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# Parliamentary Questions in Turkey

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Political reasons for asking, and consequences of, parliamentary questions in the Turkish parliament during the 19th legislative period (1991–95) were investigated. Political reasons for asking questions were inferred from attributes of questions including the party affiliation of questioners, question content, referred authorities, and constituency linkages in questions. Political consequences were gauged by the substance of ministers' answers. Our findings reveal that both opposition parliamentarians and government ministers have strategies or behavioural patterns for using parliamentary questions to enhance their own political appeal. Parliamentarians ask either blaming or soliciting questions. Blaming questions are more likely to be (i) of oral type; (ii) directed to the PM; (iii) unrelated to the constituency. Soliciting questions are more likely to be (i) of written type; (ii) directed to the responsible minister; (iii) related to the constituency. In turn, ministers are more willing to give positive, concrete, or promising answers to questions that either beg for help or a solution or pertain to particular constituencies.

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In parliamentary democracies the question period is the best known measure for legislatures to oversee the activities of governments.<sup>1</sup>

The question period [is] regularly set aside in the parliamentary timetable during which legislators may question cabinet ministers on subjects within their field of administrative responsibility. Legislators may request either an oral or a written reply to questions.<sup>2</sup>

Parliamentary questioning is a signal to both government and extra-parliamentary audiences to *obtain* or to *give* information on particular topics or to force a policy statement to be made.<sup>3</sup> There are several different motivations as well as various ends for parliamentary questioning. Among other factors, one can count primarily: to request information, to press for action, to gain personal publicity, and to show concern for the interests of constituents.<sup>4</sup>

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While purely information-seeking questions (*perlocutionary* acts) constitute the political function of parliamentary questioning (*micro function*), institutional requirements have more fundamental and structural functions (*macro functions* – control function, political profile function, and responsiveness function).<sup>5</sup>

Although MPs can freely raise questions on issues about which they are concerned, the control function (oversight effect) of questions is more limited than that of other oversight mechanisms such as *interpellations*. For instance, the answer to an information-seeking question may be full of praise for the government, which is certainly a disadvantage for the opposition.<sup>6</sup> However, by providing a check on ministers and their officials, parliamentary questions may keep the government responsive to parliament and ‘deters the administration and the government from malpractice’.<sup>7</sup> It is argued that individual legislators raise questions not primarily to control the executive but rather to increase their publicity and self-promotion and improve opportunities for re-election.<sup>8</sup> The question period thus provides a precious opportunity in particular for backbench members to gain public attention.<sup>9</sup> Governments may also use parliamentary questioning as a means of ‘making announcements in a somewhat informal way’.<sup>10</sup> A parliamentary question may force a minister to make a commitment on an issue and thus influence policy-making.<sup>11</sup> The prime minister or ministers concerned respond to questions with varying degrees of interest and concern. Whereas British ministers tend to deal with questions fairly seriously, in France and Canada questions are left unheeded due to either inertia or refusal.<sup>12</sup>

In recent decades the number of questions asked per legislative period ranged approximately from 10,000 to 20,000 in almost all European parliaments.<sup>13</sup> An increase in parliamentary questioning is a complex phenomenon and cannot be explained by a single factor such as a broadening of the public sector.<sup>14</sup> Both internal and external factors, including government type, the scope of questions, professional background of MPs, resources and organisational change, party system competitiveness, increasing internationalisation, and media interest, may be considered as important as other factors in this development.<sup>15</sup>

In scholarly literature, parliamentary questions have received relatively limited attention even in the United Kingdom which has the longest practice of question time in parliamentary democracies.<sup>16</sup> A few exceptions that exist, however, point to the use to which MPs put questions.<sup>17</sup> Franklin and Norton showed for the British parliament that MPs regarded parliamentary questions as most useful for proving themselves to their constituents. On the other hand, MPs were least satisfied with the limited role of parliamentary questions in influencing the government and its policy.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the British Question Time, in Scandinavia questions were considered less important by the MPs, received less media coverage, and were less adversarial in nature.<sup>19</sup> However, visibility and publicity dimensions were equally emphasised by

most of the Scandinavian MPs.<sup>20</sup> These empirical studies also support the hypothesis that one single question may be asked for several reasons and serve many conflicting goals.

Like the multiplicity of reasons behind asking a question, the forms and numbers of questions also vary. A parliamentary question is not a major mechanism of parliamentary control of the executive but is a principal way or means of collecting information. Although 'control as a by-product' of questions may be conducive to the responsiveness of relevant agencies, namely the executive, the question mechanism may benefit both government and opposition.<sup>21</sup> It is argued that 'the effect of a single question on executive compliance is secondary to the publicity and self-promotion opportunities presented to the questioner'.<sup>22</sup> This does not mean that 'the greater the number of questions tabled the greater publicity for the individual legislator. Therefore, an MP may take some strategic considerations into account before submitting an *effective* question such as timing, scope and referred authority.'<sup>23</sup>

#### PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS IN TURKEY

Although the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) experienced breakdowns and suspensions, and became more submissive to executive authority, during recent decades several attempts have been made to institutionalise it, including the reform of its internal organisation.<sup>24</sup> The ways and means of parliamentary supervision are as old as the history of parliament in Turkey. Parliamentary questions have been an integral part of parliamentary control of the executive as early as the Ottoman parliamentary period; however, it has become more effective since the means of supervision were constitutionally guaranteed by the 1961 Constitution. The major problems of parliamentary control mechanisms have been the excessive and unnecessary use of questioning by the opposition MPs and the non-meticulous attitude of the governments in responding to the questions. The Speakership of the TGNA returned a total of 298 questions to the questioners during the 19th period, simply because of the fact that they did not meet the requirement of being a question.<sup>25</sup>

According to the 1982 Constitution (Article 98/1), a *question* 'is a request for information addressed to the PM or ministers to be answered orally or in writing on behalf of the Council of Ministers'. However, the Rules of Procedure (RP) of the TGNA (Article 96/1) defines a question as 'a way of requesting information from the PM or ministers on certain matters excluding personal and private life without a reason of statement and personal opinion'. A question, oral or written, is signed by one MP only and pursuant to the rules on form and content is submitted to the Speakership of the TGNA.

