QuestionTimeSpeech v.1

Data on speech contributions during parliamentary question time sessions

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Data overview

QuestionTimeSpeech v.1 is a dataset on speech contributions during parliamentary question time sessions from Australia (2011-2022), Belgium (2010-2022), Canada (2006-2022), Croatia (2004-2022) and the UK (2010-2022). Each speech contribution during a question time session is treated as an observation (e.g. questions, answers, replies, points of order, interruptions, speakers' interventions, etc.). Besides the actual transcript, the dataset includes information on the contributors such as party affiliation, status (government, opposition), position (opposition, majority, cabinet), role (prime minister, opposition leader, minister of finance, etc.) and gender (male, female). For some countries, the dataset also provides information on the contributor's constituency (Australia, Canada and the UK) as well as the issue that is addressed (Australia, Canada and the UK). For Belgium and Croatia, we have also included the English translation. In this release note, you can find more information on the *cases*, *units of observation* and *variables* included in the dataset.

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Disclaimer

Please note that this is version 1 of the *QuestionTimeSpeech* dataset (published in September 2022). We aim to update and expand this dataset in the future with other countries.

We welcome questions and feedback at zeljko.poljak@uantwerpen.be

The *QuestionTimeSpeech* dataset is a part of the *ParlQuestionTime* dataverse.

Dataset

Down below, you can find more information on the *cases*, *units of observation* and *variables*.

Cases

The data consists of question time sessions from the national/federal parliaments in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia and the UK. For each case, the data spans at least one decade. Table 1 gives an overview of the cases, the covered timespan, and the number of speeches included in the dataset. For data on speeches during plenary debates, and speeches in other countries, please see the work by Rauh and Schwalbach (2020).

Table 1. Selected cases and N of QTs and speeches in data

Country	Chamber	Question time (QT)	Start date	End date	N (QT)	N (speech)
Australia	House of Representatives	Questions Without Notice	10 May 2011	31 March 2022	654	65.425
Belgium	Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers	Vragenuur	7 January 2010	20 July 2022	396	25.409
Canada	House of Commons	Oral Questions	5 April 2006	23 June 2022	1500	133.401
Croatia	Hrvatski sabor	Aktualno prijepodne	27 January 2004	20 April 2022	79	19.354
United Kingdom	House of Commons	Oral Answers to Questions	2 June 2010	14 July 2022	1576	234.773

For **Australia**, the dataset includes all contributions during ***Questions Without Notice*** (see aph.gov.au, 2022), which are daily question time sessions that tend to last for one hour. Members of the cabinet are questioned by both majority and minority MPs. The questions are not communicated to the cabinet members beforehand. All members of the cabinet, including the prime minister (PM), are usually expected to attend these daily question time sessions. Sessions usually start with the opposition leader questioning the PM. Each session contains typically 16 questions (aph.gov.au, 2022) and the time allocated for each question is 30 seconds with answers allowed to last up to 3 minutes (Serban, 2020).

For **Belgium**, we gathered speeches from weekly ***Vragenuur*** sessions during plenary debates. During these sessions each party group in the parliament questions the cabinet (see De Kamer, 2014). Questions are grouped based on their topic and are posed together in special slots to the relevant cabinet members. Once the cabinet member (or members for questions that address multiple topics) has answered, the questioners are allowed one rebuttal to the received answers. While these sessions are expected to last one hour, they usually go well beyond 1 hour. The cabinet is only notified of the content of questions on the day of the session.

In **Canada,** we collected speeches during ***Oral Questions*** (ourcommons.ca, 2022) that occur daily for 45 minutes. Party groups alternate in asking questions to the entire cabinet. Opposition and party leaders are usually granted the first slots (ourcommons.ca, 2022). The content of the questions is generally not known in advance but official rules state that MPs can only pose questions in line with the cabinet members' portfolio. All members of the cabinet are expected to be present on a daily basis, including the PM. Once a cabinet member has formulated an answer,

the MP that posed the question is allowed a follow-up question. Everyone is only granted 35 seconds to speak (Serban, 2020).

