

Free essay on the rebirth of the english question

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In the aftermath of the Scottish referendum -- which resulted in the Scots' voting against becoming independent from the United Kingdom -- the English Question has again come to the fore, and does not appear to be answered anytime soon. However, there are a myriad of potential solutions to the English Question, each of which have their merits.

At the heart of the English Question is whether other member governments of the United Kingdom -- Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales -- should be able to weigh in with equal input regarding policies that affect only England. First coined in the 1970s by British Conservative Minister and Ulster Unionist MP, Enoch Powell, it was originally called the " West Lothian Question." The English Question asks whether Ministers of Parliament (MPs) from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland should be allowed to vote on laws that strictly affect England. When Northern Ireland and Wales began their own Assemblies, and Scotland began its own Parliament in the 1990s, the English Question took the spotlight once again.

The English Question ultimately asks to what extent the English should have sovereignty in their own affairs, as well as how much say-so the Northern Irish, the Scots, and the Welsh should have in strictly-English affairs. Some of the proposals that have been entertained by the British Parliament have included excluding other member governments from voting on English issues, preserving that right solely for English Members of Parliament. A committee chaired by former Conservative Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, was set up to determine whether the Northern Irish, Welsh, and Scots should be, in effect, banned from voting on English matters. However, this ban never came to fruition.

Solutions have been advanced in response to the English Question, each with their own merits and drawbacks. Some people state that the English Question is, in actuality, an interwoven tapestry of questions. Different factions believe in vastly differing solutions.

For example, some people have examined the advantages of an exclusively-English Parliament, stating that it would create a federation of the four composite nations of the UK, each with its parliament having significant devolved powers. However, this solution is hampered by the enormous size of England compared to the other three nations. England comprises more than four-fifths of the UK's populace. This so-called federal solution has garnered neither the support from the masses nor the elites.

Another solution entails the use of Westminster as a proxy for an English Parliament. This proposal translates into the English voting on English laws. It has attracted a great deal of support in Parliament. Nearly 60% of English people believe that Scottish MPs should not be allowed to vote on matters pertaining to England, as Scotland now has its own Parliament. Since English MPs can no longer vote on issues that devolve to Scotland, this solution seems fair and logical.

However, this solution has serious drawbacks, as well. Namely, its main disadvantages are of a technical nature, as there is no such thing as an English law -- due to the applicability of territorial extent clauses. While it is beneficial for the Speaker to identify (ahead of time) which laws apply only to England, such a proposal would require the introduction of electronic voting terminals at Westminster. These terminals would selectively include or exclude the non-English MPs who vote.

Secondly, English voting for English laws carries many political disadvantages. However, it has been contended that this solution could create two MP classes, a move that could create a parliament within a parliament. The measure has been attempted, but with little success. For example, the Conservatives tried to galvanize the English during two elections, but the party platform was not popular.

Another solution to the English Question can be found by reducing the representation from post-devolution Wales and Scotland. The Labour Party is especially over-represented. This move would prevent a disproportionate number of Scots and Welsh from voting on English matters. A more proportional system of voting would help solve the English Question.

Lastly, English independence is the most assured way of guaranteeing the people of England a louder political voice. Indeed, this is the most radical solution discussed this far, and it has little support among the elites, as well as at the level of the masses. However, the English Independence Party still insists on English Independence along with a full withdrawal from the European Union (EU).

In conclusion, after several decades, the English Question has returned with full force, demanding a workable solution for all of the UK. Many English want a stronger national identity, and they perceive that a suitable answer to the English Question would give England a stronger national identity, perhaps even helping avoid foreigners' confusion of " Brits" with the " English." After years of debate, scrutiny, and scholastic studies, the English Question remains unanswered -- and improvements to the passage of English laws for a nationalized England appear even further away.