the negligence and laissez-faire that we saw in the previous government for so many years. When will we see a real industrial strategy for the aerospace sector in order to keep good jobs in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister and the government are exercising their legal responsibilities under the Investment Canada Act. As far as the aerospace sector is concerned, Canadians are proud of it. This government is determined to do what it takes to ensure the success of this sector, which is so important to the economy and to Canadian sovereignty in the long term.

## Appendix 8. Chapter 6: Questioning mechanisms and prime ministerial responsibilities

### 1. Questioning mechanisms

Country	Mechanism	Target	Frequency
<b>UK</b>	Departmental Question Time	Ministers	Daily from Monday to Thursday. Ministers attend according to a rota.
	Urgent Questions	Ministers	As and when a question arises and is accepted by the Speaker
	Written Questions	Prime Minister and Ministers	As and when questions are submitted in writing
	Prime Minister's Questions	Prime Minister	Every sitting Wednesday
	Liaison Committee	Prime Minister	Twice/Three times a year
	Prime ministerial statements	Prime Minister	As and when a matter arises that requires the PM to make a statement
<b>Ireland</b>	Oral questions to the Taoiseach	Prime Minister	Twice a week
	Business Questions to the Taoiseach	Prime Minister	Twice a week
	Leaders' Questions	Prime Minister	Twice a week
	Oral Questions to ministers	Ministers	Three times a week
	Private notice questions	Ministers	As and when a question arises and is accepted by the Speaker
	Written Questions	Prime Minister and Ministers	As and when questions are submitted in writing
<b>Canada</b>	Question Period	Prime Minister and Ministers	Each sitting day
	Written Questions	Ministers	As and when questions are submitted in writing
	Adjournment Proceedings	Ministers	As and when oral questions are not answered during question period
<b>Australia</b>	Oral questions	Prime Minister and Ministers	Each sitting day
	Written questions	Prime Minister and Ministers	As and when questions are submitted in writing

**Sources:** **UK:** Bates et al. (2018); **Ireland:** Standing Orders of the Dáil Éireann (2017); MacCarthaig (2005); Author's correspondence with Dáil Éireann clerk; **Canada:** O'Brien and Bosc (2017); Author's correspondence with House of Commons clerk; **Australia:** Wright and Fowler (2012); Author's correspondence with House of Representatives clerk.

## 2. Prime ministerial responsibilities

Responsibility	UK <sup>40</sup>	Canada <sup>41</sup>	Australia <sup>42</sup>	Ireland <sup>43</sup>
<b>Appointments: government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoints, dismisses, and may require the resignation of ministers</li> <li>Also appoints: parliamentary private secretaries and special advisers (gives final approval for appointments, according to Hennessy 2001).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoints, dismisses, and may require the resignation of ministers</li> <li>Also appoints: Secretaries of State, Parliamentary Secretaries, Deputy Ministers, and others occupying the principal offices in government (Government of Canada 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoints, dismisses, and may require the resignation of ministers<sup>44</sup></li> <li>Also appoints: parliamentary secretaries (advises the Governor General on appointments)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoints, dismisses, and may require the resignation of ministers</li> <li>Also appoints: junior ministers</li> </ul>
<b>Appointments: other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heads of the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ</li> <li>Top appointments to the Home Civil Service</li> <li>Diplomatic appointments</li> <li>Some appointments to the Armed Forces (in collaboration with the Defence Secretary)</li> <li>'Top ecclesiastical appointments (though since Gordon Brown's premierships, the Prime Minister has conveyed the preference of the Church of England's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senate appointments: advises the governor general on appointments to the Senate</li> <li>Appointments to the Supreme Court: the Prime Minister is involved in advising the governor general on appointments to the supreme court</li> <li>Selection of the governor general: the Prime Minister plays a role in advising who the next governor general should be.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Judges are appointed by the Governor-General acting on the advice of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</li> <li>Recommends the appointment of the governor general. The selection process is the responsibility of the Prime Minister</li> <li>Advises the governor general on the appointment of ambassadors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nominates 11 members of the Senate</li> <li>Nominates the Attorney General</li> </ul>

<sup>40</sup>**Summarised based on:** The Cabinet Manual (2011); House of Commons (2011) Political and Constitutional Reform Committee HC 842 The role and powers of the Prime Minister, written evidence by Lord Hennessy; Hennessy (2001).

<sup>41</sup>**Summarised based on:** Open and Accountable Government 2015; House of Commons (2017) Compendium of Procedure: Executive Branch of Government in Canada; Government of Canada (2017) The Responsibilities of the Privy Council Office; Brodie (2018).

<sup>42</sup>**Summarised based on:** Parliament of Australia (2019a); Parliament of Australia (2019b); Weller (2007).

<sup>43</sup>**Summarised based on:** Constitution of Ireland; Coakley and Gallagher (2009); Government of Ireland (2018).

<sup>44</sup> In Australia, the Labor parliamentary party traditionally had an important role in deciding the composition of the cabinet, which was elected by the caucus. Labor Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard chose their own ministers.

