



<b>Q4</b>	<b>Using the list as a starting point, suggest reasons why Parliament is effective and is not effective in checking executive power.</b>	
<b>Effective:</b>	<b>Not effective:</b>	
<p><b>Choose from:</b></p> <p>Large government majority creates an elective dictatorship.</p> <p>Whipping system makes MPs little more than lobby fodder.</p> <p>Examples of backbench rebellions show MPs can exert influence.</p> <p>Coalition government restricted the powers of the Prime Minister.</p> <p>Majority of legislation is led by the Executive.</p> <p>The House of Lords has become more effective in checking executive dominance.</p> <p>Prime Minister question time is largely stage managed and reduced to Punch and Judy politics.</p> <p>Select Committees have become more effective in recent years.</p> <p>The government through the executive control the parliamentary agenda.</p> <p>MPs can call for a vote of no confidence in the government.</p>		

**Case study: Parliament: Is Executive Power Checked?** Mike Simpson 14<sup>th</sup> May 2013  
(Article taken from tutor2u.net)

Parliament is unable to effectively check the executive due to the Westminster model of parliamentary government. This ensures that the executive has an inbuilt majority in the House of Commons and when this is allied to the exercise of strict party discipline and the limited powers of the House of Lords, it ensures that parliament can do little to check a government. This is especially the case when there has been a creation of a large majority after an election such as 1997 and 2001 with Labour majorities of 179 and 167 respectively. Majorities of 66 in 2005 and 83 with the coalition in 2010 mean that all the other parties united cannot defeat the government thus rendering Parliament relatively powerless.

The work of parliament illustrates how the legislature cannot check the government effectively. This is clearly evidenced by the work of Public Bill Committees. With an inbuilt majority for the government as composition reflects the outcome of the general election on the floor of the Commons and pressure from the whips over selection and voting, opposition amendments to bills are very rarely adopted. The notion of line by line, clause by clause scrutiny of a bill is called into question when the government, through the use of the guillotine can end discussion before every clause has been considered. Butler described the process as "*futile marathon*" and Tony Wright as a "*shocking state of affairs*".

The same analysis applies to Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). This provides an opportunity for backbench MPs from both parties and the leader of the HM Opposition to hold the government to account. As a form of scrutiny however it can be argued it is an ineffective check. Miliband has 6 questions that he can use to challenge the PM. The PM though can avoid answering the question and more often than not, the session is reduced to petty point scoring and yah-boo politics. The leaders are more concerned with coming up with a sound bite that can be used on the news and government MPs ask planted questions designed to make the PM and the government look good. High entertainment it may be an effective check on government it is not.

**Source-based question:** With reference to the source, explain weaknesses in the way in which the House of Commons hold the power of the government in check.

**Worksheet suggested solutions**

Q1		True or False?
A	The Commons has the ultimate power to remove a government from office by using a vote of no confidence.	True
B	The Commons can hold the executive to account particularly through the use of Select Committees.	True
C	Backbench MPs are effective in delaying government legislation.	False
D	Many political commentators believe a weakness in Parliament is that too many MPs are lobby fodder.	True
E	Large majority governments are able to dominate Parliament.	True

Q2	Match the correct term	Correct Term
A	When the people have power, at elections and referendums.	popular sovereignty
B	A government that dominates Parliament, usually due to a large majority, and therefore has few limits on its power.	elective dictatorship
C	The legal right to exercise sovereignty-that is: sovereignty in theory.	legal sovereignty
D	The legal ability to make economic decisions over fiscal and monetary policies.	economic sovereignty
E	The political ability to exercise powers.	political sovereignty

<b>Q3</b>	<b>Fill in the missing words</b>
<p>As a consequence of the British system being based on a <b><i>fusion</i></b> of powers, a key feature is the domination of the <b><i>legislature</i></b> i.e. Parliament by the <b><i>executive</i></b> i.e. the government. This means that most governments will serve a full five years in office; this is strengthened by the Fixed Term <b><i>Parliament</i></b> Act, and based on holding a majority of MPs can govern unchallenged.</p> <p>Under Margaret Thatcher the Conservative government and under Tony Blair the Labour government dominated the House of Commons as their landslide election victories meant they would be confident of passing their legislation with effective <b><i>whipping</i></b>.</p> <p>The <b><i>coalition</i></b> government and the current government with a small <b><i>majority</i></b> are less dominant and Parliament is better positioned to control executive power.</p> <p>(Owen 2017)</p>	

<b>Q4</b>	<b>Using the list as a starting point, suggest reasons why Parliament is effective and is not effective in checking executive power.</b>	
	<p><b>Is effective:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of backbench rebellions show MPs can exert influence (Coalition gov't and the confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP can help with the check on power)</li> <li>• Coalition government restricted the powers of the Prime Minister (Deputy PM was Lib Dem and everything needed to be signed by both)</li> <li>• The House of Lords has become more effective in checking executive dominance (more Crossbench peers)</li> <li>• Select Committees have become more effective in recent years (elections of Chairs and paid chairs have helped with this)</li> <li>• MPs can call for a vote of no confidence in the government</li> <li>• PMQs and Minister's Questions on the floor of the House, as well as written questions)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Isn't effective:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large government majority creates an elective dictatorship (Blair / Thatcher especially)</li> <li>• Whipping system makes MPs little more than lobby fodder.</li> <li>• Majority of legislation is led by the Executive (Private Members Bills rarely successful)</li> <li>• Prime Minister question time is largely stage managed and reduced to Punch and Judy politics.</li> <li>• Attendance for most debates is minimal</li> </ul>

**Case study suggested answers**

**Exam based question:** With reference to the source, explain weaknesses in the way in which the House of Commons hold the power of the government in check.

- Executive has an in-built majority (this is added to by the increased resources and civil servants accruing to the government)
- Party discipline (most MPs are career politicians and abide by the whip to ensure promotion)
- Limited powers of the House of Lords.
- Quote large majorities and also inability of opposition parties to defeat the government.
- Limited ability for Public Bill committees to have an influence (likewise, Select Committees can only recommend rather than enforce)
- Use of guillotine to force government legislation through.
- Prime Minister question does not guarantee the PM will answer the question.
- Questions are carefully planted to make the PM look good and have an effective soundbite (the media focuses on government, rather than opposition, usually)