

# Pierre Poilievre and colleagues sniff out a scandal that doesn't exist – and they know it



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Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre speaks at a news conference in Ottawa, on Aug. 1.

JUSTIN TANG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

It's a good thing Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his colleagues have courageously called out the media collusion racket that's being mean to their party on marching orders from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

A few days ago, on the platform formerly known as Twitter, Mr. [Poilievre](#) wrote, "Trudeau's media are desperate to stop his continued downfall," adding, "Today, CBC's news service CP wrote a hit piece on me because I dared criticize the World Economic Forum – a group of multinational CEOs and powerful politicians that push their interests."

[Andrew Scheer](#), former Conservative leader, backed up Mr. Poilievre's charges. "No wonder Trudeau wants to censor all but four or five Liberals news sources: they all co-ordinate in attacking Poilievre with the same false headline," he wrote. "Collusion?" To this bracing truth bomb he attached receipts: screen shots of the offending article, headlined "Poilievre's Conservative Party embracing language of mainstream conspiracy theories," running in multiple media outlets.

The story was a lightly analytical piece that touched on Mr. Poilievre's summer stump speeches railing against the [World Economic Forum](#) and ideas like a hypothetical digital ID. A handful of academic sources commented on the mainstreaming of conspiracy theories and what Mr. Poilievre might have to gain politically in this vein.

Next, Tory MP and former leadership contender Leslyn Lewis sailed into the fray. " 'Conspiracy theorist' is used to bully free-thinkers into submission so there's no need to respond to the merits of an issue," she wrote. "It's disturbing to see news outlets collude to propagate biased and poorly researched claims and charges without explanation or commitment to facts."

But you don't have to take their word for it.

You can find more of this dark collusion at work in other recent news stories. "Montreal researchers join international study of rare disease Friedreich's ataxia" blanketed news outlets recently under identical headlines, as did another story about border officers finding two live tarantulas in packages at Edmonton International Airport. Yet another headlined "Forecasted winds pose biggest wildfire threat amid heat wave" also ran widely, on what must have been orders from the top.

When you're running a dictatorial media regime, as Mr. Poilievre and his pals say Mr. Trudeau is, I suppose one of the perks is that you get to pick your hobby horses. But those seem like weird topics on which to enforce a party line, don't they?

That's because it's not a conspiracy, it's the way a wire service works. The Canadian Press covers events across the country that other newsrooms might not be able to staff, and news outlets subscribe to CP copy to augment their own. They can combine CP files with their own reporting, or run CP files exactly as they go out over the wire, including the headline, which is what happened here.

Hollering about "collusion" in this case makes about as much sense as lobbing accusations of skulduggery because the Garfield comic last weekend was the same in two different newspapers.

Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Scheer absolutely know this because they've both been working on [Parliament Hill](#) as MPs for two decades. Ms. Lewis was first elected in 2021, but she too knows this is disingenuous, because the wire service is a fact of life on the Hill.

But of course none of this should be taken at face value. Mr. Poilievre and his colleagues know they're being dishonest, just as surely as they know that many of the people listening to them would have no way of knowing that, and will absorb the falsehoods they're offering and fashion them into a durable new reality.

What these Conservative MPs are doing is worldbuilding, just like an author does with a novel or a director does with a movie that takes place in a foreign context. With fiction, you get establishing scenes that tell you about the world you've been dropped into, the rules that govern it, who lives there and how it all works. In Mr. Poilievre's worldbuilding, the establishing shot is that media do the bidding of the Liberal government, so any coverage that's critical of him is biased, any tough questions he gets are further proof, and any pushback to those notions is just defensive cover-up of the whole racket.

Author Michael Lewis has a podcast called [Against The Rules](#) that starts, in his typical brilliantly oblique style, with an audio field trip to the NBA's [instant-replay centre](#) in New Jersey. He traces the fascinating technical and human details of how the centre reviews game decisions in real time across the league

before he gets to the point of the whole podcast: this replay centre became necessary because, in society and politics and life at large well beyond a basketball court, no one trusts the referees any more.

Why would they, when they're so often told not to by people with something to gain?

[Donald Trump](#) is of course the champion of this dark art, and he's currently being indicted roughly every 20 minutes for his efforts. But it's happened across Europe, in Brazil, and, in less dramatic but still corrosive ways, in countless other places and contexts, too. In this mindset, any source that says something unwelcome is in the tank for your enemies. Spin or outright lies are just smart strategy because hey, we're playing a competitive sport here. Objective truth is nothing more than a construct – or a scam for suckers.

It's common to talk about this type of undermining as destroying confidence in institutions – media, government, justice, science, medicine, education. The list of authorities that people and society itself once relied on that are now viewed with suspicion or outright hostility is long and depressing.

But it goes much deeper than the institutions themselves. When you persuade people that all the refs are suspect, what you're really telling them is that there is no such thing as verifiable truth. In the tribal world of politics, that means that once you've got people onside, reality is whatever you say it is.

Convince people they're standing on quicksand and you become the branch they'll cling to.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-pierre-poilievre-and-colleagues-sniff-out-a-scandal-that-doesnt-exist/>