Unlike many European countries,<sup>26</sup> the RP of the TGNA includes a general list of forbidden questions. Those matters which can easily be

learned from other sources, or aim at consultation only, and are similar to the content of a motion of interpellation submitted earlier, cannot be accepted by the Speakership (Article 97, old RP Article 95). Moreover, according to Article 138 of the Constitution 'no questions shall be asked, debates held, or statements made in the Legislative Assembly relating to the exercise of judicial power concerning a case under trial'. Finally, a question may not be answered by the PM or relevant minister if its contents fall into the category of 'confidential information' described by the Banking Law.

The Speaker of the TGNA and his staff exercise a very significant function in deciding the suitability of the questions. The motions of supervision, including questions, are first examined by the Speakership (by the relevant officers in practice) and are then included in the agenda or returned to the questioner. Considering the fact that the ways and means of supervision is initiated mainly by the opposition parties/members the responsibility and position of the Speaker becomes more crucial.<sup>27</sup>

Questions, either oral or written, are referred to the prime minister or relevant ministry by the Speakership. Oral questions, which must usually contain fewer than 100 words and no attachments, are a way of collecting information through which either the PM or the relevant minister makes an official statement on the subject matter. Questions are put on the agenda after five days following the referral date to the relevant ministry (RP Article 98, seven days before the 1996 amendments). It is provided that a minimum of one hour at the beginning of each session of at least two working days of every week is reserved as a special time for oral questions. The government spokesperson (one of the members of the Council of Ministers) can answer the oral question within five minutes (ten minutes before the amendments of 1996) even in the absence of the questioner; the questioner may request additional information from his seat and the spokesperson can answer it in not more than five minutes (RP Article 98). The spokesman may answer more than one question simultaneously or answer questions on similar issues jointly with prior notice to the Speaker. An oral question not answered within three consecutive sessions can be converted into a written question.

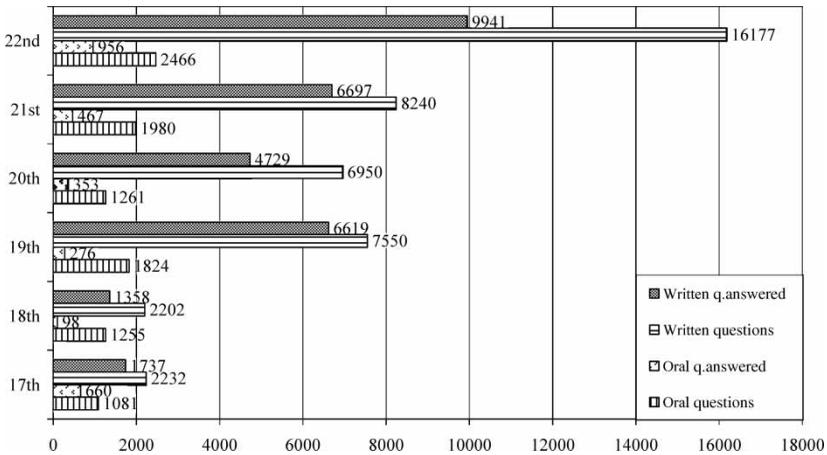
Written questions, which must usually contain fewer than 500 words and no attachments, are a way of collecting information by means of which an official governmental declaration, having the signature of the PM or the relevant minister on the subject matter, is made. Written questions are answered within 15 days (previously 20 days) following their referral to the relevant ministry at the latest (RP Article 99). Answers are sent to the questioner and the answer will be published as an annex to the Minutes of the TGNA. The Speaker sends a notice to the PM or the relevant minister who has failed to answer a question on time and if they fail to answer the question within ten days following the

receipt of the first notice the question is published in the agenda of the TGNA under the heading of ‘unanswered questions’. The government, however, has the right to delay at most *one month* its answer to an oral or written question for reasons of public benefit or for the compilation of necessary information on condition that the government informs the Speaker’s Office of the delay (RP Article 99 and old RP Article 97). The MPs also submit questions to the Speakership about the duties of the Speaker, the Bureau of the Assembly, and the Consultative Council within the scope of the activities of the TGNA (RP Article 100). Either the Speaker or a deputy Speaker who is delegated by the Speaker may answer these questions. The general procedures for questioning apply to these questions.

In recent years, Turkish MPs have increasingly resorted to oral and written questions (see Figure 1). The total numbers of oral and written questions submitted to the TGNA, which were 3,313 in the 17th legislative period (1983–87) and 3,457 in the 18th period (1987–91), reached 9,374 in the 19th period, 8,211 in the 20th, 10,220 in the 21st and 18,643 in the current 22nd period (as of July 2006). This trend partially reflects an increase in the overall legislative activities of MPs.

The increase in the total number of questions in the post-18th period can be explained by various factors. First of all, democratic political reforms which gradually lifted the restrictions on freedom of expression provided a wider spectrum for participation and representation in the late 1980s and early

FIGURE 1  
PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS RECEIVED AND ANSWERED, 1983–2006



Source: TGNA Minutes.