For **Croatia**, we collected speeches from ***Aktualno prijepodne*** (see Hrvatski sabor, 2020). These are question time sessions that occurred on a monthly basis until 2007, but are now held on a quarterly basis. Each session contains 40 questions to members of the cabinet. The number of questions granted to each party group depends on the share of seats the party group has. Cabinet members are notified of the topic 24 hours before the start of the session. The questioned cabinet member has to respond immediately after the question has been asked, and rebuttals are allowed (Hrvatski sabor, 2020). The sessions usually last one day due to the relatively high number of questions, and the fact that questions may last for two minutes, and that four minutes are granted for answers.

Lastly, for the **UK**, we collected speeches from daily ***Oral Answers to Questions*** (see parliament.uk, 2022). These sessions are held from Monday to Thursday and last for an hour. Questions can only be asked to cabinet members who are scheduled that day. MPs who wish to question a specific cabinet member need to put their questions in three days before the question time. Topical questions are reserved for the end of the session and do not need to be reported in advance. On Wednesdays, the PM comes to the House to be questioned for 30 minutes (Bevan and John, 2016). MPs who pose questions to the PM are chosen by a random shuffle, while opposition leaders are granted fixed slots. The PM in theory does not know the topics that will be discussed (parliament.uk, 2022).

Units of Observation

Each speech contribution during the studied period is treated as an observation (see Table 1). As such, observations capture what each participant during a particular QT said. From the moment someone else starts to speak, the observation ends and a new one starts. Speeches are ordered **chronologically**.

Speech contributions are scraped from the official parliamentary websites (for Australia: aph.gov.au; for Belgium: dekamer.be; for Canada: ourcommons.ca; for Croatia: edoc.sabor.hr; for the UK: hansard.parliament.uk) using Python and relying dominantly on the BeautifulSoup package (Richardson, 2007).

Variables

country

Indicates the country in which the speech contribution was made: *Australia*, *Belgium*, *Canada*, *Croatia* or *UK*.

date

Indicates the date on which the speech contribution was made, that is, when the question time session took place.

contributor

Indicates the name of the politician who made the speech contribution.

Please note that:

- For Belgium and the UK, there are speech contributions that have no known contributor (e.g. "*Hear, Hear"*). We attribute the value 99 to the contributor of these speech contributions, and do not code further contributor characteristics (e.g. the variable *party*).
- For Australia and Belgium, we report the name of the speaker as indicated at the beginning of the session. For the UK and Croatia, the speakers' names appear in the transcript. In Canada, we were unable to scrap the name of the person that is chairing the debate. We aim to include this in the upcoming versions. For now, we keep the value of this variable blank (the speakers' speech contributions can still be identified via variable *role*, see below)

party

Indicates the party affiliation of the politician that made a speech contribution. Abbreviations are used when possible.

Please note that:

- Some parties changed their names during our study period (*sp.a -> vooruit* in Belgium or *Pametno -> Centar* in Croatia). The dataset reports the name of the party at the time of the speech contribution.
- For the UK, we keep the "Labour party" and the "Labour and Co-operative party" separate. Please recode this if necessary for the research questions at hand.
- For the UK, members of the cabinet are usually not associated with parties during debates. For the post-2015 election period, we classify all cabinet members to the Conservative party, while for the post-2010 election period we tried to identify all Liberal Democrat cabinet members.
- For Belgium, we refer to politicians from Ecolo and Groen separately, although they form one party group in parliament.
- Politicians without party affiliation are indicated under *Independent* (for Belgium, this includes Veerle Wouters and Hendrik Vuye who formed a party group *Vuye&Wouters*).
- For Croatia, it was not possible to establish the party affiliation of several deputy ministers of past governments who were not elected to parliament.

constituency

Indicates the name of the constituency where the politician who delivered a speech was elected. Only available for countries with single-member electoral districts: Australia, Canada and the UK.

Please note that:

- The constituency name always reflects the constituency the contributor represents at the time of the speech contribution.

role

Indicates the role of the contributor. This is a categorical variable and is country-dependent.

