

The USA and freedom

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:11 pm

As the New York Times [has noted](#):

Former President Barack Obama warned on Tuesday night that the country was “dangerously close” to allowing its government officials to act in a way “consistent with autocracies,” offering a veiled rebuke of the Trump administration that was delivered with trademark caution.

They added:

Appearing before a civic group in Hartford, Conn., during a tumultuous stretch for the country both at home and abroad, Mr. Obama offered a winding explanation about the dangers facing American democracy. He pointed to an erosion of traditional values like the rule of law, an independent judiciary, the freedom of the press and the right to protest.

I have three thoughts.

First, this is overdue. Former Presidents Clinton, Bush and Biden need to be doing the same thing. They keep their titles for a reason.

Second, the intervention is correct: idealised values are being eroded. They should not be.

Third, it has to be said that no living President was a paragon of virtue on these things. The US was very far from being the land of the free before Trump got into office on either occasion when he has succeeded in doing so. Maybe Obama should also be talking about how things can be improved so that freedoms exceed those available when he was in office, so that the US might move to something that looks more like a democracy.