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Canada's Greatest Underachiever: Examining the Squandered Potential of Question Period

Introduction

Question Period in the House of Commons became rather heated during a particular session in 2024 when former Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and current leader of the Conservative Party and Official Opposition, Pierre Poilievre, slung insults across the floor at each other. While Trudeau called the Conservative leader “spineless” and accused him of courting “white nationalist groups” while visiting an anti-carbon tax protest, Poilievre labelled the Prime Minister as a “wacko,” “radical,” and “extremist” for supporting British Columbia’s drug decriminalization efforts.¹ The verbal clashing between the two men subsided only when Poilievre was ejected by the Speaker of the House for refusing to rescind his initial “wacko” comment.² While the removal of the leader of the official opposition from Question Period is rare, name calling and personal attacks are not. However, despite that such inflammatory conduct has become ordinary during Question Period, it is in no way indicative of how the institution should be operating.

As this essay will argue, Question Period in the House of Commons should be a venue of responsible government which publicly exposes government policy inadequacies and imposes salient issues onto the government agenda. While the aggressive political point-scoring that is typically displayed in Question Period is engaging, this engagement comes at the serious cost of a Canadian populace ignorant of actual government directives since such conduct stifles productive dialogue. This inflammatory behavior is proof of the fact that Question Period is underachieving its potential by ensuring that the institution will continue to neglect both holding the government of the day accountable and educating Canadians on policy.

¹ John Paul Tasker, “Speaker kicks Poilievre out of the Commons after he calls PM a ‘wacko’ in tense question period exchange,” *CBC News*, April 30, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/poilievre-trudeau-whacko-1.7189600>.

² Tasker, “Speaker.”

Expose and Impose

Since the confederation of Canada, responsible government has been one of the premier political tenets underpinning Canadian democracy. It can be defined as a feature of Canadian governance that “makes the executive responsible for its actions to a democratically elected legislative body... This accountability implies first that the executive is required to defend its actions in the House”.³ In other words, responsible government means that the executive, composed of the prime minister and their cabinet ministers, must defend and justify their decisions before the various elected members of Parliament (MPs) that make up the House of Commons. In this way Question Period is a direct exercise of responsible government.

More specifically, Question Period allows MPs to publicly pose 35 second questions and receive 35 second answers for about 45 minutes a day from Monday through Friday.⁴ Typically, opposition MPs, which are those members that do not belong to the governing party, are the ones to ask the government the most questions.⁵ The opposition party with the highest number of seats is known as the official opposition.⁶ By asking questions, MPs are able to obtain “information from the Ministry of the day... [and] confront the government and hold it accountable for its actions, and to highlight the perceived inadequacies of the government”.⁷ Hence by allowing the executive to be probed and examined through oral questioning, Question Period is meant to hold the government responsible to the House and by extension the Canadian public.

This essay identifies two ways in which Question Period can exercise responsible government. This public accountability occurs mainly through *exposing* and *imposing*. In regards

³ Patrick Malcomson, Richard Myers, Gerald Baier and Thomas M.J. Bateman, eds., *The Canadian Regime: An Introduction to Parliamentary Government in Canada*, 7th ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 45.

⁴ Eric Janse and Jeffrey LeBlanc, eds., *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 4th ed. (House of Commons, 2025), <https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-4/ch11-2-e.html>.

⁵ Janes and LeBlance, *House of Commons*.

⁶ Janes and LeBlance, *House of Commons*.

⁷ Janes and LeBlance, *House of Commons*.

to the former, this simply means that Question Period is a venue in which MPs from opposition parties can use their questions to bring public attention to what they believe are questionable government policy decisions. For instance, in 1983 the Progressive Conservative opposition members asked Minister Pierre Bussières if his Department of National Revenue had adopted a “quota-system” which judged tax collectors on the quantity of business and income tax they collected.⁸ While the governing Liberal Party continually denied the accusation, the Progressive Conservatives maintained aggressive and daily questioning on Bussières and even produced their own documentation of an extant “quota-system” in the Department – which incited the creation of an investigation task force and the firing of the deputy prime minister for their oversight.⁹ Although the Liberal Party itself never admitted fault, its reaction to the documentation provided by the Progressive Conservatives within Question Period seems to indicate the opposition had pushed the government to address an issue that could have grown to significantly impact Canadians.