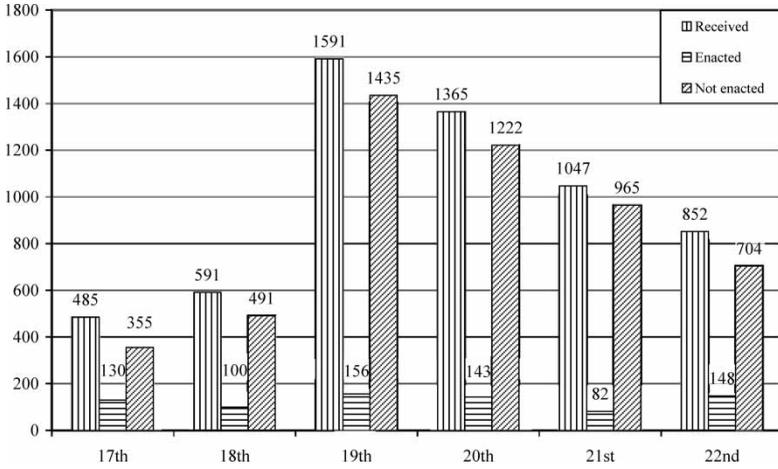
1990s. Consequently 'effective number of parties' and 'seat fragmentation' increased in the parliament during the 1990s and facilitated the inclusion of social or individual issues in the legislative process.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, ongoing socio-economic aspects of Turkish society, such as population growth, unemployment, poverty and internal migration, accelerated constituency demands on MPs. When the relevant bureaucratic authorities do not provide any information about even the simplest issue brought by an MP, he or she submits a parliamentary question to the relevant minister and gets an answer faster than the usual procedure.<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, the deadline for a minister's answer to an oral question and getting an answer by a minister in the plenary are other significant motives for an MP to submit a question. Sometimes an MP may use the information obtained through the parliamentary questioning process for his legislative activities (drafting a bill) or other political objectives, for example, an MP may publicise the information, which was gathered by asking several parliamentary questions on the same issue, and drive the relevant authorities into greater difficulty. Finally, it is evident that the chance of an individual bill being enacted has been very low (10.66 per cent on average). In other words, a question is the only significant weapon in the hands of an individual MP during his parliamentary life. Thus, when MPs fail to initiate policy and influence the content of legislation, they attempt to control 'the government's general conduct on affairs'.<sup>30</sup>

There has been a similar increase in the number of private bills put forward – from 485 in the 17th period, 591 in the 18th period, to 1,591 in the 19th period but a gradual decrease in the following periods (see Figure 2). The rate of private bills enacted, however, *dropped* in the 19th legislative period compared with the previous periods whereas the rate of parliamentary questions answered *increased* substantially in the 19th period (see Figure 3).<sup>31</sup> The large increase in the number of questions in the 19th period thus was matched by the comparable increase in the number of answers (74 per cent on average). During the 19th period, we may argue that questions have become more successful than private bills in getting results, provided that an important part of these answers are of a substantive nature.

However, in Turkey, too, parliamentary questions are of limited use for legislative oversight:

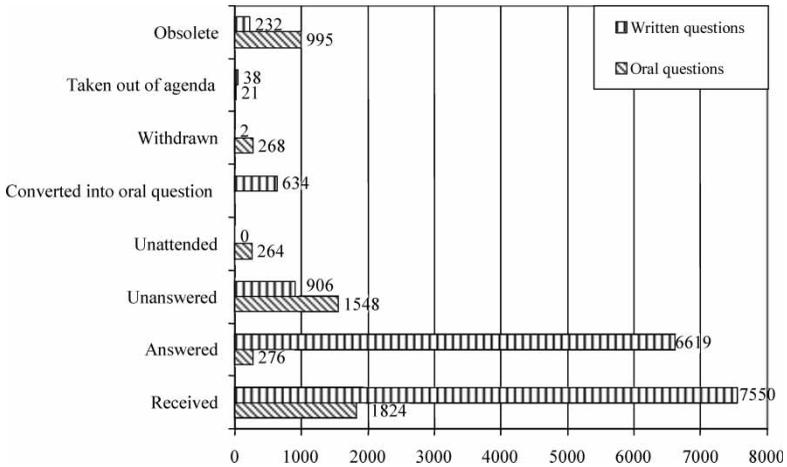
Oral and written questions are a request by a member of the Parliament to a Minister for explanation of, or for action on a specific matter. It has no immediate political sanction, and so is clearly distinguishable from other procedures of parliamentary control, such as interpellation . . . All these mean that the question in terms of supervision function has a *limited* effect.<sup>32</sup>

FIGURE 2  
PRIVATE BILLS, 1983–2006



Source: TGNA Minutes.

FIGURE 3  
FINAL STATUS OF QUESTIONS, 19TH PERIOD



Source: TGNA Minutes.

We are thus interested in MPs' aims in using questions for their political interests as well as in the subsequent effects of questions they have asked.

There is reason to believe that MPs can sometimes extract politically meaningful results by asking questions of ministers. In previous research it was observed that a large number of questions reflect the particular interests of a constituency, economic sectors, or other social groups.<sup>33</sup> Ministers, who always refute any questions concerning the wrongdoing of the government, often come up with practical solutions to regional grievances (see Table 1). For instance, to such questions pointing to delay in infrastructure building, the minister either answered that construction had already started or promised its completion by a certain deadline.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

While the TGNA has been experiencing a gradual institutionalisation, a majority of MPs reserve most of their time for non-legislative activities such as constituency service.<sup>34</sup> Like constituency service, parliamentary questioning may also enhance an MP's visibility, reputation, and chance of reelection.<sup>35</sup> As the review of the literature shows, parliamentary questioning may be motivated by MPs' concern for the interests of their constituents. Such concern may be reflected in the relationship between parliamentary questions and their constituency relevance.

TABLE 1  
EXAMPLES OF ORAL AND WRITTEN QUESTIONS (18TH LEGISLATIVE PERIOD)

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**(Agenda number)**

**Q: MP's question**

**A: Minister's answer**

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(7/1348)

Q: Delayed payment to the public sector workers.

A: The completion of the payment.

(7/1379)

Q: Whether the village hit by a landslide will be declared a disaster area.

A: The declaration of the village to be a disaster area.

(7/1421)

Q: Whether any sugar factories are to be built in the province.

A: The announcement of the time of construction and the size of the plant.

