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Questioning the Utility of Question Hour

*Assessing the efficiency of question hour in the Punjab Assembly
Fourth Parliamentary year (2011-2012)*

Published: August, 2012

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Questioning the Utility of Question Hour

Assessing the efficiency of Question hour in the
Punjab Assembly
Fourth Parliamentary year (2011-2012)

Gauging the efficiency of the assembly secretariat, in forwarding questions to the provincial departments & tabling the received answers, and the departmental efficiency to answer the questions.

Preface

It is time to congratulate the CPDI team to complete the first-ever study of its kind on the utility of question hour in the assembly. This study measure the efficiency of the assembly secretariat and relevant departments to respond to the questions asked by legislatures. It also reflects on the interest of the members of different parties to ask questions on the floor of the house.

This study is based on the data of 4th parliamentary year of the Punjab assembly. It depicts some very interesting and thought-provoking trends. As you traverse along the pages of this study, you will notice that performance of female members is much better than their male colleagues. Similarly, some political parties seem to have greater interest in question hour than other. For both male and female, much of the burden is shared by top 10% of the members. Such trend will be more vivid and conclusive in the analysis of whole parliamentary term. CPDI has already started work on this comprehensive study and it would be published once the term of the assemblies is over and new general elections are announced in Pakistan.

The purpose of this study is more than academic. It aims at initiation of a constructive dialogue around the rusted rules of procedures of the Punjab assembly that were developed by assembly itself and has never been subjected to public scrutiny. Its message is that we need a major overhaul in our procedures to make it at par with the international best practices. Our assembly secretariat and our line departments need to improve their efficiency to make the exercise of question-hour a meaningful one; otherwise there is no fun in receiving the answer to the questions that were asked 2 years back. This study is one of the series of publications that CPDI has planned to produce before next general elections in the country. It is hoped that this series will raise awareness among people and will enable them to exercise informed choice of vote in elections.

This study is the result of painstaking efforts made by many colleagues. Mr. Qamber, Ms. Sheeba, Ms. Ambreen, Ms. Fauzia and Mr. Shahid Jatoi worked hard to get and arrange data. Most of the analyses were drawn by a team consisting of Mr. Bilal Saeed and Mr. Shuja Akram. Ms. Rameesa Afzal was responsible for designing of the document. Publication of this study was made possible through the support of National Endowment for Democracy. My thanks are due to all those who participated in this pioneer study. We will welcome all comments and critique on methodology and analysis so that the next report can be improved in the light of these comments.

Amer Ejaz
Executive Director

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1 Introduction

The first hour of Punjab assembly’s sitting, except for Saturday or Sunday or a holiday, if a sitting of assembly is held on that day, is assigned for asking questions and is referred to as the question hour. During the question hour, the relevant minister addresses the questions submitted by the members of the assembly. Question hour serves as one of the most significant instruments to instigate government’s performance. Questions are also important in judging the performance of government departments, public servants and to hold ministers accountable.

1.1 Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to provide a quantitative analysis on the efficiency of question hour in the Punjab assembly during the fourth parliamentary year (April 14, 2011 to March 30, 2012). This efficiency is measured by studying two factors, i.e., the efficiency of the assembly secretariat and the efficiency of the departments.

- a) **Efficiency of the assembly secretariat:** The efficiency of the assembly secretariat is gauged by calculating the overall time taken by the assembly secretariat to forward questions to the departments and the time taken to table the answers on floor of the house.
- b) **Efficiency of the Departments:** The efficiency of the departments is measured by time taken by the departments to reply to the questions after receiving them from the assembly secretariat.

1.2 Methodology

The current analysis is based upon the questions addressed by the Punjab assembly during the fourth parliamentary year. The first session of the fourth parliamentary year was held on 14th April 2011 (one sitting) and the last session was held from 29th March 2012 to 30th

(one sitting) and the last session was held from 29th March 2012 to 30th March 2012 (two sittings). There were 13 sessions in this parliamentary year in which 11 of the sessions have question hours. Session 27th was budget session while session 34th was prorogued under article 109 of the constitution of Pakistan. The list of questions is obtained from the official website of the Punjab assembly. The number of questions addressed session wise, is provided in table hereunder.

Session #	Period		No. of Sittings	# of Questions
	From	To		
24	14th April 2011	14th April 2011	1	27
25	25th April 2011	25th April 2011	1	34
26	12th May 2011	12th May 2011	1	35
27	10th June 2011	29th June 2011	13	0 ¹
28	22nd July 2011	22nd July 2011	1	35
29	11th August 2011	11th August 2011	1	34
30	9th September 2011	16th September 2011	6	152
31	14th October 2011	14th October 2011	1	31
32	12th December 2011	9th January 2012	21	579
33	19th January 2012	6th February 2012	11	235
34	15th February 2012	15th February 2012	1	0 ²
35	24th February 2012	12th March 2012	12	299
36	29th March 2012	30th March 2012	2	33
Grand Total				1494

¹ Budget Session

² Session prorogued

The study is conducted over a data comprising 1494 questions³ addressed during the fourth parliamentary year. In total 1539 questions were addressed during the question hour in the provincial assembly of Punjab during the fourth parliamentary year. Out of these 1539 questions, 45 questions were removed from the study as 35 of these questions were deferred and 10 of the questions had invalid data entries in the documents obtained from the assembly website.

³ Starred questions are studied

2 Rules of Procedures: Punjab Assembly

Punjab assembly has detailed rules of procedure to conduct its official business. Chapter 8 of the Rules of Procedures is related to questions and provides an understanding of the business conducted during the question hour. This chapter is reproduced hereunder:

Ch VIII: Questions

42. Time of Questions.

(1) Except as provided in these rules, the first hour of a sitting, after the recitation from the Holy Quran and the swearing in of members, if any, shall be available for the asking and answering of questions.

(2) There shall be no question hour on –

(a) [a Saturday, a Sunday] or a holiday if a sitting of the Assembly is held on such a day;

(b) a day fixed after a general election for making of oath by members generally;

(c) a day fixed for –

- (i) the election of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker;
- (ii) the ascertainment for the purpose of clause (2A) of Article 130 of the Constitution;
- (iii) moving, consideration and voting of a resolution for vote of confidence in the Chief Minister;
- (iv) moving, consideration and voting of a resolution of no confidence in the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker or the Chief Minister;
- (v) address by the Governor;
- (vi) discussion on the Budget or the Supplementary Budget or for voting on demands for grants relating to the Budget or the Supplementary Budget; and
- (vii) consideration and passage of the Finance Bill.

43. Notice of Questions.–Not less than fifteen clear days’ notice of a question shall be given unless the Speaker, with the consent of the Minister concerned, allows a question to be asked at shorter notice:

Provided that if the consent of the Minister is not received within seven days from the receipt of the communication, the Speaker may admit a short notice question if he is satisfied that it is a matter of urgent public importance.

44. Short notice Questions.–Questions at short notice shall ordinarily be answered at the commencement of the question hour:

Provided that–

- (i) a member shall not ask more than one short notice question in a sitting; and
- (ii) a short notice question shall not be asked to anticipate a question of which notice has already been given.

45. Form of notice of Question.–

- (1) A separate notice of every question shall be given in writing to the Secretary and shall specify the official designation of the Minister to whom it is addressed, or if the question is addressed to a private member, the name of that member.
- (2) A member, who desires to ask a starred question, shall distinguish it with an asterisk.
- (3) If, in the opinion of the Speaker, any starred question is of such a nature that a written reply would be more appropriate, he may direct that such question be placed on the List of Unstarred Questions.