Another example occurred within the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in 2013. During Question Period the Official Opposition, then the BC NDP, disclosed leaked documents that stated the governing BC Liberal Party intended to use government funds for partisan efforts within ethnic communities.¹⁰ More specifically, through its line of questioning the BC NDP revealed that this document planned to use public apologies to racialized communities for historic injustices as “quick wins” aimed at garnering political support.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, the BC Liberal Party was plunged into deep controversy as a result; nonetheless, the people of British

⁸ C.E.S. Franks, *The Parliament of Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 152.

⁹ Franks, *The Parliament*, 152.

¹⁰ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)*, 39th Parl, 5th Sess, Vol 42 (February 27, 2013), 1400 (J. Horgan).

<https://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard-content/Debates/39th5th/20130227pm-Hansard-v42n7.htm>.

¹¹ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard)*, 39th Parl, 5th Sess, Vol 42 (February 27, 2013), 1410 (J. Kwan).

Columbia were well served by the opposition. British Columbians had been successfully alerted to the government's plan to use taxpayer money, ethnic communities, and the tragic histories of those communities as tools for achieving partisan electoral goals.

As seen above, one way Question Period is used to hold the government accountable for its actions is by exposing its less desirable decisions to the public. As C.E.S Franks writes, "debate and question period ensure that no issue is inviolate, that all are eligible to be examined... in the glare of the most embarrassing public spotlight".¹² Yet exposing government action is only one way in which Question Period allows the government to be held responsible to the public. As noted above, this essay identifies *imposing* as another path MPs can take during Question Period to keep the government accountable. Namely this includes imposing issues that are salient to the Canadian public onto the government's agenda by continuously bringing them up in Question Period.

This idea of Question Period being used to make the government address Canadian's key concerns has been identified in the parliamentary literature. For instance, a 2024 article found a strong correlation between Question Period and public interest in climate change. The study looked at the Conservatives, NDP, and Liberals from 2006 to 2021 and found that, "on average, the ratio of a party's Question Period interventions related to climate change increases by 0.4% following a one percent increase in the public salience of this issue".¹³ What is especially interesting is that from 2011 to 2015, when the Conservative Party and NDP were the governing party and official opposition, respectively, both discussed climate change during Question Period at similar rates.¹⁴ The authors describe this as noteworthy since the Conservative approach to

¹² C.E.S. Franks, *The Parliament*, 154.

¹³ R. Michael Alvarez and Jacob Morrier, "Issue Responsiveness in Canadian Politics: Are Parties Responsive to the Public Salience of Climate Change in the Question Period?" *Political Research Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2024): 176, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129231194270>.

¹⁴ Alvarez and Morrier, "Issue Responsiveness," 180.

climate change has routinely been understood as lacking while the NDP has made the issue a core tenant of its party doctrine.¹⁵ Meaning that, to see the governing Conservatives maintain a responsiveness to climate change just as strong as their official opposition:

...highlights the significant role played by the Question Period in ensuring democratic accountability. By granting opposition parties the opportunity to shape the agenda, the Question Period empowers them to pressure the government into addressing issues that hold importance to the public but might otherwise be ignored or neglected.¹⁶

The effect the NDP had in imposing climate change as a key issue onto the Conservatives became even more obvious when the Conservatives were no longer in power. After becoming the official opposition in 2015, the Conservatives' issue responsiveness towards climate change dropped by roughly 77% and became "statistically indistinguishable from zero" despite the issue's public salience continuing to rise.¹⁷ Put differently, the Conservative Party's increased attention to the issue of climate change did not stem from an inherent desire to respond to the concerns of Canadians. Rather, this interest only existed due to the pressure the NDP, as the official opposition, was able to impose onto the governing Conservatives' agenda.

Further, imposing salient issues through Question Period does not just increase the governing parties attention to that matter but it can also result in real policy changes. For example, Erica Rayment writes about how during the 34th Parliament, opposition MPs from the Liberal Party and NDP used Question Period to pose questions regarding violence against women and, in turn, imposed the issue onto the governing party's agenda.¹⁸ She notes that these "[e]fforts to force government policy action pertaining to violence against women leveraged the institutional structure of the Subcommittee on the Status of Women to achieve some small policy

¹⁵ Alvarez and Morrier, "Issue Responsiveness," 180.

¹⁶ Alvarez and Morrier, "Issue Responsiveness," 180.

¹⁷ Alvarez and Morrier, "Issue Responsiveness," 178.