(7/1479)

Q: Delay in the putting into operation the telephone switchboard in the village.

A: A temporary use of the telephone switchboard of a neighbouring village.

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*Source:* Y. Hazama, 'Parliamentary Questions, Representation, and Electoral Competition in Turkey', unpublished manuscript, 1994.

Although the motives for asking questions are relatively clear, little has been known about the behavioural effect of parliamentary questions on parliamentary politics. When Wiberg tried to gauge the political effect of questions in Western European parliaments, he had to rely on highly aggregate data such as the total number of questions.<sup>36</sup> The current research is a preliminary and explorative study that aims to bring to light the political consequences of parliamentary questions in Turkey. Instead of testing theory-based hypotheses, we have tried to find answers to the set of questions that address the above concern.

In the following sections, we examine first what kind of questions parliamentarians ask in order to increase their visibility. In particular, parliamentarians may resort to questions that primarily aim: (1) to hold the government accountable or (2) to defend the interests of the constituency. It is possible to find out which types of questions serve which of the two purposes. Second, more often than not parliamentarians receive substantive answers. The possibility of receiving such answers may depend on various factors including types of questions, referred authorities, the oral/written distinction, and constituency relevance. The contents of answers are analysed using these explanatory variables.

The main source of our data consists of the TGNA Minutes of the 19th legislative period (1991–95). The questions were coded by 14 variables in terms of: (1) questioners' party affiliation; (2) question content; (3) referred authorities; (4) constituency relevance of questions; and (5) the type and speed of answers from the minister.<sup>37</sup> This codification is intended to discover political reasons for asking questions, shown in the attributes of questions and questioners as well as political consequences that are reflected in the minister's answers.

This period had some particular characteristics in the political development of Turkey.<sup>38</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s Turkey faced economic and political problems. Economically, the pace of development failed to improve the regional disparities; living standards and income distribution did not keep pace with the high population growth. Politically, the exclusionary characteristic of the secular state combined with insufficient channels for participation increased the demands of socially excluded religious and ethnic groups.

More specifically, there are a number of reasons why we choose this period to answer our research questions. First, the 1991 general election was the first fairly contested election since the return to civilian democracy in 1983 following the 1980 military takeover. The incumbent party lost a significant number of votes and an opposition party became the winner of the election and formed the government. Second, the parliamentary party system gradually became more fragmented and polarised and the effective

number of parties in parliament increased from 1987. Thus political parties from right to left were able to express the voice of socially and economically excluded groups in the parliament. Third, this period was also the start of coalition governments (until 2002). Fourth, the sudden death of President Ozal, a strong inter-party status quoist bloc of Islamists and nationalists (*Hawks*), the rise of Kurdish terrorism and the economic crisis slowed down and halted political reforms and led to political crises. In this period, in 1994, the Turkish economy experienced its most severe crisis since 1945, 'with a 6.1 per cent reduction in GNP and 7.1 per cent drop in real per capita GDP'.<sup>39</sup> Finally, starting from this period, Turkey also emerged at the forefront of the international arena and assumed important initiatives in the Gulf Crisis of 1991 and subsequently in various crises in different regions of the world.

## FINDINGS

This section begins with the background of who asks questions and then presents findings that shed light on: (1) the type of questions that parliamentarians ask in order to hold the government responsible or to serve the constituency interests and (2) why some questions receive more substantive answers than others.

Who asks parliamentary questions is important since it is the only *independent* act of an MP in the TGNA.<sup>40</sup> Here, we concentrate on whether the question comes from an opposition party's MP or from an MP of the government party(ies). Almost all the questions (95.3 per cent) come from opposition members in parliament (see Table 2).

Parliamentary questions are more useful for opposition members than for governing party members. Whereas governing party MPs can use their direct but informal access to ministers to perform effective constituency services, opposition party MPs have to resort to a more formal access to demand concrete government measures for their constituents. Opposition MPs also try to use parliamentary questions to keep the government responsive to the parliament. However, opposition MPs may find questioning more effective for their constituency service, publicity, and recognition than for influencing policy making.<sup>41</sup>

### *Questions: Blaming the Government or Speaking for the Constituency*

What kind of questions do parliamentarians ask in order to criticise the government or to serve constituency interests? Table 3 summarises three cross-tabulations to show types of questions by referred authorities, the oral/written distinction, and constituency relevance. For simplicity, referred authorities are represented by the percentage of questions referred to the prime

TABLE 2  
NUMBER OF QUESTIONS BY PARTY AFFILIATION

Party	n	%
<b>In opposition:</b>	<b>8929</b>	<b>95.3</b>
ANAP, centre-right	5029	53.69
RP, pro-Islam	2621	27.98
CHP/SHP, centre-left	336	3.59
DEP, pro-Kurdish	191	2.04
Independent/ANAP	171	1.83
DEP/SHP	156	1.67
BBP/RP, nationalist	127	1.36
Independent/SHP	91	0.97
MHP/RP, nationalist	98	1.05
CHP/DSP	85	0.91
ANAP/DYP	7	0.07
DSP, centre-left	6	0.06
DYP/ANAP, centre-right	3	0.03
MP/RP, pro-Islam	1	0.01
YP/ANAP, centre-right	4	0.04
<b>In government:</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>4.7</b>
SHP, centre-left	329	3.51
DYP/ANAP, centre-right	107	1.14
SHP/DSP	3	0.03
SHP/ANAP	2	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>9367</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Note:* Slashes between party abbreviations indicate that the MPs changed parties.

Shown before each slash is their last affiliated party. CHP was a coalition member between April–October 1995. Abbreviations for party names are as follows: ANAP: Motherland Party, BBP: Great Unity Party, CHP: Republican People's Party, DEP: Democracy Party, DSP: Democratic Left Party, DYP: True Path Party, MP: Nation Party, MHP: Nationalist Action Party, RP: Welfare Party, SHP: Social Democrat Populist Party, YP: New Party.

