

Brexit and the UK Parliament: Challenges and Opportunities

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Speaker

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Respondents

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Location

The Nye Hughes Room

ANU Centre for European Studies
The Australian National University
Building #67C, 1 Liversidge Street
Acton ACT 2601

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Registration required

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Brexit has been dominating the UK Parliament's activities as negotiations on the terms of the UK's departure from the European Union (EU) have been taking place. Parliament is a primary venue for MPs to attempt to alter the Brexit process. It offers a wide range of opportunities for MPs to voice dissent, signal their preferences and influence the agenda, especially in light of the government's minority status. How far has the UK parliament achieved influence in the Brexit process independently of government?

This lecture – which is based on research conducted with Dr Philip Lynch and Professor Adam Cygan at the University of Leicester – will address that question by drawing on a range of data on MPs' positions, parliamentary activities, a dataset of divisions in select committees, the content of select committee reports and interviews with Parliamentary staff.

The research has found that while the executive–legislative relationship has not fundamentally changed, divisions within the two largest political parties and the government's minority status after the 2017 general election have meant the executive has had to make concessions to its own backbench MPs on both sides of the referendum debate, in order to ensure the passage of legislation and has suffered comparatively frequent defeats in Parliament.

Select committees have been influential at times through common themes emerging in some of their reports and their ability to highlight issues not previously on the agenda. Nevertheless, they have also been undermined to some degree by divisions between committees on the leave–remain and core–periphery dimensions and within the Brexit committee.

Richard Whitaker's research focuses on the study of legislatures, particularly the European Parliament and the UK Parliament, as well as British political parties and European integration. He is currently conducting a project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council on Parties, Parliament and the Brexit Process (<https://parlbrexit.co.uk>) with Professor Adam Cygan and Dr Philip Lynch.