46. Subject matter of Questions.–

- (1) Subject to the provisions of these rules, a question may be asked for the purpose of obtaining information on a matter of public concern within the special cognizance of the Minister to whom it is addressed.
- (2) A question addressed to a Minister shall relate to the public affairs with which he is officially connected, or to a matter of administration for which he is responsible.

- (3) The questions relating to a Department for which there is no Minister shall be addressed to the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs.

47. Questions to Private Members.–A question may be addressed to a private member provided the subject-matter of the question relates to some Bill, resolution or other matter connected with the business of the House for which that member is responsible, and the procedure in regard to such question shall, as far as may be, the same as that followed in the case of a question addressed to a Minister with such variations as the Speaker may consider necessary or convenient.

48. Admissibility of Questions.–In order that a question may be admissible, it must satisfy the following conditions; namely–

- (a) it shall not bring in any name or statement not strictly necessary to make the question intelligible;
- (b) if it contains a statement, the member shall make himself responsible for the accuracy of the statement;
- (c) it shall not contain arguments, inferences, ironical expressions, imputations, epithets or defamatory statements;
- (d) it shall not ask for an expression of opinion on or the solution of an abstract legal question or a hypothetical proposition;
- (e) it shall neither refer to the character or conduct of any person except in his official or public capacity nor to the character or conduct which can be challenged only on a substantive motion;
- (f) it shall not be of excessive length;
- (g) it shall not relate to a matter which is not primarily the concern of the Government;
- (h) it shall not ask for information on any matter under the control of bodies or persons not primarily responsible to the Government, except where the Government has financial interests in such bodies or persons;
- (i) it shall not ask for information on matters under the consideration of a Committee, nor shall it ask about the proceedings of the Committee, unless such proceedings have been placed before the Assembly by a report of the Committee;
- (j) it shall not make or imply a charge of a personal character;

- (k) it shall not raise questions of policy too large to be dealt within the limits of an answer to a question;
- (l) it shall not repeat in substance any question already answered;
- (m) it shall not be trivial, vexatious, vague or meaningless;
- (n) it shall not ask for information contained in documents easily accessible to the public or in ordinary works of reference;
- (o) it shall not contain references to newspapers by name and shall not ask whether statements in the Press or by private individuals or by non-official bodies are accurate;
- (p) it shall not ask for information regarding Cabinet discussions or any advice given to the Governor, or in relation to any matter in respect of which there is constitutional or statutory obligation not to disclose information;
- (q) it shall not–
 - (i) contain any reflection on the conduct of the Governor or a Judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court;
 - (ii) contain any criticism of the decisions of the Assembly;
 - (iii) ordinarily ask for information or matter of past history;
 - (iv) seek information about matters which are in their nature secret or sensitive;
 - (v) contain any reflection on a decision of a court of law or statutory tribunal established in Pakistan or such remarks as are likely to prejudice a matter which is *sub-judice*;
 - (vi) relate to a matter which is *sub-judice*; and
 - (vii) refer discourteously to a foreign country.

49. Speaker to decide admissibility of Questions.–The Speaker shall decide the admissibility of a question and shall disallow any question or a part thereof which, in his opinion, is in contravention of these rules, or he may, in his discretion, amend its form.

50. Notice of admission of Questions.–A question shall not be placed on the List of Questions for answer until eight clear days have expired from the day on which the notice of the admission of the question by the Speaker was given by the Secretary to the Minister, or the member to whom it is addressed.

51. Allotment of days for Questions.–The time for answering questions shall be allotted in rotation on different days for the answering of questions relating to such Department or Departments of the Government as the Speaker may, from time to time, specify and on such day only questions relating to the Department or Departments for which time on that day has been allotted, and questions addressed to private members, shall be placed on the List of Questions for answers.

52. Number of Questions for a sitting.–

- (1) Not more than two starred questions including short notice questions and five unstarred questions from the same member shall be placed on the List of Questions for a sitting: Provided that nothing in this rule shall apply to a question postponed or transferred from an earlier date or to another department.
- (2) Not more than thirty-five starred questions shall be placed on the List of Questions for a sitting and the remaining questions mature for answers, if any, shall be taken over to the next day allotted for the Department concerned.
- (3) The questions shall be placed on the List of Questions in the order in which their notices are received, but a member may, by notice in writing given at any time before the sitting for which his question has been placed on the said List, withdraw his question.

53. List of Questions.–Questions which have not been disallowed shall be entered in the List of Questions for the day and the answers, if received from the Minister concerned not later than forty-eight hours before the commencement of the question hour on the day on which the questions are set down in the List, shall be entered along with it, and shall be called in order in which they stand in the List unless the Speaker changes that order with the leave of the Assembly.

54. Delay as to answer.–

- (1) If the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary concerned is not ready with the answer to a question or if the answer to a question has not been received within the time prescribed in sub-rule (1), the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary concerned shall state, in the House, the reasons therefore.

- (2) If the Speaker is satisfied that it was beyond the control of the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary concerned to have been ready with the answer, the question shall be put for answer on the next day allotted for that Department.
- (3) The Speaker may direct that the Minister concerned shall enquire into the matter and report the result of the inquiry, including the action taken, if any, to the House on the next day allotted for that Department.

55. Mode of asking Questions and answering.–

- (1) At the time of asking questions, the Speaker shall call successively each member in whose name a starred question appears in the List of Questions.
- (2) The member so called shall rise in his place and, unless he states that it is not his intention to ask the question standing in his name, he shall ask the question by reference to its number on the List of Questions.
- (3) If, on a question being called, it is not put or the member in whose name it stands is absent, the Speaker may, at the request of any other member, direct that the answer to it be given.
- (4) The questions shall be answered by the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary concerned.

56. Supplementary Questions.–When a starred question has been answered, any member may ask such supplementary questions as may be necessary for the elucidation of the answer, but the Speaker shall disallow a supplementary question which, in his opinion, either infringes any provision of these rules relating to the subject matter and admissibility of questions or is otherwise an abuse of the right of asking questions.

57. Written answers to Questions not replied orally.–If any starred question placed on the List of Questions for answer on any day is not called for answer within the time available for answering questions on that day, the answer already supplied by the Minister concerned shall be laid on the Table by the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary concerned or the member to whom the question is addressed and no oral answer shall be required for such a question nor shall any supplementary question be asked in respect thereof.

58. Prohibition of discussion on Questions or answers. – There shall be no discussion on any question or answer except as provided by rule 61.

59. Questions relating to the Secretariat of the Assembly.–Questions relating to the Secretariat of the Assembly including the conduct of its officers, may be asked of the Speaker by means of a private communication and not otherwise.

60. No publicity of answers to Questions in advance. – Answers to questions which Ministers propose to give in the Assembly shall not be released for publication until the answers have actually been given on the floor of the Assembly or laid on the Table.

61. Discussion on a matter of public importance arising out of answer to a Question.–

- (1) On every [Wednesday], the Speaker may, on two clear days notice being given by a member, allot one hour for discussion on a matter of sufficient public importance which has during the last week been the subject of a question, starred or unstarred: Provided that the Speaker may extend the time of sitting for that day by an hour.
- (2) Such notices shall be considered by the Speaker in the order in which they have been received, and when one such notice is admitted all other notices shall lapse.
- (3) The Speaker shall decide whether the matter is of sufficient public importance to be put down for discussion, but he may not admit a notice which, in his opinion, seeks to revise the policy of the Government.
- (4) There shall be no voting nor any formal motion in the course of or at the conclusion of such discussion.

3 An examination of Questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year

3.1 Party representation in the Punjab Assembly

As per the figures extracted on August 202012, there are a total of 370 members in the Punjab assembly, wherein 80 are females and 290 are males. The party wise membership, split on the basis of gender, is provided in the table below.