*Source:* Compiled and calculated by the authors from TGNA Minutes.

minister out of the total of a given type of question. The oral/written distinction is shown by the percentage of oral questions and the constituency relevance by the percentage of constituency-relevant questions.

An overview of the table can be given on question type, referred authorities, the oral/written choice, and constituency relevance. First, questions submitted by the MPs during the 19th legislative period were in general more practical than partisan in nature. The two most frequent questions are about infrastructures and natural disasters (15.5 per cent) and business problems (13.7 per cent).<sup>42</sup> Second, a disproportionate number of questions (30.4 per cent) were addressed to the prime minister while responsible ministers received 69.0 per cent.<sup>43</sup> As many as 63.8 per cent of the questions on business problems and 55.3 per cent of the questions on corrupt ministers and bureaucrats were referred to the prime minister as the responsible head of the government. Third, oral questions constitute only 18.8 per cent of the

TABLE 3  
TYPES OF QUESTION BY REFERRED AUTHORITIES, ORAL/WRITTEN, AND CONSTITUENCY RELEVANCE

Types of question	Type total		Referred to PM		Oral		Constituency-relevant <sup>d</sup>	
	n	% grand total	n	% type total	n	% type total	n	% type total
Infrastructures and natural disasters	1438	15.5	90	6.3	149	10.4	1310	91.1
Business problems	1270	13.7	810	63.8	264	20.8	134	10.6
Education and culture	666	7.2	101	15.2	84	12.6	331	49.7
Local government	566	6.1	62	11.0	104	18.4	262	46.3
Health services and social security	552	5.9	56	10.1	112	20.3	321	58.2
Corrupt ministers and bureaucrats	532	5.7	294	55.3	216	40.6	71	13.3
Internal security and terrorism	516	5.6	109	21.1	74	14.3	248	48.1
Foreign affairs and national defence	409	4.4	169	41.3	100	24.5	29	7.1
Labour problems	396	4.3	129	32.6	83	21.0	78	19.7
Unjust treatment by bureaucrats	353	3.8	116	32.9	99	28.1	94	26.6
Agricultural problems	335	3.6	77	23.0	91	27.2	189	56.4
Land property	197	2.1	60	30.5	31	15.7	119	60.4
Religious affairs	157	1.7	35	22.3	11	7.0	88	56.1
Human rights violations	74	0.8	13	17.6	11	14.9	34	45.9
Other <sup>a</sup>	1823	19.6	702	38.5	313	17.2	738	40.5
Grand total <sup>b</sup>	9284	100.0	2823	30.4	1,742	18.8	4046	43.6
Pearson chi2(14) <sup>c</sup>			1,70E + 03		325,348		2,60E + 03	
Pr.			0.001		0,001		0.001	

Note: <sup>a</sup>Category 'other' includes questions on a wide range of issues such as pollution, sports, promotions, private TV channels, toll fares etc.; <sup>b</sup>For oral and written questions, the grand total was 9287, due to double entries; <sup>c</sup>Pearson's chi-squares were calculated for the independence between question type and (1) referred authorities (Prime Minister or Minister/Speaker), (2) oral/written type (oral or written), and (3) constituency relevance (relevant or irrelevant) and <sup>d</sup>Questions are constituency-relevant if they refer to the constituency of the questioner or the province or region in which the constituency is located.

Source: Compiled and calculated by the authors from TGNA Minutes.

questions.<sup>44</sup> However, 40.6 per cent of the questions on corrupt ministers and bureaucrats were asked in an oral form apparently to raise publicity. Fourth, nearly half of the questions (43.6 per cent) were at least *explicitly* related to the constituency of the questioner. In particular, almost all of the questions on infrastructures and natural disasters (91.1 per cent) were constituency relevant.<sup>45</sup>

Is there a clear pattern of questions by whether parliamentarians are blaming the government or seeking service to their constituencies? We may hypothesise that they tend to ask *blaming questions* (on policy failures) of the prime minister and in oral form. What matters for this type of question is the image that the questioner is challenging the government. Usually, the questioner does not expect any meaningful answer from the government to this relatively confrontational type of question. On the other hand, parliamentarians are expected to direct *soliciting questions* (for their constituencies) to responsible ministers and in written form. For this type of question, it is more important to obtain concrete and substantive results by way of persuasion rather than by accusing the relevant authority.

In order to test the above hypothesis about the purposes of questions, the Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to the percentage columns of the last three items. The results showed that the percentages of (1) questions referred to the prime minister and (2) questions in an oral form were *negatively* correlated with the percentage of (3) constituency-relevant questions at statistically significant levels ( $r = -0.810$ ,  $p = 0.001$  and  $r = -0.625$ ,  $p = 0.013$ , respectively).<sup>46</sup> These results supported the above hypothesis that blaming questions were more likely to be addressed to the prime minister in oral form and soliciting questions to responsible ministers in written form than otherwise.

#### *Answers: Taking Advantage of Being Questioned*

To what extent do parliamentarians receive substantive answers to their questions? Of the total of 9,367 questions actually recorded<sup>47</sup> on the TGNA Minutes, 6,864 (73.3 per cent) received some sort of responses from the authorities. As many as 34.8 per cent of these responses are concrete answers, with specific dates, measures, and promises, from responsible ministers or the PM. Although ministers have responded to about half (52.4 per cent) of the questions only with information, they have rarely responded in abstract terms or denied the allegations (10.2 per cent). In very few cases (0.1 per cent) they have displayed no interest in the questions. This is an important finding, showing that parliamentary questions are taken seriously by the government.

