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ABSTRACT:

The relationship between governments and legislatures is founded upon a confidence agreement, whereby the executive derives its authority from, and is accountable to, the legislature. As heads of government, prime ministers are crucial political actors in parliamentary systems, yet there is little understanding of how they are held accountable by legislatures. What are the mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question them? How do such mechanisms vary, and how do procedural rules affect questioning and accountability? This paper builds on theoretical foundations from comparative legislative studies and presents the first survey of mechanisms through which parliamentarians may question prime ministers in 31 parliamentary democracies. It draws on research on parliamentary rules of procedure, followed by a consultation with practitioners on matters of convention and practice. It presents novel classifications and typologies of parliamentary questioning mechanisms that include prime ministers along six key dimensions, thus filling a crucial gap in executive-legislative studies.

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