Gender based membership in Punjab Assembly			
Party	Female Members	Male Members	Total Members
PML (N)	37	135	172
PPPP	21	84	105
PML	20	61	81
MMA	0	2	2
PML (F)	1	2	3
PML (Z)	0	1	1
Independent	1	5	6
Total	80	290	370

Table 1: Gender based membership in the Punjab Assembly

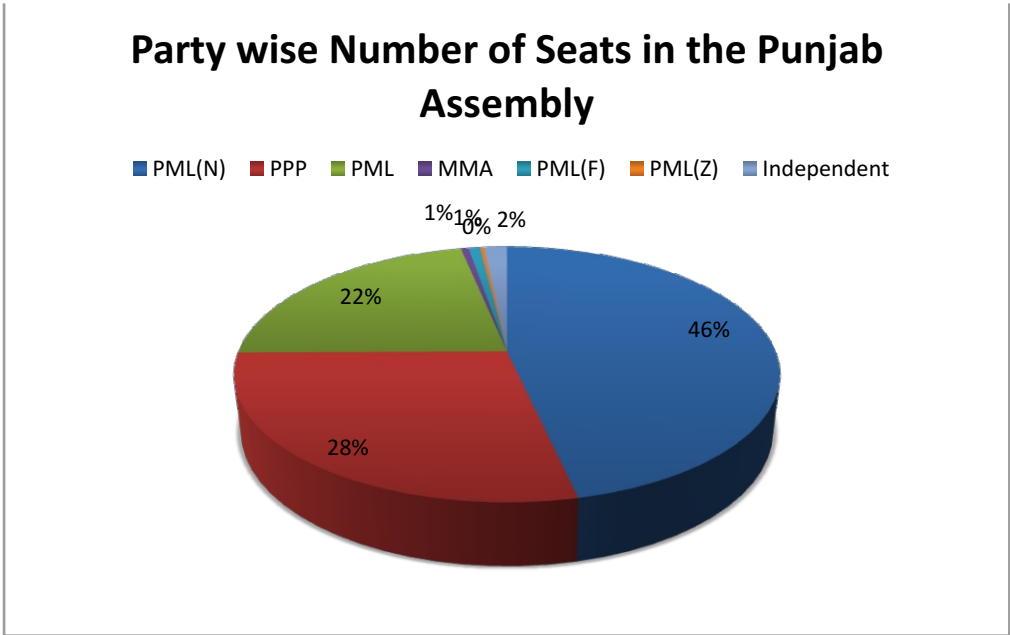


Fig 1: Party wise number of seats in the Punjab Assembly

Percentage wise, there are 21.62% female members as compared to 78.38% male members in Punjab assembly. The party wise percentage split for gender is provided in the table given hereunder

Party	Female Members (percentage)	Male Members (percentage)
PML (N)	21.51	78.49
PPPP	20	80.00
PML	24.69	75.31
MMA	0	100.00
PML (F)	33.33	66.67
PML (Z)	0	100.00
Independent	16.67	83.33
Overall	21.62	78.38

Table 2: Intraparty Gender Ratio for different political parties in the Punjab Assembly

3.2 Party wise share of questions addressed

In terms of number of questions addressed party wise, PML (N) was the leading party with569 questions (38.09%), followed by PPPP with 341 questions (22.82%), PML with 550 questions (36.81%), MMA with 14 questions (0.94%) and Independent candidates with 20 questions (1.34%).

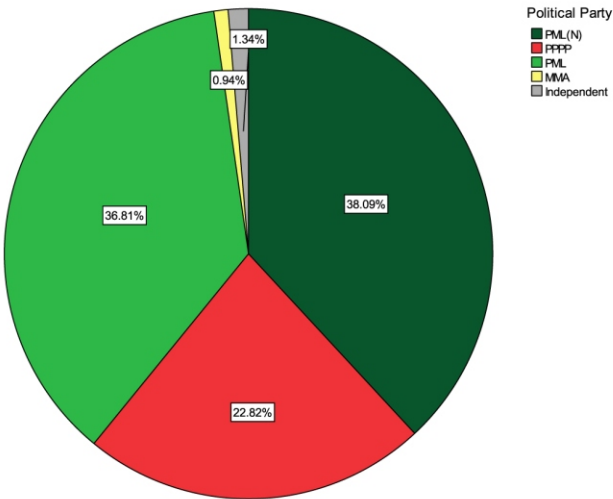


Fig 2 : Pie chart showing percentage of questions addressed for different political parties

If we compare the percentage of questions addressed with the percentage of presence in the assembly, the result would be as follow:

Party	Political parties Presence in Assembly (percentage)	Question addressed(percentage)
PML(N)	47	38
PPP	29	22
PML	22	36
MMA	1	1
PML(F)	1	0
PML(Z)	1	0
Independent	2	1

Table 3: Comparison of percentage presence of political parties in assembly and percentage of questions addressed

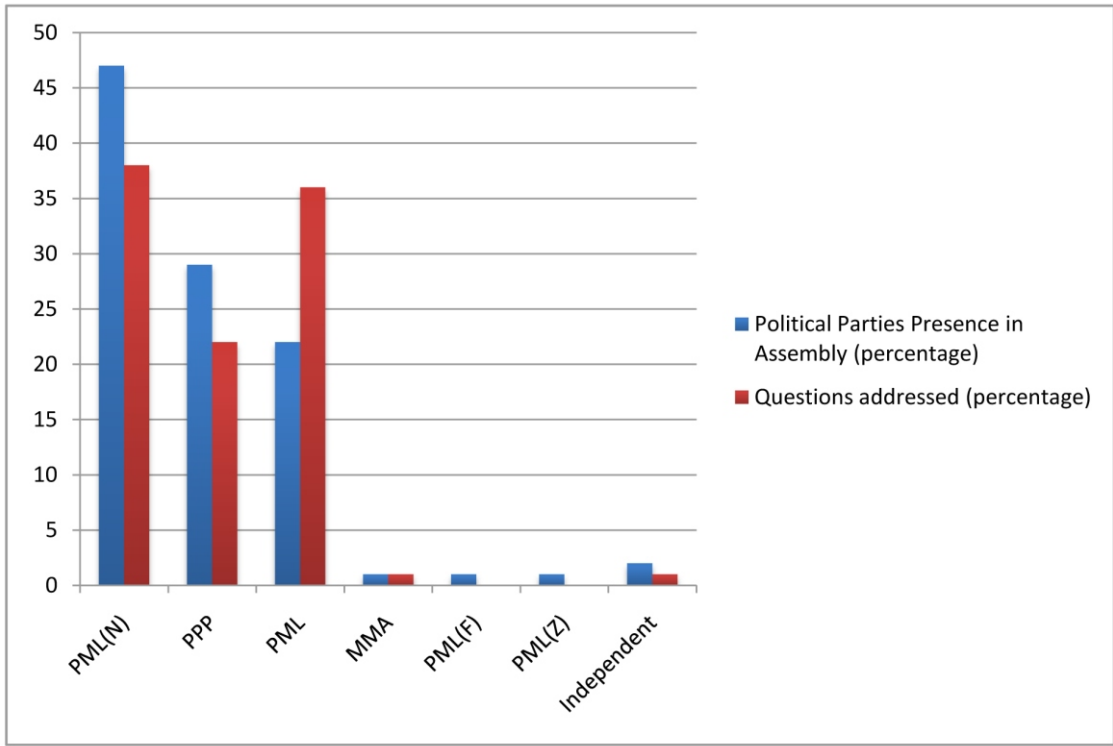


Fig 3: Graph showing comparison of political parties in assembly and questions addressed

3.3 Gender based apportionment of questions

Overall 586 (39%) of the questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year were of the female members as compared to 908 (61%) of questions addressed of the male members.