The substantiveness of answers varies according to the type of questions that are submitted. Table 4 summarises three cross-tabulations that show concrete/non-concrete answers by question type, referred authorities, the

TABLE 4  
 CONCRETE ANSWERS BY QUESTION TYPE, REFERRED AUTHORITIES, ORAL/  
 WRITTEN AND CONSTITUENCY RELEVANCE\*

Coded variables	Total answers <i>n</i>	Of which concrete answers	
		<i>n</i>	%
<i>Type of question</i>			
Infrastructures and natural disasters	1,300	799	61.5
Education and culture	551	257	46.6
Agricultural problems	250	112	44.8
Health services and social security	438	190	43.4
Land property	156	60	38.5
Labour problems	291	102	35.1
Foreign affairs and national defence	293	97	33.1
Religious affairs	142	33	23.2
Internal security and terrorism	433	94	21.7
Human rights violations	59	12	20.3
Corrupt ministers and bureaucrats	269	54	20.1
Unjust treatment by bureaucrats	231	41	17.8
Local government	388	58	15.0
Business problems	766	69	9.0
Others	1,297	409	31.5
Total	6,864	2,387	34.8
Pearson $\chi^2(14) = 868,0234$ Pr = 0,001			
<i>Referred authorities**</i>			
Prime minister	1,462	293	20.0
Minister	5,351	2,084	39.0
Total ( <i>N</i> )	6,813	2,377	34.9
Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 180,6555$ Pr = 0,001			
<i>Oral/written</i>			
Oral	275	83	30.2
Written	6,589	2,304	35.0
Total ( <i>N</i> )	6,864	2,387	34.8
Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 2,6653$ Pr = 0,103			
<i>Constituency relevance</i>			
Relevant	3,489	1,648	47.2
Irrelevant	3,373	737	21.9
Total ( <i>N</i> )	6,862	2,385	34.8
Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 487,3251$ Pr = 0,001			

Note: \*\*Concrete answer' means a statement with specific dates, measures, and promises.

\*\*Excluding questions referred to the Speaker of the TGNA.

Source: Compiled and calculated by the authors from TGNA Minutes.

oral/written distinction, and constituency relevance. First, the question type rows indicate that the prime minister or ministers respond(s) more favourably to types of questions that give them credit for bringing solutions to problems concerning citizens' daily lives such as infrastructures and natural disasters

(61.5 per cent), education and culture (46.6 per cent), agricultural problems (44.8 per cent), health services and social security (43.4 per cent), land property (38.5 per cent), and labour problems (35.1 per cent). On the other hand, ministers are reluctant either to admit or to give concrete answers to questions involving problems of the government or its governability such as business problems (9.0 per cent), local government (14.9 per cent), unjust treatment by bureaucrats (17.7 per cent), corrupt ministers and bureaucrats (20.1 per cent), human rights violations (20.3 per cent), and internal security and terrorism (21.7 per cent). The result of Pearson's chi-square test showed that the concrete/non-concrete distinction and question type are associated at the 0.001 level of statistical significance.

Second, since the prime minister tends to receive blaming rather than soliciting questions, his/her answers tend to be less concrete than responsible ministers' answers, with the percentage of concrete answers being 20.0 and 39.0 per cent, respectively (Pearson's chi-square test was significant at the 0.001 level). Third, whether the question was oral or written did not make a substantial difference to the possibility of any question receiving a concrete answer. The percentage of concrete answers was 30.2 per cent for the oral questions while the same rate was 35.0 per cent for the written questions. The result of the Pearson's chi-square test could reject the null hypothesis of independence between concrete/non-concrete answers and oral/written answers only at the 0.103 level but not at the conventional 0.05 level of statistical significance. Lastly, ministers, including the prime minister, were more willing to give concrete answers to constituency relevant than irrelevant questions (Pearson's chi-square test was significant at the 0.001 level). In sum, ministers seem to deal seriously with questions that would help to enhance their popularity.

## CONCLUSION

Parliamentary questions provide information, explanation, and justification about governmental actions. Increasing numbers of questions may be the result of several factors, including lack of effective communication between the relevant public authority and citizens as well as political competition between the government and opposition parties. Although parliamentary control of the executive may not be the major objective of a parliamentary question it may exercise a kind of influence over policy implementation with special reference to administrative procedure and ministerial practices.<sup>48</sup>

We have investigated the political function of parliamentary questions in the TGNA during its 19th legislative period (1991–95). Political reasons for asking questions, on the one hand, were inferred from attributes of questions including the party affiliation of questioners, question content, referred

authorities, and constituency linkages in questions. Political consequences, on the other hand, were gauged by the substantiveness of ministers' answers.

The general picture that has emerged from the preceding analysis is that both opposition parliamentarians and government ministers have strategies or behavioural patterns for using parliamentary questions to enhance their own political appeal. Parliamentarians ask either blaming or soliciting questions. Blaming questions are more likely to be (1) of oral type, (2) directed to the PM, and (3) unrelated to the constituency. Soliciting questions are more likely to be (1) of written type, (2) directed to the responsible minister, and (3) related to the constituency. In turn, ministers are more willing to give positive, concrete, or promising answers to questions that either beg for help or solution or pertain to particular constituencies. In conclusion, Turkish MPs in opposition use questions to compensate for their disadvantages vis-à-vis government party members. Ministers also take advantage of answering opportunities to demonstrate their capability. There are, however, other perspectives that could not be pursued in this study. For instance, the nature of the party system may affect the way parliamentarians resort to questions. The more competitive or fragmented the party system is, the more frequently parliamentarians may use questions to promote their interests. This and other potential relationships need to be investigated further with data covering a longer period than the current study.