	<p>selectors to the Monarch without interference).’ (House of Commons 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Residual academic appointments: the Mastership of Trinity College, Cambridge; the Principalship of King’s College, London; a small number of regius professorships in Oxford and Cambridge (the First Minister in Edinburgh is responsible for the Scottish regius chairs). Since the Blair premiership the No 10 practice has been to convey the wishes of the institutions to the Queen without interference.’ (House of Commons 2011)</li> <li>• Appointments to committees of inquiry and royal commissions.</li> <li>• Life peers from political parties to the House of Lords</li> </ul>			
<b>Machinery of government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prime Minister assigns and defines ministerial portfolios.</li> <li>• The Prime Minister is responsible for the creation, merger or dismissal of government departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prime Minister assigns and defines ministerial portfolios.</li> <li>• The Prime Minister is responsible for the creation, merger or dismissal of government departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prime Minister assigns and defines ministerial portfolios.</li> <li>• The Prime Minister is responsible for the creation, merger or dismissal of government departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prime Minister assigns and defines ministerial portfolios.</li> <li>• The Prime Minister is responsible for the creation, merger or dismissal of government departments</li> </ul>

<b>Conduct of cabinet business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calling and chairing meetings of Cabinet</li> <li>• Determines cabinet agenda</li> <li>• Coordinates cabinet: arranges and manages cabinet decision-making</li> <li>• Decides membership and organisation of cabinet committees</li> <li>• Deciding when the Cabinet can opt out on collective responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calling and chairing meetings of the cabinet</li> <li>• Determines cabinet agenda</li> <li>• Coordinates cabinet: arranges and manages cabinet decision-making</li> <li>• Decides membership and organisation of cabinet committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calling and chairing meetings of the cabinet</li> <li>• Determines cabinet agenda</li> <li>• Coordinates cabinet: arranges and manages cabinet decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calling and chairing meetings of the cabinet</li> <li>• Determines cabinet agenda</li> <li>• Coordinates cabinet: arranges and manages cabinet decision-making</li> </ul>
<b>Steering government policy</b>	Oversees the work of government, sets the general directions of government policy, and is the public spokesperson for government policy.	Oversees the work of government, sets the general directions of government policy, and is the public spokesperson for government policy.	Oversees the work of government, sets the general directions of government policy, and is the public spokesperson for government policy.	Oversees the work of government, sets the general directions of government policy, and is the public spokesperson for government policy.
<b>Foreign policy</b>	Represents the country at the international level, international summits and in bilateral relations.	Represents the country at the international level, international summits and in bilateral relations.	Represents the country at the international level, international summits and in bilateral relations.	Represents the country at the international level, international summits and in bilateral relations.
<b>National security/Defence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairing the meetings of the National Security Council Oversight of the production and implementation of the National Security Strategy.</li> <li>• Oversight of counter-terrorist policies and arrangements. (Hennessy 2001)</li> <li>• 'With the Foreign and Defence Secretaries the use of the royal prerogative to deploy Her Majesty's Forces in action (with Parliament, by convention, being</li> </ul>	The Prime Minister takes a special interest in, and is responsible for, national security and defence policy.	The Prime Minister takes a special interest in, and is responsible for, national security and defence policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prime Minister takes a special interest in, and is responsible for, national security and defence policy.</li> <li>• The Prime Minister has a special responsibility for overseeing and managing the relationship with the UK with respect to Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement.</li> </ul>

	<p>consulted if time allows).’ (House of Commons 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘With the Foreign Secretary the use of the royal prerogative to ratify or annul treaties, to recognise or derecognise countries (though in certain circumstances, the House of Commons can block treaty ratification under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010).’(House of Commons 2011)</li> </ul>			
<b>Intergovernmental relations</b>	<p>‘Participates in the coordination of intergovernmental relations between the devolved administrations; participates in the Joint Ministerial Committee and has also served as chair of the JMC.’ (House of Commons 2011)</p>	<p>‘The Prime Minister, with the support of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, is responsible for the overall management and coherence of relations with provincial and territorial governments, and for promoting and strengthening Canadian unity.’ (House of Commons 2017)</p>	<p>Role in coordinating federal affairs and in coordinating the relationship between the central government and the states and territories.</p>	-
<b>Budget and government spending</b>	<p>‘Determining with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary of the Treasury the detailed contents of the Budget.’ (House of Commons 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible to Parliament for the overall spending programme of the Government;</li> <li>• Makes the major fiscal decisions: ‘The Prime Minister approves the Budget presented by the Minister of Finance.’ (House of Commons 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible to Parliament for the overall spending programme of the Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible to Parliament for the overall spending programme of the Government</li> </ul>



<b>Dissolution of parliament and calling an election</b>	The Fixed-term Parliaments Act (2011) has removed this prerogative power.	<b>Calling an election:</b> Even though elections are on a fixed term basis (every four years), the Prime Minister may still advise the governor general about the dissolution of Parliament.	The Prime Minister advises the governor general about the dissolution of parliament.	The Prime Minister advises the head of state on matters regarding the summoning and dissolution of the Dáil.
<b>Relationship with parliament</b>	'Ultimate responsibility (with the Deputy Prime Minister and the leaders of the House of Commons and the House of Lords) for the government's legislative programme and the use of government time in the chambers of both Houses.' (House of Commons 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages the relationship between government and parliament</li> <li>• Manages the government's legislative programme before parliament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages the relationship between government and parliament</li> <li>• Manages the government's legislative programme before parliament (together with the Leader of the House).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages the relationship between government and parliament</li> <li>• Manages the government's legislative programme before parliament</li> <li>- Announces the Order of Business at the commencement of the sitting of the Dáil on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (and may be asked questions).</li> <li>- Decides priorities for legislation Arranges parliamentary business (through the chief whip).</li> </ul>

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