The following table intends to gauge the presence in assembly vs Questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year.

Female members				Male members			
Presence in assembly		Questions addressed		Presence in assembly		Questions addressed	
Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
80	21.62	586	39	290	78.38	908	61

Table 4: gender segregated data of presence in assembly and questions addressed

The bar graph provided hereunder provides a comparative analysis in percentages for reader’s convenience.

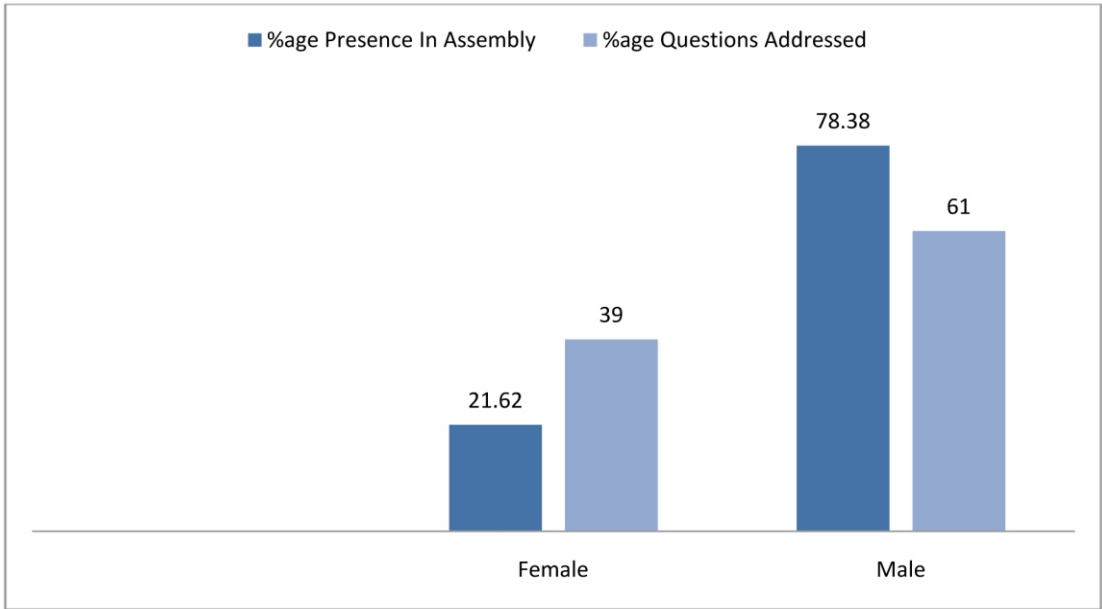


Fig 4: Gender based comparison of Presence in assembly vs Questions addressed

3.4 Gender based intraparty apportionment of questions

An analysis of gender based intraparty apportionment of questions shows PML’s female legislatures as the most active ones vis a vis their male counterparts.

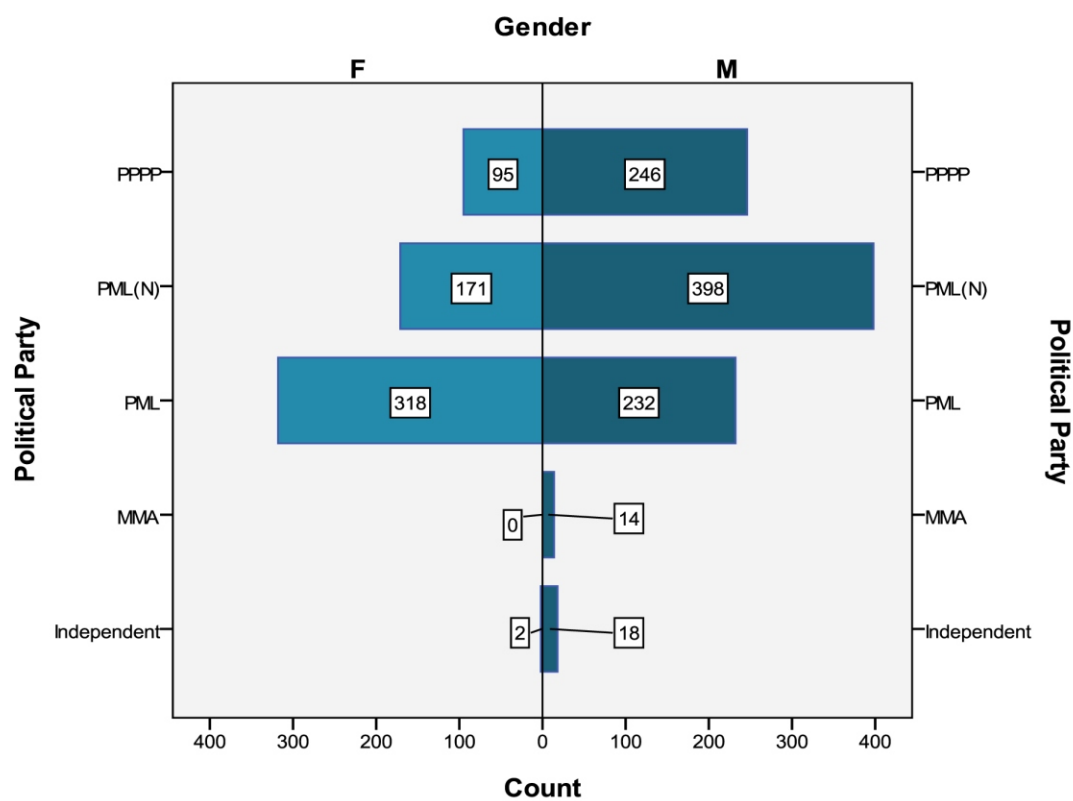


Fig 5: graphic representation of intraparty gender based apportionment of questions

3.5 Intraparty Gender based competitiveness: Gender based representation versus Questions addressed

At the sum total level, 39.22% of questions addressed were of female members (chart a) while their representation in the assembly is 21.62% (chart b), thus depicting that female members were twice

more active than their male members in posing questions that were addressed during the fourth year⁴.

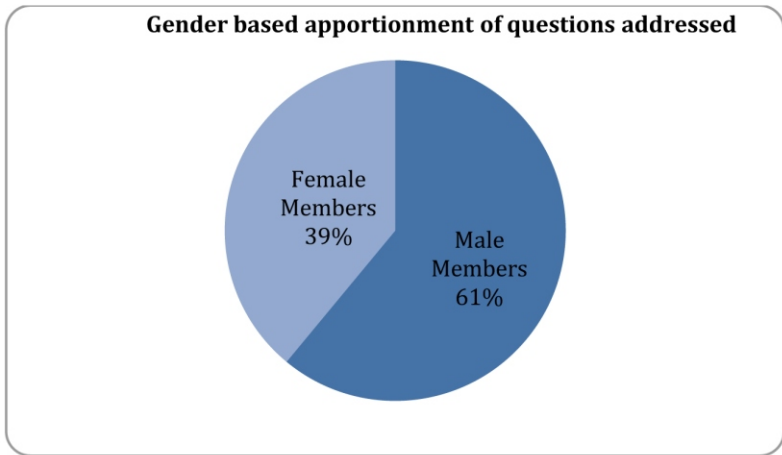


Fig 6: Gender based apportionment of Questions addressed

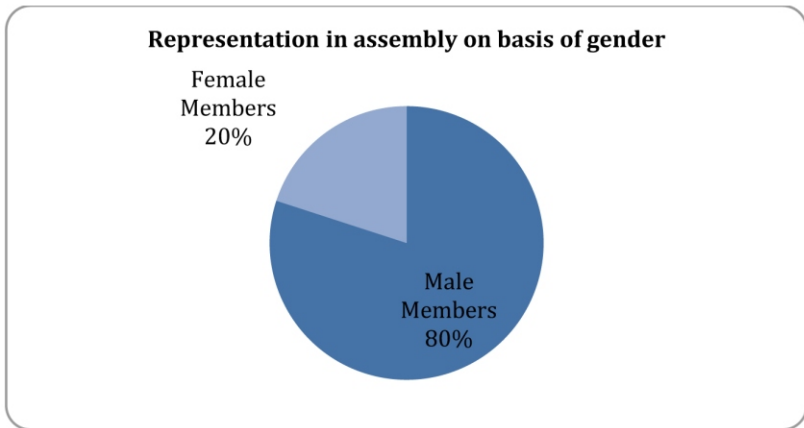


Fig 7: Percentage representation in Assembly (overall)

