QuestionTimeIssue v.1

Data on issue attention during parliamentary question time sessions

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Data overview

QuestionTimeIssue v.1 is a dataset on issue attention during parliamentary question time sessions from Australia (2011-2022), Belgium (2010-2022), Canada (2006-2022), Croatia (2004-2022) and the UK (2010-2022). Each issue from the Comparative Agendas Project master codebook (economy, social welfare, law and order, education, etc.) for each question time session is treated as an observation. Variables indicate the share of attention that is devoted to an issue based on keywords that appear in the speech contributions of each debate. More specifically, the data includes the following variables: (i) the overall attention devoted to an issue, (ii) the attention devoted to an issue by the government (politicians from governing parties), (iii) attention devoted to an issue by the opposition (politicians from opposing parties), (iv) the attention devoted to an issue by the cabinet (politicians that are members of the executive cabinet such as the prime minister, ministers, secretaries), (v) the attention devoted to an issue by the majority (politicians from the majority without a cabinet seat), (vi) the attention devoted to an issue by female politicians overall, as well as females in (vii) the government and (viii) the opposition, and finally, (ix) the attention devoted to an issue by male politicians overall, as well as males in (x) the government and (xi) the opposition. 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 *QuestionTimeIssue* dataset (published in September 2022). We aim to update and expand this dataset in the future with other countries.

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

Dataset

Down below, you can find more information on *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 issue attentions observations included in the dataset. For data on issues during plenary debates, and for issues in other countries, please see the work by Sylvester et al. (2022).

Table 1. Selected cases and N of QTs in data

Country	Chamber	Question time (QT)	Start date	End date	N (QT)	N (issue attention)
Australia	House of Representatives	Questions Without Notice	10 May 2011	31 March 2022	654	13.734
Belgium	Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers	Vragenuur	7 January 2010	20 July 2022	396	8.316
Canada	House of Commons	Oral Questions	5 April 2006	23 June 2022	1500	31.500
Croatia	Hrvatski sabor	Aktualno prijepodne	27 January 2004	20 April 2022	79	1.659
United Kingdom	House of Commons	Oral Answers to Questions	2 June 2010	14 July 2022	1576	33.096

For **Australia**, the dataset includes issue attention 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 issue attention 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 issue attention 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 issue attention 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 issue attention 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 major issue from the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP; see Baumgartner et al., 2019) constitutes an observation for each question time session in a country. Overall, there are 21 major CAP codes that cover a variety of issues such as macroeconomy, social welfare, housing, transportation, defence, culture, etc. As such, for the 1.576 question time sessions from the UK, we have 33.096 observations as indicated in Table 1 (1.576 QTs times 21 issues).

Attention to each issue was calculated using the *QuestionTimeSpeech v.1* dataset (Poljak and Mertens, 2022). All speeches were analysed by using the *quanteda* package in R (Benoit et al., 2018) and by employing the CAP dictionary in English (Albugh et al., 2013a; 2013b). The dictionary allows us to identify references to the 21 major policy topics[1] from the CAP in speech contributions. The attention devoted to a particular issue durining a question time session was calculated as the share of references to this issue among all references to 21 major CAP issues for specific groups of people (see *Variables*).

For Belgium and Croatia, we use the *speech_english* variable from the *QuestionTimeSpeech v.1* dataset to calculate issue attention. This variable contains the translated speech contribution from

[1] Please note that in addition to the 21 major CAP topics, the dictionary also calculates references to some other issues such as *forestry*, *fisheries*, and *religion*. These issues were grouped with one of the 21 major CAP issues based on some of the sub-code issues in the CAP codebook (forestry-> environment; fishery->agriculture; religion -> civil and human rights). Data with separate attention to these issues can be made available upon request.

the original Croatian, Dutch and French language. For the translation Google Translate was used, which has become a reliable tool to use (De Vries, 2018).

Note that if a particular group of politicans did not participate in a question time session, or did not reference any issues, values are left empty (see *Variabels*).

Variables

country

Indicates the country: *Australia*, *Belgium*, *Canada*, *Croatia* or *UK*.

date

Indicates the date, that is, when the question time session took place.

cap_issue

Indicates the description of the cap code.

cap_code

Indicates the CAP code that is used to code this issue.

overall_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session.

For example, if during a particular question time session 100 references were made to issues from the CAP codebook, and if 10 of these were on the economy, then the attention devoted the economy in this question time session is 0.1.

opp_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by politicians from the opposing parties.

For example, if during a particular question time session 100 references were made to issues from the CAP codebook by opposition politicians, and if 10 of these were on the economy, then the attention devoted the economy in this question time session is 0.1.

gov_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by politicians from the governing parties.

majority_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by politicians from the majority that do not have a position in the cabinet.

cabinet_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by politicians from the executive cabinet.

m_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time by male politicians.

f_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by female politicians.

opp_m_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by male politicians in the opposition.

opp_f_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by female politicians in the opposition.

gov_m_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by male politicians in the government.

gov_f_attention

Indicates the share of attention devoted to an issue during a question time session by female politicians in the government.

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