¹⁸ Erica Rayment, *What Women Represent: The Impact of Women in Parliament* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024), 113.

wins for women”.¹⁹ More specifically, the subcommittee produced a report which had many of its suggestions adopted into the governing party’s new firearm legislation.²⁰ None of these “small wins” would have occurred without the initial work of MPs using Question Period to attract attention to this key issue.

What the above analysis therefore reveals is the true purpose of Question Period in Canada. It is designed to be an institution for the proliferation of responsible government – namely through both *exposing* government policy inadequacies to the public and *imposing* public concerns onto the government agenda. This is what Question Period *should* be. While neither exposing or imposing can alone drastically change government policy, that is not necessarily their purpose. Rather through these two methods, Question Period has the potential to act as the initial spark needed to push the government into taking accountability for either what it has done or what it has avoided doing.

Disheartening Reality

Although the above ideal form of Question Period is achievable, as illustrated by the aforementioned examples, it is sadly not the norm. One 2024 study by Ruxandra Serban compared the presence of conflictual remarks in Canada’s Question Period to its equivalents in Australia, the UK, and Ireland. While roughly 40% of questions in Australia and the UK and only 15% of questions in Ireland were found to contain conflictual remarks, nearly 80% of questions asked in the Canadian Question Period were found to be conflictual.²¹ However, conflict does not necessarily need to be a bad thing. In her study, Serban operationalizes “conflictual remarks” as criticism of the prime minister, the government, the party and, most

¹⁹ Rayment, *Women*, 130.

²⁰ Rayment, *Women*, 119.

²¹ Ruxandra Serban, “Conflictual behaviour in legislatures: Exploring and explaining adversarial remarks in oral questions to prime ministers,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 26, no. 2 (2024): 560-561, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481231189381>.

importantly, government policy.²² However nearly 100% of all questions posed in the Canadian Question Period were directed at attacking the prime minister, government, or party instead of criticizing actual policy.²³ More specifically, she writes that the official opposition leaders in Canada, who typically ask the most questions, were “significantly confrontational, with 93% of their questions containing instances of conflict” and that these questions “predominantly deployed personalised criticism of the prime minister”.²⁴ Therefore suggesting that the opposition is often more concerned with defaming the prime minister of the day and attacking how they run their government as opposed to providing genuine and substantial insight on where government policy has gone awry and where it should be headed.

Not only has this sorry state of Question Period been identified in the academic literature, but it has also been reported on by MPs both past and present. For instance, former Liberal MP Sergio Marchi, reflecting on his time as an opposition MP in the 1980s, described the attack tactics that were routine in the Question Periods he partook in. Marchi writes that:

Sadly, the overly aggressive mindset contributed to a poorer political culture. It created a race to the bottom. When the government went low, we in the opposition went lower. Everything seemed to constitute a scandal. It was a vicious circle... during Question Period when we Liberals were in opposition, we made mountains out of molehills, which was a real pity.²⁵

Specifically, Marchi reflects on how his fellow Liberal MPs would attack the governing Progressive Conservative Party on the most trivial of issues. He writes about his dismay when his colleagues asked whether the prime minister had served Canadian wine on a recent flight in a government jet.²⁶ Additionally he reflects on another time when his party attacked the minister of

²² Serban, “Conflictual behaviour,” 552-553.

²³ Serban, “Conflictual behaviour,” 561.

²⁴ Serban, “Conflictual behaviour,” 562-563.

²⁵ Sergio Marchi, “What We Lose When Question Period Becomes Performance Art,” *The Walrus*, January 26, 2026, <https://thewalrus.ca/what-we-lose-when-question-period-becomes-performance-art/>

²⁶ Marchi, “Performance Art.”

foreign affairs for flying first class to Hong Kong despite the fact that it was the only available commercial airline ticket and the minister needed to get there quickly for emergency government business.²⁷ Marchi ends by arguing that these “frivolous attacks” served no other purpose than to sow distrust among MPs and parties, prevent bi-partisan agreements, and increase public cynicism of Canadian democracy.²⁸ Put differently, Question Period was not a venue in which any government accountability seemed to be produced.

Similar sentiments are also reflected by current MPs as well. For example, MP Corey Hogan, who currently represents the riding of Calgary Confederation, has advocated for substantial changes in how Question Period is currently conducted. In its contemporary form, Hogan criticized Question Period for being composed of “shallow questions, shallow answers, [and] mad applause on both sides as though we were hitting oratory high scores in 35-second exchanges about procurement,” and reflected that “[t]oo often, it feels like noise, not insight”.²⁹ Corey seemingly agrees with this essay's own ideal vision of Question Period as a venue of responsible government. He writes that, “Canada’s system is built on the idea that the government must answer to Parliament routinely and in public. That’s a good thing — a deteriorating executive cannot hide here”.³⁰ Yet he admits that “the current format of question period falls short. True accountability is not measured in decibels or sound bites. It’s measured in whether Canadians learn something they didn’t know before”.³¹ Hence, Hogan too contends that MPs current conduct in Question Period actively undermines the institution's ability to create a productive political environment.