Following the same analytical trend as of total, 58% questions of female members of PML were addressed while their gender based party presence is only 25%, this was followed by PML (N) of whom 30 % of questions were addressed of the female members, while their party representation

⁴ As we are discussing the questions addressed rather than the questions posed therefore we can only estimate that females had asked more questions than the male members and that the departments do not discriminate in addressing the questions on the basis of gender.

30 % of questions were addressed of the female members, while their party representation on the basis of gender is 22%. Similarly, for PPPP, 28% of the questions posed by female members were addressed, while their party presence on basis of gender is only 20%. Lastly, 10% of questions were addressed of independent female members, while their gender based presence accounts for 16% in total independent member strength. No women candidate from the remaining parties posed any question.

The details are presented in the table provided hereunder.

Party	Female members	No. of questions addressed	Male members	No. of questions addressed
PML(N)	37(22%)	171(30%)	135(78%)	398(70%)
PPP	21(20%)	95(28%)	84(80%)	246(72%)
PML	20(25%)	318(58%)	61(75%)	232(42%)
MMA	0	0	2(100%)	14(100%)
PML(F)	1(33%)	0	2(66%)	0
PML(Z)	0	0	1(100%)	0
Independent	1(16%)	2(10%)	5(84%)	18(90%)

Table 5: Gender based intraparty apportionment of questions and presence in assembly

3.6 Top 10 members with highest number of questions addressed:

1. **Top 10 members with highest number of questions addressed:** Following table shows top 10 members of the Punjab Assembly with highest number of question addressed in 4th parliamentary year. The trend shows that 486 (33%) questions belong to 10 (3%) members of the assembly.

Sr #	Name	Party	Grand Total
1	Nighat Sheikh	PML(N)	66
2	Ch. Muhammad Asadullah	PML(N)	63
3	Khadija Umar	PML	62
4	Mian Muhammad Naveed Anjum	PML(N)	62
5	ZobiaRubab Malik	PML	60
6	Seemal Kamran	PML	55
7	Khawaja Muhammad Islam	PML(N)	50
8	Syed Hassan Murtaza	PPPP	46
9	Sardar Khalid Saleem Bhatti	PPPP	42
10	Rana Asif Mahmood	PML(N)	42
	Total		486

Table 6 : Top 10 members with highest number of questions addressed

2. **Top ten male members with highest number of questions addressed:** When we look at only the male members with the highest number of questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year, top 10 male members had 439 questions addressed, bringing the top ten average to 44 questions each. All of the top three assembly members with maximum number of questions addressed belonged to PML (N), i.e. Ch. Muhammad Asadullah with 63 questions, followed by Mian Muhammad Naveed Anjum with 62 questions and Khawaja Muhammad Islam with 50 questions. The trend also shows that 48 % of the addressed questions were asked by only 3% of the male members in the assembly⁵.

Sr #	Name	Party	Grand Total
1	Ch. Muhammad Asadullah	PML(N)	63
2	Mian Muhammad Naveed Anjum	PML(N)	62
3	Khawaja Muhammad Islam	PML(N)	50
4	Syed Hassan Murtaza	PPPP	45
5	Rana Asif Mahmood	PML(N)	42
6	Sardar Khalid Saleem Bhatti	PPPP	42
7	Ch. Aamir Sultan Cheema	PML	38
8	Engineer Qamar-ul-Islam Raja	PML	35
9	Shaikh Allaud Din	PML	32
10	Muhammad Ashraf Chohan	PML(N)	30

Table 7: Top 10 male members with highest number of questions addressed

⁵ Total number of question addressed of male members are 908; total number of male members in assembly are 280

3. **Top ten female members with highest number of questions addressed:** When we look at only the female members with the highest number of questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year, the top 10 female members had 397 questions addressed, bringing the top ten average to 40 questions each. Nighat sheikh from PML (N) had the maximum number of questions addressed in the fourth parliamentary year, i.e., 66 questions. She was followed by Khadija Umar of PML with 62 questions and Zobia Rubab Malik of PML with 60 questions. Here again 68% of the addressed questions are asked by 10% of the female members. If we narrow it down, 41% of addressed questions were asked by 4% of the female members⁶. A clear majority of PML female in table below is noticeable.

Sr #	Name	Party	Grand Total
1	Nighat Sheikh	PML(N)	66
2	Khadija Umar	PML	62
3	Zobia Rubab Malik	PML	60
4	Seemal Kamran	PML	55
5	Nasim Lodhi	PML	30
6	Sajida Mir	PPPP	28
7	Samia Amjad	PML	27
8	Raheela Khadim Hussain	PML(N)	26
9	AmnaUlfat	PML	23
10	Nargis Faiz Malik	PPPP	20

Table 8: Top 10 female members with highest number of questions addressed

⁶ Total number of question addressed of female members are 588; total number of female members in assembly are 80

3.7 *Apportionment of questions addressed by departments:*

A total of 1494 questions were addressed during the fourth parliamentary year by 26 departments of Punjab government. The highest numbers of questions i.e., 136 were addressed by Health department, followed by 121 of Schools Education department and 89 of Local Government and Community Development department. On the other hand certain departments, which were not the main focus of the legislators took lesser load of questions with minimum number of questions addressed by Information and Culture Department i.e., 20, followed by Mines and Minerals with 22 and that of Transport department with 24 questions. The trends in following graph show the interest of the legislators in different departments.

