

## Is Trump trying to silence the press?

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:40 pm

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A free press is an essential part of a functioning democracy. If legal threats close that down, what is left?

<https://youtu.be/tdRnQdDZTSE?si=GLTWbLckjIRIRIXV>

This is the audio file:

[https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=x57pp-177ece0-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo\\_link=episode\\_page&bttn-skin=c73a3a](https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=x57pp-177ece0-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&bttn-skin=c73a3a)

And this is the transcript:

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Is Donald Trump trying to silence the press in the USA? It's an important question and it needs an answer because of two legal actions that have already taken place since he was elected as the next president.

He has settled a legal claim with the ABC News Network, where they have agreed to pay \$15 million in compensation because they said he was a rapist, and he denied it, even though there is court documentation that suggests he might be.

The claim has been made by so many people around the world that right now, Donald Trump could queue up in every court, in every country, to try to bring legal action against somebody who has said it. You can feel the sense of fear in the media as a consequence because everybody hates the idea of a libel action.

And now Donald Trump has done something else He has started a lawsuit against a

newspaper in Iowa.

The Des Moines Register, which is quite a well-known paper, even though it serves a state community, ran an opinion poll before the election in November saying that it looked as if the Democrats might win Iowa, which would have been strange because this is definitely a Republican state. And the finding was so surprising that they did publish all the support information produced by the pollsters to justify how the opinion had been reached that it was possible that Harris might win in Iowa and Trump would lose.

Well, as it turned out, Trump won Iowa, as he won an awful lot of states in the USA. And that's the way these things go. As we all know, opinion polls tend to be - technical term coming up - pretty rubbish, but what is the consequence of Trump suing a newspaper for producing an opinion poll that was wrong?

He's saying they did it with malicious intent. In other words, they were trying to undermine his chance of being elected, and therefore, he's looking for damages.

Now, this is really worrying. If you begin to close down the opportunity for political discussion, the opportunity for there to be opinion polls, the opportunity to discuss alternatives, which is what those polls feed into, then you don't have a democracy anymore.

And that's also true if you have a press that is so fearful of criticism by a politician through threat of legal action, which that President can afford to bring because he has very strong financial backers and a court system which he can basically control, then again you lose the power of what is called the fourth estate.

Now, the fourth estate is journalism, and its fundamental role inside democracy is to hold politicians to account. We might have a first estate, that is, elected politicians, and a second estate, the executive, the government and a third estate, that is the judiciary, who ensure that laws are enforced. But the fourth estate, journalists are fundamental to hold those other branches of power to account. If you want a functioning democracy, you have to have a functioning free press.

Now, there are very good questions about whether we've had that in the UK for a long time, given the control of the media in the UK by very powerful oligarchs in effect, who have pursued their own agendas through the control they have of the newspapers that they own, and now, sometimes, the news channels that they own. So, there is doubt about the existence of a free press already.

And we saw doubts in the USA about a free press in the run-up to this election when some of the newspapers owned by major media moguls or oligarchs, not necessarily from media backgrounds, refused because they claimed they needed to be neutral, but it's pretty obvious that they were frightened of Trump.

And if we have a media that is frightened, it cannot deliver that essential role of ensuring that the government is held to account.

Trump knows that. He's not stupid. Whatever else he is, he is definitely not stupid. He knows how to use the power of intimidation to silence his opponents. And he is definitely trying to do that.

And that is what is going on with these legal cases. He won't need to bring many more cases to achieve his goal. No newspaper, no news channel, can afford to lose case after case against a powerful person and stay in business. The costs are too high, the time involved in fighting these battles too great. And as a result, Trump knows that he can silence opposition to what he wants.

And this, this is the truth.

It's really frightening, particularly if we see the extension of this power into the UK as I think is possible.

And that means that we would lose the opportunity for political debate anywhere.

And then you have to ask the question, how long before they come for things like this channel? And the answer is, I don't know, but If you value democracy, and you value the right to express free opinion, and you want to see that continue, and you want genuine choice in your future, you have to be worried about Donald Trump and his desire to silence the press, because this is the pathway to the end of democracy.