²⁷ Marchi, “Performance Art.”

²⁸ Marchi, “Performance Art.”

²⁹ Corey Hogan, “Canadians deserve a better question period,” *iPolitics*, February 2, 2026, <https://www.ipolitics.ca/2026/02/02/canadians-deserve-a-better-question-period/>.

³⁰ Hogan, “Canadians deserve.”

³¹ Hogan, “Canadians deserve.”

Despite Question Period being an institution where the opposition should be holding the government accountable, both the statistical and anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise. As seen above, Question Period predominantly produces uninformative criticism and personal insults aimed at the prime minister, their government, or party as opposed to either exposing government policy missteps or imposing pertinent issues onto the government agenda. As explained by Franks, in practice, “Question period is a means of discrediting individual ministers and government alike, so that the public will be persuaded that the opposition would be the better choice at the next election”.³² In more recent scholarship, this phenomenon described by Franks has been labelled the “permanent campaign”. Or, as explained by Alex Marland, this idea that political parties are constantly jockeying for popular support even outside of election cycles.³³ Both *exposing* and *imposing* would in theory achieve this goal by respectively revealing what a government has done wrong and what pertinent issues it has failed to address. However, today’s opposition parties have seemingly understood that embarrassing the executive is the preferable method of satiating this unquenchable desire for future electoral support. In turn, the present form of Question Period in the House of Commons has eschewed its responsibility of holding governments accountable to the Canadian public.

A Worthy Trade Off?

However, some have questioned whether this behavior in Question Period is necessarily a bad thing. For instance, in an interview study conducted by Serban, some MPs seemed to argue that the prominence of verbal attacks in Question Period was not only simply a part of the institution but also a vital characteristic of it. Serban reports that while “[a]ll interviewees

³² Franks, *The Parliament*, 146.

³³ Alex Marland, Anna Lennox Esselment, and Thierry Giasson, “Welcome to the Permanent Campaign,” in *Permanent Campaigning in Canada*, ed. by Alex Marland, Anna Lennox Esselment, and Thierry Giasson (UBC Press, 2017), 5.

confirmed that an adversarial style of questioning is part of the culture of Question Period... opposition MPs see adversarial questioning as a *feature* of their role” (emphasis added).³⁴ Following this logic that conflictual behaviour is necessary, Serban found that some MPs “thought that combativeness makes Question Period more ‘exciting’: a way to represent one’s party and attack the government in a way that attracts attention. As one interviewee put it, ‘[Question Period] is not a place to be kind’”.³⁵ In this view, inflammatory remarks in Question Period exist within the political culture to achieve tangible benefits.

What exactly these benefits are has been investigated by the academic literature. For example, a 2014 study by Rob Salmond looked into the effect different types of Question Periods had on voter behavior around the world. The study measured a citizen's “political knowledge” by the amount of district-level candidates they could name, with the ability to name two candidates or more considered the gold standard.³⁶ In turn, the study found that countries “with more open and quick-fire” Question Periods such as Canada had citizens who could name more candidates and consequently displayed a higher level of political knowledge.³⁷ This led Salmond to conclude that the “presence of an open and spontaneous Question [Period] appears to be one of the many factors that lead citizens to be more engaged with politics”.³⁸ Hence, although the bad behavior that plagues Question Period in Canada may be unbecoming, Salmond argues that, at the very least, it seems capable of engaging and educating the Canadian masses.

³⁴ Ruxandra Serban, “Questions to the Prime Minister in the Canadian House of Commons: Transformation or tweak?,” *Parliamentary Affairs*, ahead-of-print (2025): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaf046>.

³⁵ Serban, “Transformation or tweak,” 16.

³⁶ Rob Salmond, “Parliamentary Question Times: How Legislative Accountability Mechanisms Affect Mass Political Engagement,” *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014): 333, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2014.895121>.

³⁷ Salmond, “Parliamentary Question Times,” 333.

³⁸ Salmond, “Parliamentary Question Times,” 337.