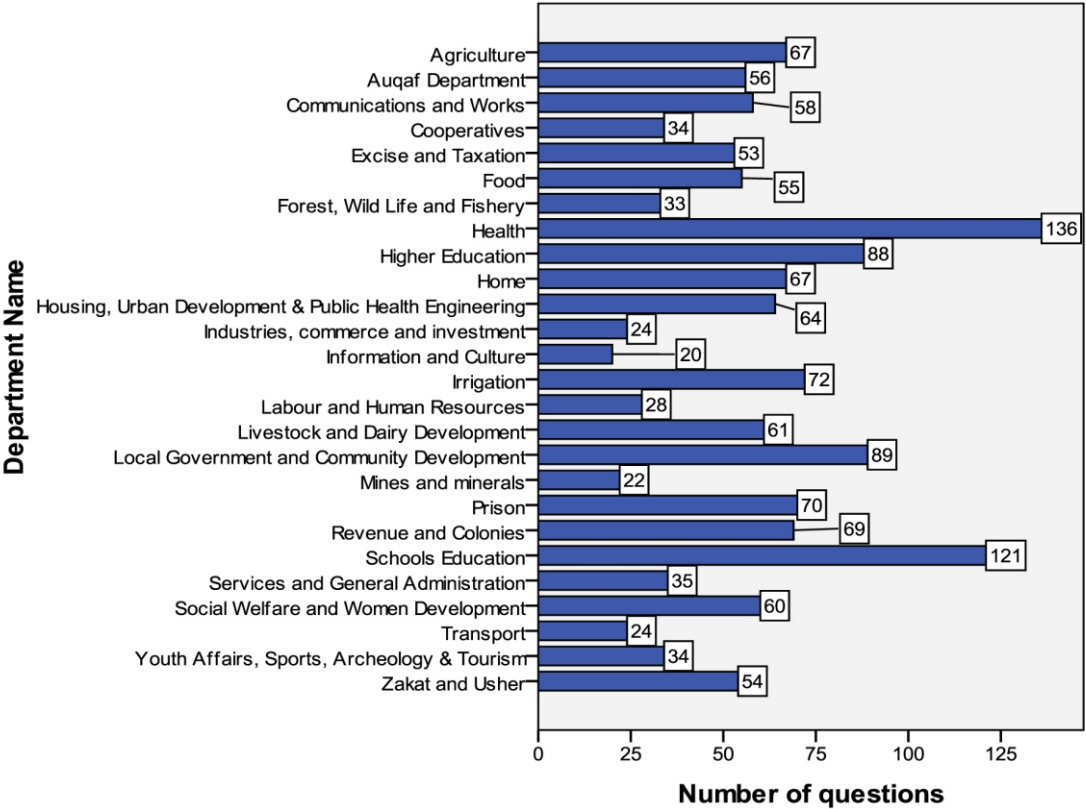


Fig 8: Apportionment of questions addressed by different departments

4 Examining the efficiency of Question hour

4.1 Efficiency of assembly secretariat:

The efficiency of the assembly secretariat is measured by the sum of the time taken by the assembly secretariat to forward questions to the departments and the time taken to table the answers received in the assembly. The average assembly efficiency in the fourth parliamentary year was 7 months and 24 days (234 days), wherein average time taken to forward questions to departments was two months and three days (63 days) while the time taken by assembly secretariat to table the answers in the assembly was 5 months and 21 days (171 days). The assembly was found least efficient in the case of Home department and Services and General Administration Department wherein the efficiency was 16 months and fourteen days (494 days) on the average, these departments were followed by Information and culture department at 12 months and 13 days (373 days) and Prison department at 11 months and 23 days (353 days).

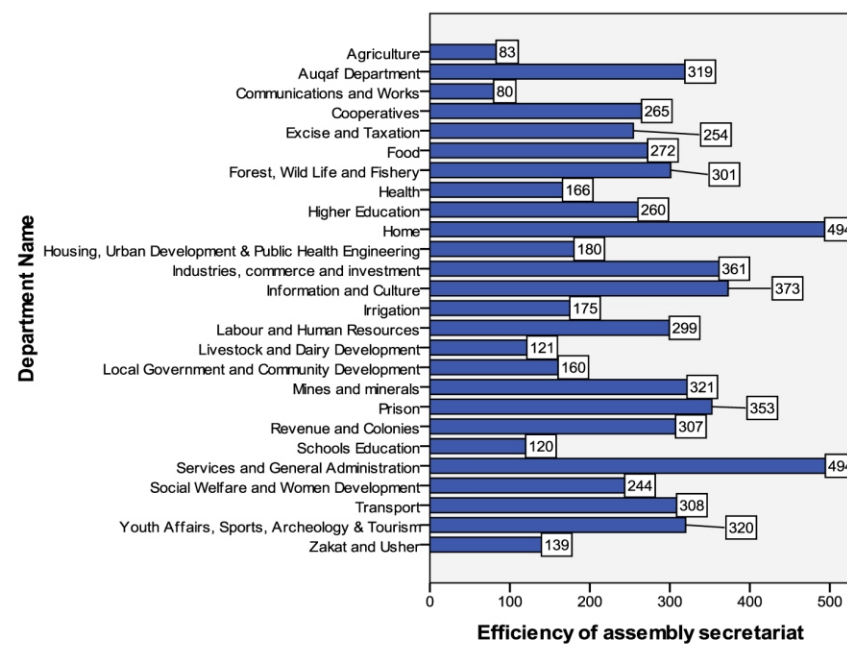


Fig 9: Time (number of days) taken by assembly secretariat in forwarding the questions to relevant department and tabling the answer in assembly

Assembly secretariat was most efficient for Communication and Works department wherein it took two months and twenty days (80 days), followed by Agriculture department wherein the efficiency was two months and 23 days (83 days), and schools education department with four months (120 days).

4.1a Party wise Average time taken by assembly secretariat to forward questions to departments:

The average number of days taken by assembly secretariat to forward questions to departments was 63 days. A party wise analysis of the time taken by the assembly secretariat shows that on an average it took maximum time (75 days) in forwarding questions asked by Independent members, whereas the ruling party i.e., PML (N)'s questions were forwarded in the minimum time i.e., on an average of 60 days. The average time for forwarding the questions of the other parties was also in the same range with PPPP's questions taking 63 days, PML's questions taking 65 days while those of MMA took 65 days.

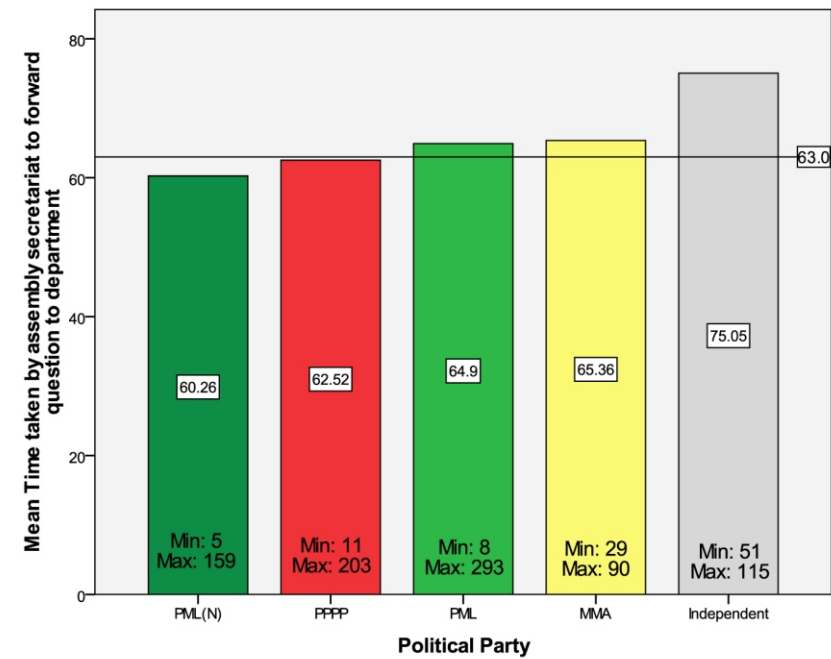


Fig 10: Time taken by Assembly secretariat to forward questions to relevant departments (part wise)

4.1b Party wise Average time taken by assembly secretariat to table answers in the assembly after receipt:

Overall, the average number of days taken by the assembly secretariat to table answers in the assembly after the same were received from the relevant departments was approximately 5 months and 21 days (171 days). In this respect, Independent members remained on top priority with replies to their questions put to the house in an average of 2 months (60 days), followed by those of PPPP's in 4 months and 22 days (144 days), PML's in 5 months and 7 days (157 days), while MMA's questions were given the least priority with an average of 7 months and 20 days (230 days).

Graph below presents the average, minimum and maximum time taken by the assembly secretariat to table the answers in the assembly.