#### NOTES

1. M. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), p. 107. Functions of parliaments can be categorised mainly by three components: *legitimation, recruitment–socialisation–training*, and *decisional or influence*. R.A. Packhenam, 'Legislatures and Political Development', in A. Kornberg and L. Musolf (eds.), *Legislatures in Developmental Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1970); P. Norton, *Does Parliament Matter?* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); and G.W. Copeland and S. Patterson, 'Parliaments and Legislatures', in G. Kurian (ed.), *World Encyclopedia of Parliaments and Legislatures* V.I (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1998).
2. G. Loewenberg and S. Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 149.
3. M. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', in H. Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag and St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 180.
4. M. Wiberg and A. Koura, 'The Logic of Parliamentary Questioning', in M. Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries: Forms of Questioning and Behavioral Trends* (Helsinki: Finnish Political Science Association, 1994), pp. 30–31. It is argued that parliamentary questioning also has symbolic functions as a process of interpretation of the past, the present, and the future and a symbolic-expressive behaviour of allocating responsibility and guilt and indicating conflict and belonging. I. Mattson, 'Parliamentary Questioning in the Swedish Riksdag', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, p. 346.
5. Wiberg and Koura, 'The Logic of Parliamentary Questioning', pp. 31–6.
6. Wiberg and Koura, 'The Logic of Parliamentary Questioning', p. 34.

7. G. Loewenberg and S. Patterson, 'Comparing Legislatures', p. 149.
8. B.E. Rasch, 'Question Time in the Norwegian Storting – Theoretical and Empirical Considerations', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, pp. 256–60.
9. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures*, p. 108.
10. Arranged or planted questions may serve several functions varying from publicising some governmental actions to making a policy statement. Wiberg and Koura, 'The Logic of Parliamentary Questioning', pp. 36–7.
11. Mattson, 'Parliamentary Questioning in the Swedish Riksdag', p. 287.
12. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures*, p. 107.
13. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures*, p. 107; Loewenberg and Patterson, *Comparing Legislatures*, p. 155; K. von Beyme, *The Legislator German Parliament as a Centre of Political Decision-making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 80–81, and C. Leston-Bandeira (ed.), Southern European Parliaments in Democracy, Special Issue, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(3) (2003).
14. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', p. 214.
15. von Beyme, *The Legislator German Parliament as a Centre of Political Decision-making*, pp. 75–6; M. Wiberg, 'To Keep the Government on Its Toes: Behavioral Trends in Parliamentary Questioning in Finland 1945–1990', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, pp. 121–39; E. Damgaard, 'Parliamentary Questions and Control in Denmark', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, p. 72; Mattson, 'Parliamentary Questioning in the Swedish Riksdag', pp. 300–304 and 349–50, and B.E. Rasch, 'Question Time in the Norwegian Storting: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, pp. 247–75.
16. P. Norton, 'Introduction', in M. Franklin and P. Norton (eds.), *Parliamentary Questions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
17. P. Howarth, *Question in the House: The History of a Unique British Institution* (London: Bodley Head, 1956); N. Johnson, 'Parliamentary Questions and the Conduct of Administration', *Public Administration*, 39 (1961), pp. 131–48; D.N. Chester and N. Bowring, *Questions in Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); D.N. Chester, 'Questions in Parliament', in A.H. Hanson and B. Crick (eds.), *The Commons in Transition* (London: Fontana, 1970); D.N. Chester, 'Questions in the House', in S.A. Walkland and M. Ryle (eds.), *The Commons in the Seventies* (London: Fontana, 1977); R. Borthwick, 'Questions and Debates', in S.A. Walkland (ed.), *The House of Commons in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Wiberg, *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, and Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication'; C.E.S. Franks, 'Debates and Question Period in the Canadian House of Commons: What Purpose do they Serve?', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 15 (1985), pp. 1–15; M. Westlake, 'The Origin and Development of the Question Time Procedure in the European Parliament', EUI Working Paper EPU 90/4 (Florence: European University Institute, 1990).
18. Franklin and Norton, *Parliamentary Questions*. In 1989, they mailed a questionnaire to 70 MPs, asking a large number of questions. Out of the 70, 34 replied, including 18 Conservatives and 14 Labour members.
19. Mattson, 'Parliamentary Questioning in the Swedish Riksdag', pp. 342–3.
20. Wiberg, *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*.
21. Rasch, 'Question Time in the Norwegian Storting', pp. 256–60.
22. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', p. 182.
23. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', p. 198.
24. İ. Turan, 'Volatility in Politics, Stability in Parliament: An Impossible Dream? The Turkish Grand National Assembly During the Last Two Decades', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(2) (2003), pp. 151–76; Ö.F. Gençkaya, 'Reforming Parliamentary Procedure in Turkey', in Ö.F. Gençkaya, R. Keleş and Y. Hazama, *Aspects of Democratization in Turkey* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies-JETRO, 1999), pp. 2–21, and E. Kalaycioglu, 'Cyclical Breakdown, Redesign and Nascent Institutionalization: The Turkish Grand National Assembly', in U. Liebert and M. Cotta (eds.), *Parliament and Democratic Consolidation in Southern*

