

As with Johnson, the case against Trump all boils down ...

Published: January 14, 2026, 6:50 am

I spent too much time last evening reading speeches by members of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee whilst simultaneously watching coverage of former President Trump's appearance in court. Neither was that exciting. Let me deal with Trump first.

As it turns out the case against Trump is more straightforward than most expected. Every one of the charges is of falsifying business expenses.

This appears surprising. That is not because there is much doubt that this happened: Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, has already served time in jail for being on the other side of the falsified transactions. The surprise was that there was no charge of conspiracy, apparently. The suggestion is that these charges only refer to misdemeanours and not felonies, with lower penalties as a result.

I am not in any way an expert on New York law. I do not think I have to be. I think that politically the issue is not whether Trump did on this indictment commit a greater or lesser offence. It is all about whether he lied or not.

The political question in this case (although not in others to come) is about whether Trump can be trusted. It is exactly the same question that is being asked of Johnson. The issue as to what Trump lied about is much less important than the question 'can he be trusted?' That is also true for Johnson.

For both men there are some who will always believe them. That might be true whatever they do, although Johnson's waning support suggests that Trump should not take that for granted. Those faithful supporters are not the issue though. They might need their own support and counselling, but the significance of this issue is on its impact on the majority.

As a matter of fact we have to trust our politicians. Few will ever do so completely. Most politicians share two uncomfortable traits. One is not answering the question. The other is seeking to save their own skin, which usually makes them evasive, at best.

Neither is appealing. So we compromise. We choose between politicians that we trust more rather than less.

Johnson has lost that trust.

Will Trump? My suspicion is that he will. And that is the significance of this case. Those that might come against Trump on voter fraud in Georgia and about 6 January are more serious and more politically complex. They are potential felonies. But this case is simple. It asks the question 'Is Trump honest?' The answer is very obviously that he is not.

This will make no difference to some Trump loyalists. But even amongst other Republicans this will matter. The simple fact that Trump would falsify records will create doubt for some, and I suspect add few to his cause. If so, this prosecution has value.

That is my hope. And if so, it was not wasted time watching it.