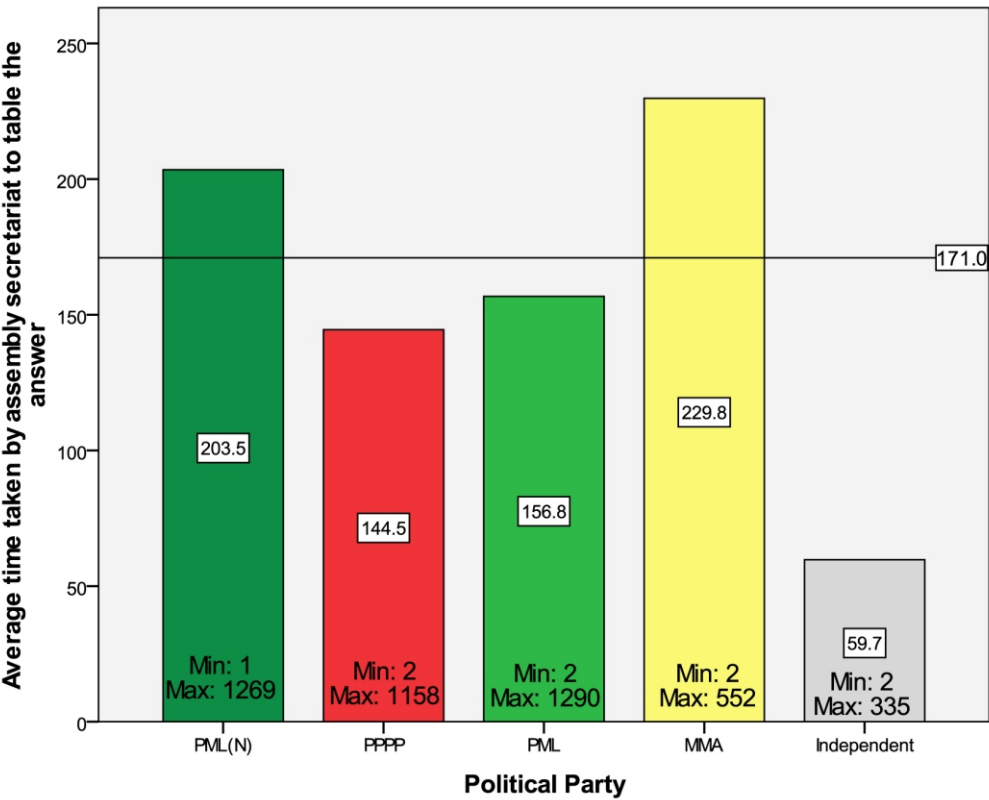


Fig 11: Time taken by assembly secretariat to table the answers in Assembly

4.2 Efficiency of departments in answering questions:

An analysis of the efficiency of different departments of Punjab Government with respect to the time taken by them in replying to a question asked by the legislators showed an average of 11 months and 27 days (357 days) from the date of receipt of question from the assembly secretariat to the date of submission of reply to back to assembly secretariat. On the basis of average time taken to reply the questions, Industries, Commerce and Investment remained the most efficient with an average of 2 months and 10 days (70 days) to submit replies to questions relating to them, while on the other hand Schools Education department remained the slowest to respond to the questions of legislators by taking an average time of 26 months and 16 days (796 days).

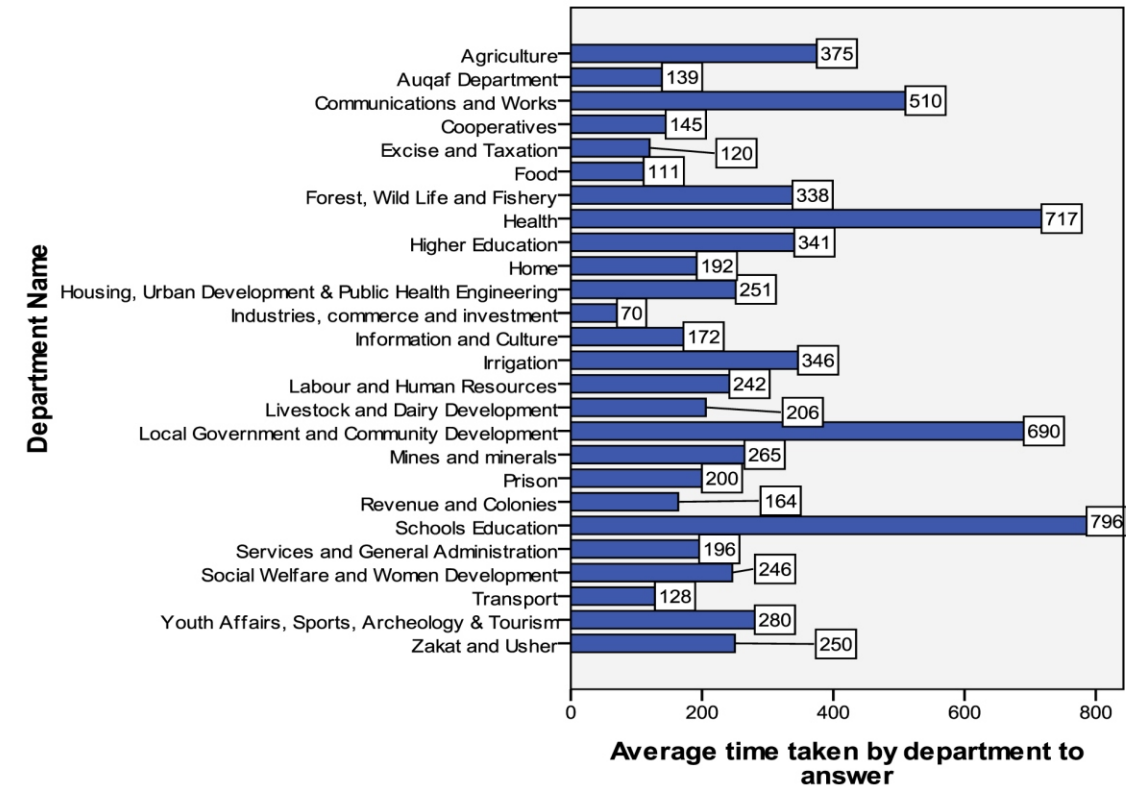


Fig 12: Time taken (number of days) by different departments to answer the questions

4.2a Top five Departments with longest response time:

The department that took the most time to answer questions was Schools education department that took on an average 26 months and 16 days (796 days) to answer questions (taking 1283 days maximum and 15 days minimum to answer questions), followed by health department that took on an average 24 months (717 days) to answer questions (taking 1196 days maximum and 21 days minimum to answer questions), local government and community development department taking on an average 23 months(690 days) (taking 1320 days maximum and 66 days minimum to answer questions), communication and works addressing questions in 17 months (510 days) average (taking 1204 days maximum and 252 days minimum to answer questions), and agriculture department taking an average 12 months and 15 days (375 days) to address questions (taking 1316 days maximum and 159 days minimum to answer questions).

S.No	Department	Average time taken to respond (Days)	Maximum time taken to respond (Days)	Minimum time taken to respond (Days)
1	School Education	796	1283	15
2	Health	717	1196	21
3	Local government	690	1320	66
4	Communication & Works	510	1204	252
5	Agriculture	375	1316	159

Table 9: Time taken by department to respond to the questions asked by legislators

4.2b Top five Departments with shortest response time:

The department that took the least time to answer questions was Industries, commerce and investment that took on an average 2 months and 10 days (70 days) to answer questions (taking 307 days maximum and 4 days minimum to answer questions), followed by Food department taking on an average 3 months and 21 days (111 days) (taking 458 days maximum and 26 days minimum to answer questions), Excise and taxation department addressing questions in 3 months (120 days) on average (taking 268 days maximum and 17 days minimum to answer questions), Transport department taking on an average 4 months and 8 days (128 days) to address questions (taking 578 days maximum and 17 days minimum to answer questions), and Auqaf Department taking 4 months and 19 days (139 days) (taking 606 days maximum and 7 days minimum to answer questions).