- Europe: Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey* (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1989), pp. 149–79.
25. S. Iba, *Parlamentar Denetim Yolları, Etkinliği ve Susurluk Orneği* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1997), p. 136.
  26. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', pp. 200–204.
  27. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', p. 204.
  28. Until the current 22nd period both 'seat fragmentation' and the number of questions increased gradually and periodically throughout the 1990s. Although the 'effective number of parties' and 'seat fragmentation' are the lowest in the current parliament since 1983, the total number of questions almost doubled compared to the previous periods. Therefore, it is less likely to argue that 'fragmentation' is the main cause in explaining the increase in the number of questions. Unfortunately, our aggregate data is not sufficient to test this speculative argument for these periods.
  29. Freedom of Information Act was adopted in 2003.
  30. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication', p. 220.
  31. During the 17th and 18th periods the majority party governments in power initiated legislation by means of private bills or combined the similar bills with a governmental draft in the process of law-making. Therefore, the success rate for individual bills was higher. It is obvious that during the successive coalition periods (19th, 20th and 21st periods) law-making was mainly based on governmental drafts having the consent of coalition parties.
  32. Ö.F. Gençkaya, 'The Impact of Organizational Attributes on Legislative Performance: A Structural-Functional Analysis of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 1983–1987', Unpublished doctoral dissertation (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University, 1990), p. 123.
  33. Y. Hazama, 'Parliamentary Questions, Representation, and Electoral Competition in Turkey', unpublished manuscript, 1994.
  34. C.L. Kim, J.D. Barkan, İ. Turan and M.E. Jewell, *The Legislative Connection: The Politics of Representation in Kenya, Korea, and Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984); E. Kalaycioglu, 'Cyclical Breakdown, Redesign and Nascent Institutionalization: The Turkish Grand National Assembly', and Y. Hazama, 'Constituency Service in Turkey: A Survey on MPs', *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2005, <http://www.ejts.org/document471.html>.
  35. Kim *et al.*, *The Legislative Connection*, p. 143.
  36. Wiberg, 'Parliamentary Questioning: Control by Communication'. With that data, he had to conclude from the time-series analysis that there was no significant relationship between the size of the public sector and the number of questions.
  37. Unless otherwise stated for special reasons noted in the text the total number of questions may vary for each unit of analysis.
  38. On political dynamics of this period see E. Kalaycioglu, 'Elections and Party Preference in Turkey: Changes and Continuities in the 1990s', *Comparative Political Studies*, 27 (1994), pp. 402–24; C. Balim *et al.*, *Turkey: Economic, Political and Social Challenges in the 1990s* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); M. Heper and A. Evin, *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic* (Boulder, CO and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994); E. Kalaycioglu, 'The Shaping of Party Preferences in Turkey: Coping with the Post-Cold War Era', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 20 (1999), pp. 47–76; E. Ozbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics Challenges to Democratic Consolidation*, (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2000); F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2000); *Impact of Globalization on the Turkish Economy* (Ankara: Central Bank of Turkey, 2002), <http://www.tcmb.gov.tr/yeni/evds/yayin/kitaplar/global.doc>; M. Heper and F. Baskan, 'Politics of Coalition Government in Turkey, 1961–1999', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 7 (2001), pp. 68–89; B. Rubin and M. Heper (eds.), *Political Parties in Turkey* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002); S. Sayari and Y. Esmer (eds.), *Politics, Parties and Elections in Turkey* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); B. Beeley (ed.), *Turkish Transformations New Century – New Challenges* (Huntingdon: The Eothen Press, 2002); E. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); I. Turan, S. Iba and A. Zarakol, 'Inter-part Mobility in the Turkish Grand National Assembly: Curse or Blessing?', *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2005, <http://www.ejts.org/document400.html>.

and E. Kalaycioglu, *Turkish Dynamics Bridge Across Troubled Lands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

39. A. T. Akarca and A. Tansel, 'Economic Performance and Political Outcomes: An Analysis of the 1995 Turkish Parliamentary Election Results', *ERC Working Paper in Economics* 04/01, January 2004, p. 8.
40. In recent years, however, some parliamentary party groups require their deputies to get the party's pre-approval prior to submission of the motion of question to the Speakership.
41. For the Norwegian case, see Rasch, 'Question Time in the Norwegian Storting', p. 267.
42. It is interesting that although democratisation was the major phenomenon of the period, issues relating to freedom of expression and human rights consisted of only about 2.5 per cent of the total questions.
43. The remaining 51 (0.5 per cent) have been directed to the Speaker of the TGNA. If the question is related to more than one ministry or if the responsible authority is unknown the question is referred to the PM practically.
44. There are reasons why few oral questions were put on the agenda of the TGNA. Before the comprehensive parliamentary reforms introduced in 1996 for answering oral questions, there were no time limits. The RP stipulated only that oral questions would be put on the agenda seven days after the Speaker's letter was sent to the prime minister or the responsible ministry. Earlier, the Speaker, if he deemed it necessary, might give time to a series of questions compiled in the sixth section of the agenda (old RP Article 97). (For the details of parliamentary reforms, see Ö.F. Gençkaya, 'Reforming Parliamentary Procedure in Turkey', pp. 2–21.) In other words, whether an MP could ask an oral question was at the discretion of the Speaker. Even if the Speaker spared time for oral questions, the PM or the responsible minister was often absent from the session and the oral questions were simply deferred. Out of the total oral questions in the 19th period, 56.4 per cent became obsolete.
 

On the other hand, if written questions could not be answered within 35 days of their referral to the respondent authority, they were to be converted into oral questions. This rule may have forced the responsible ministers to ask written questions in time. In fact, the mean days that have been spent between the *arrival of the question to the Speakership* and the minister's answer were greater for the written questions (87.9 days,  $N = 6567$ ), which have time limitations, than for oral questions (325.2 days,  $N = 275$ ), which do not. The result of the t-test for the difference between the two means is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
45. Questions dealing with infrastructures and natural disasters are more common in economically less developed constituencies than in more developed ones. We have compared (1) the mean per capita 1993 income of the constituency from which any MP asked constituency-related questions and (2) that of the constituency from which any MP asked *unrelated* questions. The t-test, when applied to the two means (1,688,576 TL and 1,912,977 TL, in current price (1 USD = 14,487 TL at the end of 1993) has shown that the mean per capita 1993 constituency income calculated for the constituency-relevant questions is lower, at the 0.001 significance level, than the mean per capita 1993 constituency income calculated for the irrelevant questions. This is a reflection of the fact that those constituencies which either lack infrastructures or remain vulnerable to natural disasters tend to be found in economically less developed areas.
46. The Pearson's correlation coefficient for the relationship between (1) the percentage of questions referred to the prime minister and (2) that of questions in an oral form was 0.579 at the 0.024 level of statistical significance.
47. Out of the total 9,374 agenda numbers assigned to oral and written questions in the 19th legislative period, seven agenda numbers had no questions recorded in the Minutes.
48. Norton, *Does Parliament Matter?*, p. 112.