

# Albanese avoiding questions: Coalition

**EXCLUSIVE**

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The Coalition will ramp up its attack on Anthony Albanese over a lack of parliamentary scrutiny, as data reveals his government is answering 43 per cent fewer questions from the opposition in question time than under the Morrison government.

Analysis from the House of Representatives Procedure Office compiled for the Coalition and obtained by The Australian shows that between August 3 and December 2, 2021, when Scott Morrison was prime minister, the government answered 311 questions from the opposition.

In the same period this year, Labor answered 177 opposition questions, a 43 per cent decrease.

Once the final House of Representatives question time of the year takes place on Thursday, that number will increase to roughly 183 questions asked by the opposition, representing 41 per cent fewer questions.

Paul Fletcher, manager of opposition business in the House, said the Prime Minister had promised parliamentary transparency and scrutiny but had been “absolutely shameless” in doing the complete opposite.

“Anthony Albanese is desperate to avoid parliamentary scrutiny. He is consistently cutting question time as short as he thinks he can get away with,” Mr Fletcher said.

“And he is cutting it shorter and shorter as the months go by.

“In the autumn sittings (February 6 to March 30, 2023), Labor answered an average of 7.9 questions per question time from the opposition.

“In the winter sittings (May 9 to June 22, 2023), it dropped to 7.4 questions; in the spring sittings (July 31 to November 30) it

dropped to 6.3 questions.

“Of course this is on top of Mr Albanese’s more blatant actions to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, such as scheduling very light sitting timetables and cancelling sitting weeks from the timetable.”

The Coalition’s missing questions have largely gone to the expanded crossbench in the House of Representatives, but MPs on the opposition benches are asking fewer questions overall.

Leader of the House Tony Burke has allocated the 18-member lower house crossbench three questions during question time, an increase from one question for the seven-member crossbench in the previous parliament.

In the spring sitting of 2021, the crossbench and Labor asked 342 questions combined across 31 sitting days. During the same period this year, the Coalition and crossbench asked just 261 questions of the government across 28 sitting days, or about 270 questions over 29 days when parliament rises on Thursday.

Mr Burke said the Coalition didn’t want the crossbench to receive extra questions but it was the only democratic option, given its expanded size.

“We also waste a lot more time than in any previous parliament on spurious points of order,” Mr Burke told The Australian. “I have never understood why Mr Fletcher spends so much time trying to prove that he doesn’t know the standing orders – but fewer questions is a direct result of that.”

Mr Fletcher’s assault came as senior government minister Murray Watt downplayed focus group research compiled by Redbridge for News Corp, publisher of The Australian, showing voters believed Mr Albanese was “bland”, a “beta male” and weak on cost of living.

“I noticed that there was another comment in that focus

group that was reported that said that people, notwithstanding what they might have had to say about Albo, still very much preferred him to Peter Dutton,” Senator Watt told Sky News’ Sunday Agenda.

“I don’t think that there’s anything in there to be concerned about.

“What is tough is actually injecting budget discipline to record the first budget surplus that our country has recorded in 15 years.

“That has taken tough, discipline decisions by the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and others around the cabinet table,” Senator Watt said.

Mr Albanese has repeatedly promised his government would be accountable and transparent and vowed that the 47th parliament under his leadership would be more respectful, including in question time.

## Labor in opposition

Spring 2021

Opposition questions	311
Sitting days	31
Opposition questions per question time	10

## Coalition in opposition\*

Spring 2023

Opposition questions	177
Sitting days	28
Opposition questions per question time	6.3

\*As of December 1, 2023