S.No	Department	Average time taken to respond (Days)	Maximum time taken to respond (Days)	Minimum time taken to respond (Days)
1	Industries, Commerce and Investment	70	307	4
2	Food	111	458	26
3	Excise and taxation	120	268	17
4	Transport	128	578	17
5	Auqaf	139	606	7

Table 10: Time taken by department to respond to the questions asked by legislator

4.3 Party wise Average time taken by departments to answer:

Overall, average time taken to obtain answers from the departments by all the parties combined was 11 months and 27 days (357 days). The average time required to obtain answers from the government departments was 13 months and 22 days (412 days) for PML (N), followed by 13 months and 1 day (391 days) for MMA, 11 months and 27 days (357 days) for PML, 9 months and 2 days (272 days) for PPPP, and 8 months and 29 days (269 days) for Independent candidates.

Graph below presents the average, minimum and maximum days taken by the departments to reply to the political parties.

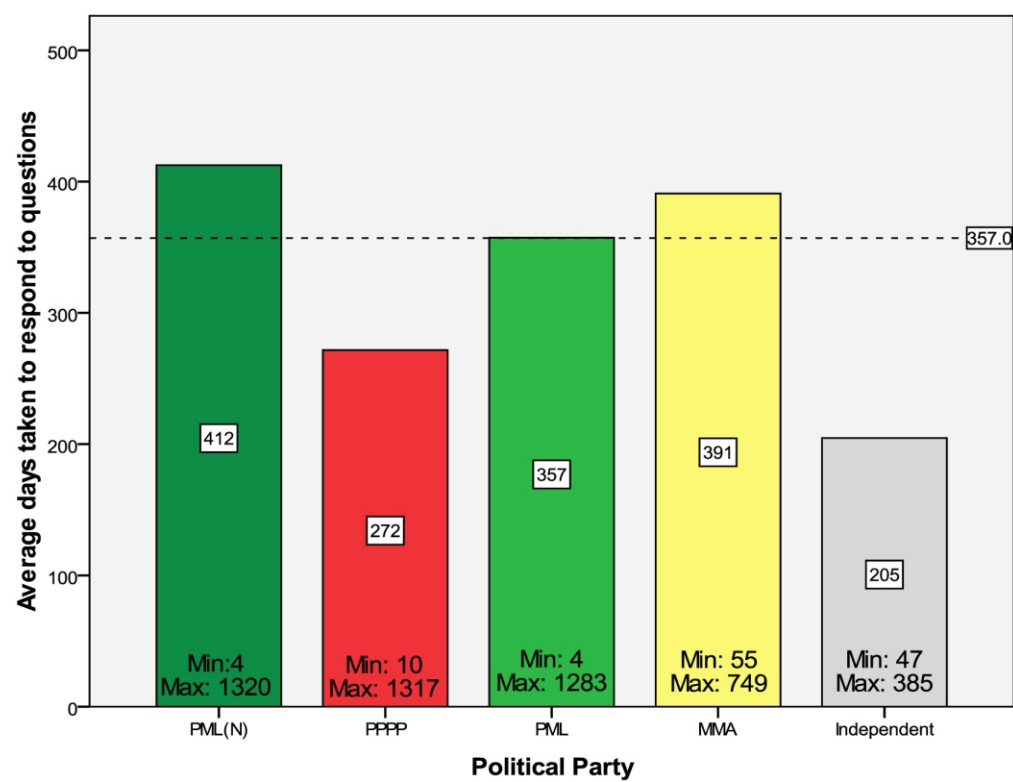


Fig 13: Time taken (number of days) by different departments to answer the questions(party wise)

5 Concluding Remarks

It should be noted that the questions addressed pertained to those asked in all four parliamentary years rather than the fourth parliamentary year itself. 76 of the questions addressed were asked in 2008, 441 in 2009, 583 in 2010 and 394 in 2011. The trend in itself reflects the inefficiency of the departments in answering questions

The efficiency of assembly secretariat in forwarding questions to the respective government department and tabling the answers received was on the average 7 months and 24 days, wherein average time taken to forward questions to departments was two months and three days while the time taken by assembly secretariat to table the answers in the assembly was 5 months and 21 days. Although it is understandable that answers cannot be tabled in the parliament unless a session is called, however, the average time taken to forward questions to government departments must be reduced.

The efficiency of provincial government departments in addressing questions of the members can be observed through the combined average, i.e., 11 months and 27 days, which can, in no scenario be recognized as efficient responses. Slow responding departments such as Schools education, Health, and local government and community development, taking on an average 26 months, 24 months and 23 months respectively are, nevertheless, very inefficient in responding to questions posed by the assembly members. Such delayed responses result in the requested information losing its effectiveness altogether. It is surprising that members have never made protest or walked out of the assembly on the issue of late reply to their questions.

CPDI suggests that Rules of Procedures should mention the number of days during which secretariat has to forward the questions to relevant department. The relevant departments must also be made accountable for any delay in responding the questions. Moreover, a category must be added to the questions, depending upon the nature of issue probed and urgency of information required that should provide for an earlier than usual response. This category should include instances wherein damage to public property, corruption or looting, or

mismanagement of public funds is required to be brought to attention of the assembly so that the issue could be highlighted and corrective measures are taken immediately. Such questions must be considered to require urgent attention by the assembly secretariat and must be processed at a rapid pace. Even if the question hour is dedicated to other departments, these questions of urgent importance must be tabled in those sessions so that the problem may be resolved with efficacy.

6 Appendix

6.1 Number of Questions addressed (Department * Party Cross tabulation)

The following table provides department * party wise cross tabulation details of the number of questions addressed during the fourth parliamentary year of the Punjab assembly.

Department Name	Political Party (Number of Questions addressed during fourth parliamentary year)					Total
	Independent	MMA	PML	PML(N)	PPPP	
Agriculture	2	0	27	22	16	67
Auqaf Department	2	0	12	20	22	56
Communications and Works	2	0	25	14	17	58
Cooperatives	2	1	9	18	4	34
Excise and Taxation	0	0	15	18	20	53
Food	0	0	23	14	18	55
Forest, Wild Life and Fishery	0	2	8	14	9	33
Health	0	2	43	61	30	136
Higher Education	2	1	34	36	15	88
Home	0	4	28	25	10	67
Housing, Urban Development & Public Health Engineering	2	0	33	18	11	64
Industries, commerce and investment	1	0	9	8	6	24
Information and Culture	1	0	5	10	4	20
Irrigation	0	0	35	24	13	72
Labour and Human Resources	2	0	10	8	8	28
Livestock and Dairy Development	2	0	29	16	14	61
Local Government and Community Development	0	0	26	52	11	89
Mines and minerals	0	1	6	6	9	22
Prison	0	0	25	30	15	70

Department Name	Political Party (Number of Questions addressed during fourth parliamentary year)					Total
	Independent	MMA	PML	PML(N)	PPPP	
Schools Education	0	0	53	51	17	121
Services and General Administration	0	0	15	14	6	35
Social Welfare and Women Development	0	0	25	17	18	60
Transport	0	0	12	8	4	24
Youth Affairs, Sports, Archeology & Tourism	2	2	7	14	9	34
Zakat and Usher	0	1	13	19	21	54
Total	20	14	550	569	341	1494

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