In general, we provide information for roles such as *Prime Minister*, *Deputy Prime Minister* (+portfolio information), *Minister/Secretary* (+portfolio information), *The Speaker*, *The Deputy Speaker*, *Majority MP,* and *Opposition MP*. We also have information for *The Leader of the Opposition* (not in Belgium), and other country-specific roles such as *Manager of Opposition Business* in Australia or *Parliamentary Secretary* (+portfolio information) in Canada.

Please note that:

- *Speakers, Deputy-Speakers* and *First Deputy-Speakers* are only associated with a politician in case this politician is currently chairing a debate. As such, if a politician acts as a deputy-speaker but is also participating during the question time session, his role is not referred to as *Deputy-Speaker* but as *Majority MP* or *Opposition MP*.
- For the UK, roles can change during debates if a politician has multiple roles. As such, when such politicians speak, their role reflects the role in which they are questioned.
- For countries other than the UK, despite the fact that some politicians have multiple roles, we list all roles because it was not possible to collect data based on the specific role a politician is questioned for.
- For the shadow cabinet in the UK, we only provide information for the *Shadow Deputy Prime Minister/Shadow First Secretary of State* and the *Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer*.

gender

Indicates the gender of the contributor. When possible, we assigned gender to contributors based on the titles they were addressed by (e.g., Mr. for male and Ms. for female). For Belgium and Croatia, we assigned gender based on our knowledge of these politicians.

0 = male

1 = female

Please note that:

- To the best of our knowledge, at least for our study period and cases, no politician has identified as non-binary.

gov

Indicates if the party of the contributor is affiliated with the government or the opposition.

0 = opposition

1 = government

99 = not affiliated to government or opposition (*Speakers* and *Deputy Speakers*)

Please note that:

- We also consider a party as part of the government if it only provides support while not having a cabinet seat. For example, the Green party of Australia during the Gillard government, the Belgian PS during the Wilmes II government, the Croatian HSU during the Milanović government or the DUP during the May II government are all considered to be part of the government in the dataset.
- If a party started or stopped supporting the government during the term, it is treated accordingly. For example, Croatian HNS is treated as the opposition during the first months of the Plenković I government while it is treated as the government during the remainder of the Plenković I term.
- Crossbenchers in Australia are treated under opposition as they do not provide formal support to the government.

position

Indicates the position of the contributor. This position variable refers to a politician as a part of the opposition, a part of the parliamentary majority (government MP with no cabinet seat), or a part of the executive cabinet (government MP with a cabinet seat).

0 = opposition

1 = majority (government MP with no seat in the cabinet)

2 = cabinet (government MP with a seat in the cabinet/or a high office in the executive)

99 = not possible to attribute position (Speakers and Deputy Speakers)

Please note that:

- In Belgium and Croatia, members of the cabinet are not MPs.
- Secretaries of State in Belgium are treated as part of the *cabinet* since they are able to attend cabinet meetings.
- In Croatia, Deputy-Ministers are considered to be a part of the *cabinet* as they attend cabinet meetings in the absence of ministers. Please recode this if necessary for the research questions at hand.
- Parliamentary secretaries in Canada and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of States in the UK are considered to be part of the *majority*, not as a part of the *cabinet*. This is because they cannot attend cabinet meetings. On the contrary, while some Ministers in the UK also do not attend cabinet meetings, we treated them as part the *cabinet* due to the higher position that they hold. Please recode this if necessary for the research questions at hand.

issue

Indicates the official issue (agenda point) addressed in the speech contribution. These issues are country-dependent and are only available for Australia, Canada, and the UK.

Please note that:

- We have additional data on issue attention during these question time sessions (see Poljak and Mertens, 2022; *QuestionTimeIssue v.1)*
- *Engagements* are included as an issue for Prime Minister's Questions in the UK.
- For the UK, issues addressed under *Topical questions* are not specified. As such, we report them as *Topical questions*.

speech

Encompasses all transcribed sentences of each speech contribution.

Please note that:

- In Canada, we were only able to collect transcripts in English as the official parliamentary website automatically translates speech contributions in French to English.
- In Belgium, we collected the original transcripts in the language that was actually spoken.

speech_english

The translation of the speech contribution to English using Google Translate (only for Belgium and Croatia).

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