However, such conclusions overpresent the efficacy of the current state of Question Period. While having Canadian voters be politically engaged and educated on the names of their local candidates is important, it comes at the serious cost of coherent policy discussions. Or, put differently, the aggressive behavior that has become commonplace in Question Period has not only seen the venue fail to exercise responsible government, but has also greatly prevented Canadians from being able to extract any real information on government policy. More specifically, this behaviour sees the governing party aim to stifle, rather than promote, informative dialogue in Question Period to avoid falling into rhetorical traps set-up by the official opposition and the public embarrassment that would follow.

The main method the governing party employs to prevent public mishaps during Question Period is by obsessively preparing. As described by Jonathan Malloy, cabinet ministers especially devote much time to preparing responses to possible questions they believe will be posed by the opposition. He writes about how before the advent of portable electronics it was not uncommon for ministers to attend Question Period with bulky binders filled with possible questions and responses.³⁹ Further, he discusses how, under the leadership of Stephen Harper, ministers would participate in a private “daily mock session” before each Question Period where they would be tested on topics that may arise during the real event.⁴⁰ It is this preparation that Malloy describes as “part of the overall value of Question Period” since “[i]t ensures ministers of the Crown are well-informed and ready to account for their portfolios”.⁴¹ However, what Malloy fails to mention is that this preparation typically results in government MPs reading from their manufactured answers regardless of the actual questions that were posed to them.

³⁹ Jonathan Malloy, *The Paradox of Parliament* (University of Toronto Press, 2023), 125.

⁴⁰ Malloy, *Paradox*, 125.

⁴¹ Malloy, *Paradox*, 125.

For instance, a 2026 study by R. Michael Alvarez and Jacob Morrier, which looked into the quality of answers being provided during Question Period, found that the governing party typically uses scripted party messaging to deflect the oppositions' questions and oftentimes provides unrelated answers to the posed questions. Alvarez and Morrier based the quality of these answers off of their depth of engagement with and relevance to the question being asked.⁴² The authors found that, "[d]uring the 39th, 40th, 42nd, and 43rd legislatures, the quality of answers to questions from members of third parties was significantly higher than the quality of answers to questions from members of the official opposition".⁴³ Meaning that, while minor parties may have had their questions relatively well addressed, the questions posed by the official opposition were typically met with superficial answers that were oftentimes irrelevant to its content.

The existence of a gap in relevancy between questions and answers during Question Period has also been supported by testimonial evidence from MPs themselves. In the same aforementioned interview study by Serban, MPs often admitted that they viewed answers to be "very scripted, with some opposition MPs suggesting that it does not matter what you ask, as the minister will most likely read a pre-prepared answer regardless".⁴⁴ Further, Serban seemingly uncovered the reason as to why this is the case. She found that MPs reported that this lack of substantial answers in Question Period stemmed from the desire "to generate favorable media clips, [and] also to avoid being caught making mistakes, which may result in a 'damaging clip'".⁴⁵ Or, put differently, even though government MPs are in theory well versed in the concerns and issues of the day, they seemingly still refuse to depart from approved party

⁴² R. Michael Alvarez and Jacob Morrier, "Measuring the Quality of Answers in Political Q&As with Large Language Models," *Political Analysis* 34, no. 1 (2026): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2025.10007>.

⁴³ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 92.

⁴⁴ Serban, "Transformation or tweak," 16.

⁴⁵ Serban, "Transformation or tweak," 16.

messaging out of fear of embarrassing their government. This behaviour results in answers that have little relevance to the question at hand.

The culprit responsible for this breakdown in productive dialogue is none other than the conflictual behaviour that occurs during Question Period. In the aforementioned study by Alvarez and Morrier, it is possible to discern a correlation between the inflammatory and insulting nature of the question and the relevance of the answer. The authors published two tables respectively containing the questions and their answers with the lowest and highest measured relevance and a clear pattern emerged. On the lowest end, many of the posed questions end with an incendiary comment on the governing minister's character. For example, on a question regarding China, the questioning MP remarked that the "Prime Minister clearly has zero credibility when it comes to China" and asked "[h]ow are Canadians supposed to trust this Prime Minister to act in their best interest?".⁴⁶ The answer ignored Chinese-Canadian relations entirely and instead the prime minister took the opportunity to congratulate the party's newest MPs who had just won a by-election.⁴⁷ Another question saw an MP attack the minister of finance for personally paying a friend \$200,000 to give a speech and suggested that such a decision means that the minister "has no moral authority to talk about budgetary matters or anything else" and asked "[w]hy does he not just resign?".⁴⁸ The finance minister retorted by stating the MPs question made it "plain that the member has not bothered to review the documentation which is publicly disclosed".⁴⁹ In such situations, can the answering government ministers really be blamed? After all, it is quite difficult to answer a question with a discussion on policy when the

⁴⁶ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 87.

