

The Two Messiahs: How British Politics Lost Its Grip While the Country Faces Whatever Comes Next

Adam Tugwell | 14 May 2026



British politics is showing signs of a deeper cultural shift - one that cuts across factions and personalities. It is the emergence of a two-part messiah complex: the belief among some politicians that they are uniquely equipped to lead the country, and the belief among some supporters that stability will come from choosing the right individual rather than from strengthening the system itself.

This is not confined to one wing of one party.

It is a pattern that appears in different forms across the political landscape.

A recent example came from a supporter of Andy Burnham, who suggested that financial markets would “fall in behind” him if he became Prime Minister. The remark was striking not because of who it referenced, but because of what it revealed: a belief that systems respond to personalities rather than to signals, policy clarity or institutional stability.

A different example came from supporters of Wes Streeting, who struggled to articulate what policies he would bring to government. Their emphasis was on tone and managerial competence rather than on specific proposals. Again, the issue is not the individual, but the pattern: the idea that political authority can be performed without being defined.

These two instincts - the self-anointed and the self-comforted - appear to be opposites, but they meet in the same place. Both assume that leadership is primarily about the individual. Both assume that the public will accept personality in place of substance. Both assume that the system will wait while politics resolves its internal debates.

But the system is not waiting.

Local authorities are warning that they cannot meet statutory duties. Public services are operating with little slack. The food system is exposed to global shocks. Energy markets remain volatile. International shipping routes are unstable.

These pressures are not speculative; they are already shaping the country’s trajectory.

Against this backdrop, the King’s Speech - the formal statement of the government’s priorities - reads as though it was written for a different moment. It outlines ambitions for stability and renewal, but it does not fully reflect the structural fragility beneath the surface. It does not acknowledge the cumulative pressures facing local government, the exposure of supply chains, or the sensitivity of markets to political drift.

This is not a partisan critique.

It is an observation about **misalignment** - between the political conversation and the country’s actual condition.

The risk is not that one faction is wrong and another is right.

The risk is that politics as a whole is looking inward while the country moves outward.

A political culture that elevates individuals above institutions - whether through charisma or managerial polish - becomes vulnerable to distraction. It becomes preoccupied with succession, positioning and internal hierarchy at the very moment when attention should be focused on the structural challenges ahead.

The public can sense this. They may not follow every detail, but they recognise when politics has stopped being about them. They recognise when representation has become a performance rather than a responsibility. They recognise when the people in charge are more focused on internal contests than on the realities of the country.

This is not a crisis of ideology.

It is a crisis of focus.

And focus is the one thing the country cannot afford to lose.

The pressures Britain faces require leadership that is grounded, connected and attentive to the realities of place.

They require a political culture that understands the mechanics of the system, not just the choreography of politics. They require a shift away from the idea that stability comes from choosing the right individual, and toward the recognition that stability comes from strengthening the institutions and communities that hold the country together.

The two messiahs - the self-anointed and the self-comforted - are symptoms of a deeper structural drift. The further politics moves from the lived realities of the people it represents, the more it becomes vulnerable to delusion. And the more delusion takes hold, the less capable the system becomes of responding to the pressures that are already here.

The country is moving.

The question is whether its politics will look up in time to see it.

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