

'English votes for English laws' has not given England a voice in parliament, study finds

November 28 2016

'English votes for English laws' (EVEL) has not enhanced England's voice in the UK Parliament, according a 12-month study by researchers at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). The study says that "greater attention should be paid to the challenge of enhancing England's voice in the UK parliament".

Finding the good in EVEL, published by the Centre for Constitutional Change with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council and the Constitution Unit at UCL, is the first in-depth analysis of how EVEL has worked since its introduction in October 2015. The report is written by Professor Michael Kenny and Daniel Gover from QMUL's Mile End Institute.

It recommends that the House of Commons should consider introducing a cross-cutting English Affairs select committee as a forum for debating and scrutinising English issues. The report says that a forum such as this might help show that England's interests are being voiced and heard at Westminster.

Currently, English stages are held at the end of a bill's Commons passage, when most scrutiny and debate has already taken place. The report finds that there has been almost no interest in in these English stages in their current form, with most lasting around two minutes.

The report finds that while the current version of EVEL is flawed, it has avoided most of the problems predicted by its critics. The authors

conclude that EVEL "can be justified as a pragmatic response to devolution to other parts of the UK."

Michael Kenny, Professor of Politics and Director of the Mile End Institute at QMUL said: "So far, this system has been operating out of political sight but EVEL may well turn into a headache for Theresa May. Because most English MPs are Tories, the current system makes little difference to legislative outcomes.

Professor Kenny said: "But what would happen if a majority in the Commons were to vote down legislation that followed on from a 'hard Brexit' deal which only applied to England and had the support of a majority of English MPs? And what if measures such as the government's proposals to introduce more grammar schools in England are blocked by a Commons majority that includes the SNP and other non-English members? These rules matter and they could be more flexible, transparent and balanced."

The report makes several recommendations for reform. These fall into four categories: doing more to facilitate expression of England's 'voice' at Westminster (as opposed to simply a veto right); applying more consistently the 'double veto' that is central to the government's reform; reducing the complexity of the system; and taking steps to improve its legitimacy.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

Citation: 'English votes for English laws' has not given England a voice in parliament, study finds (2016, November 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-english-votes-laws-england-voice.html>

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