

Disconnection is my word of the year for 2023

Published: January 13, 2026, 2:09 am

In political terms, 2023 was significant. For a start, this might have been the last year in which the Tories govern the UK for some time. They are heading for almost certain heavy electoral defeat, and if they move even further to the right thereafter, as seems likely, maybe to political oblivion.

The consequence of the Tory's political infighting and collapse as a cohesive political party has been the creation of a void in the centre-right of UK politics, which the Conservatives have vacated. To near-universal dismay, Labour has decided to fill that gap. As a result, there is now no party on the left-of-centre in the UK that has any current prospect of forming a government under a first-past-the-post electoral system.

The LibDems are doing well as a consequence of this situation but, at present, have little more to say or offer than Labour, except on proportional representation. For most, they do, therefore, remain a party of protest rather than a party of choice.

In England, the Greens are, in that case, the only real alternative choice, but the number of seats where they are viable is tiny, although I hope that their representation grows at the next election, simply to make the points that electoral reform is essential.

In Wales, Plaid Cymru, for all their own faults (and they did not have a great year) are the only obvious alternative to Labour, especially now that Mark Drakeford has left, leaving a largely unknown new leader in charge with the likelihood that they will be under Starmer's control being high.

Looking at Scotland, it has been a fascinating year. The SNP will want to forget almost everything about it. The Scottish police enquiry into Nicola Sturgeon's activities appears to be unusually protracted. I cannot be alone in wondering why. But what was really interesting was that the support for independence, after a brief stutter, appears to have survived this apparent political blow. There is good news in that. The idea that Independence is only an SNP issue might have been consigned to history, and that will be of significant benefit in the future.

All this being said, the obvious conclusion is that the rightward drift in politics in 2023 has been significant, dangerous, and to most people, deeply unwelcome.

A majority in the country do not think that migration is the biggest issue that we face and are instead well aware of the important role that migrants do and will play in our economy as our existing population ages.

Meanwhile, as millions of households suffer from increasing debt, those same sane people also understand that the economic policy that has been pursued by the Tories, to which Labour is also committed, has to be wrong for the country, as well as for them. A growing sense of anger on this issue is bound to become apparent, most especially if interest rates are kept artificially high for a long time under a new Labour government.

On top of this, whilst the Tory culture wars undoubtedly feed the prejudices of some in our society, many more are aware from their lived experience of just how toxic many of the right-wing claims are.

However, the number of people turning the news off is growing. The genocidal actions of the Israeli government have created a revulsion in many that means that they can no longer face the images coming from that war. Ukraine was bad; Gaza is one hundred times worse. The failure of too many politicians to appreciate this has been another contributor to the breakdown in the relationship between both our leading political parties and the country that they seek to represent.

My suggestion that follows is to my word for the year. That is disconnection. People are alienated from politics, the news, economic policy, the toxic language of the media, the imposition of a culture war that they do not want, the language of hatred that too many politicians use, and the political system as a whole, which most now realise cannot represent them. As a result, they know that there must be something better that could be done. Equally, they are aware that it is not on the horizon as yet. The consequence is disconnection.

That disconnection is either worrying or the precursor of change. I obviously hope that it is the second. Either way, I am not expecting 2024 to provide any answers to any real questions when we already know that the outcome of the general election will be the return of another government dedicated to fiscal austerity, utterly pointless fiscal rules, hopeless spending cuts, monetary policy of the worst sort that economic theory has to offer, and total failure to deliver for the needs of the UK as a whole.

No wonder more than 30% of people in Wales want to leave the union, with that number running at around 50% in Scotland. If you asked people in England how many wanted to leave Westminster behind I suspect that you would get a pretty high percentage as well. That is what disconnection looks like. That is what we will see in 2024.