⁴⁷ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 87.

⁴⁸ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 87.

⁴⁹ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 87.

question itself is targeted at one's personality and only using policy decisions as a pretext. In such a setting, constructive dialogue will naturally break down.

However, in Alvarez and Morrier's second table which contained the questions and answers with the highest relevance there was a noticeable difference in how the questions were asked. For instance, one MP asked the parliamentary secretary to the minister of veteran affairs to "update this House on the benefits that our government provides to injured veterans and their families" with no snide comments attached.⁵⁰ The question was then succinctly answered with a brief rundown of "the average monthly financial benefit that an injured veteran may be eligible for".⁵¹ Another question simply asked what the government had done in regards to Ethiopian-Canadian relations, with the prime minister announcing that their recent trip to Africa had resulted in "negotiations toward a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement with Ethiopia".⁵² In these cases, the question is neither a poorly disguised ad hominem nor is it deflected by the government. Instead the Canadian populace receive an actual answer of substance which can then be further used to understand where the government of the day is headed in any given policy realm.

The pattern these examples reveal is obvious; questions that are civil receive direct answers and questions which are simply personal attacks are answered superficially. While the authors do not specify which questions came from either opposition or government MPs, with the latter obviously being more inclined to ask easier questions, the pattern is nonetheless undeniable. It is a pattern that suggests that Question Period needs to leave the petty partisan bickering behind if it is ever going to produce actual information for the Canadian public. As the opposition attempts to embarrass the government with loaded questions, the governing party

⁵⁰ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 88.

⁵¹ Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 88.

⁵² Alvarez and Morrier, "Quality of Answers," 89.

naturally refuses to truly engage in Question Period – meaning that it possesses little ability to educate Canadians about government policy.

It is therefore unsurprising that most Canadians view Question Period negatively. For instance, recent polling revealed that a third of Canadians viewed parliamentary debate, including Question Period, as “uninformative” while 46% and 54% described it as “useless” and “posturing,” respectively.⁵³ While the conflictual conduct in Question Period may be exciting, engaging, and even educational for Canadians in some respects, it comes at the serious cost of a citizenry with no real way of gathering insight about their government’s policy directives. What good is it if an average Canadian voter can identify a handful of district-level candidates every election cycle but fail to articulate what any of those candidates or their parties even stand for? This is hardly a worthy tradeoff. Not only does the inflammatory behavior of Question Period ensure that Canadians lose it as a venue for responsible government where the opposition may expose or impose policy issues, this conduct also guarantees the institution's inability to produce substantive information for the public.

Conclusion

Question Period in the Canadian House of Commons has great potential to be Canada's greatest venue of responsible government but it is instead currently Canada’s greatest underachiever. To ensure the executive is held publicly accountable, the opposition should be both *exposing* the public to dubious government policy directives and decisions while also *imposing* prominent public concerns onto the government agenda. However, today the opposition has eschewed this ideal form of Question Period and has instead used the institution to routinely

⁵³ Michael Lee, “Canadians hold largely negative views of parliamentary debate, many see it as ‘posturing’: Angus Reid,” *CTV News*, November 2, 2023, <https://vancouver.ctvnews.ca/politics/article/canadians-hold-largely-negative-views-of-parliamentary-debate-many-see-it-as-posturing-angus-reid/#:~:text=These%20were%20followed%20by%20%22disrespectful, on%20the%20issue%20of%20heckling.>

propel insults and attacks towards the prime minister, their party, and their government in the hopes of garnering future electoral support by publicly embarrassing the executive. While some have argued that this inflammatory behaviour is beneficial for Canadians' engagement in politics, the disadvantages of this current conduct outweigh these perceived advantages. When Question Period routinely becomes a platform for the opposition to thinly disguise insults as questions and sling them across the floor in the hopes the executive will slip up and embarrass itself, the government naturally deflects with superficial and scripted answers. In this case no productive or informative dialogue can be held. There is no winner, but there is certainly a loser – the Canadian public. In such a setting, Canadians lose Question Period as both a way to gather insight on government policy and also as a venue for responsible government.

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