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**POLITICS**

# Liberals accuse Poilievre of 'riling' up Canadians in border crash comments

## Poilievre criticized for 'terrorist' comments

OTTAWA – Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre released a blueprint for how he would respond to an uptick in hate crimes on Thursday, while the Liberals accused him of being irresponsible for prematurely labelling an explosion at a Canada–U.S. border checkpoint a "terrorist attack" the day before.

By **Stephanie Taylor** The Canadian Press

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Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre speaks during a press conference at Queen's Park in Toronto on Thursday Nov. 23, 2023. Poilievre says he has a plan for how he would tackle a rise in hate-motivated crimes reported since the start of Israel-Hamas war, but that it doesn't involve touching what protesters say. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Frank Gunn  
DPI

**OTTAWA - Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre released a blueprint for how he would respond to an uptick in hate crimes on Thursday, while the Liberals accused him of being irresponsible for prematurely labelling an explosion at a Canada-U.S. border checkpoint a "terrorist attack" the day before.**

**The Opposition leader presented what he called "common sense Conservative measures" during a news conference at a Toronto synagogue, which would include re-evaluating Canada's terrorism threat level and creating an anti-hate network for faith communities.**

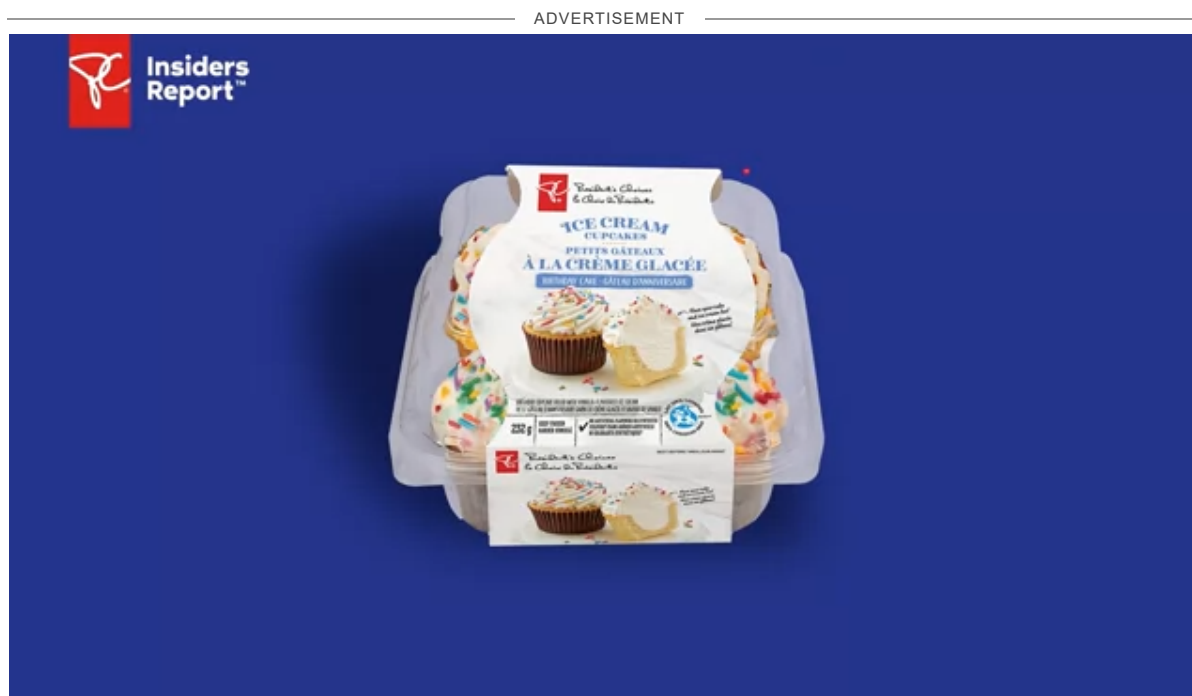
**"After eight years of (Prime Minister) Justin Trudeau, Canada is a more dangerous place," Poilievre told reporters.**

**Jewish Canadians have reported a sharp rise in antisemitism and violence against synagogues and schools since Hamas militants killed 1,200 people, including hundreds of civilians, in Israel on Oct. 7.**

**Muslim communities have reported a similar increase in hate-motivated violence in Canada during the latest Israel-Hamas war, which has seen Israel cut off supplies and launch airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, a Hamas-controlled Palestinian territory, in retaliation for the attacks.**

**Poilievre mentioned examples of what he referred to as past terrorist attacks in Canada, including the January 2017 shooting that killed six Muslim men at a mosque in Quebec City and the June 2021 truck attack that killed four members of a Muslim family in London, Ont.**

At the news conference on Thursday, Poilievre was asked about comments he made Wednesday during question period in the House of Commons, where he asked Trudeau for an update on an vehicle explosion near the Canada-U.S. border that left two people dead. In his question, Poilievre had referred to "media reports of a terrorist attack."



Speaking in French, Poilievre said: "Can the prime minister give us any information about this terrorist attack?"

Then in his English question, he said: "It is the principal responsibility of government to protect the people. Can the prime minister give us an update on what he knows and what action plan he will immediately implement to bring home security for our people?"

Trudeau said at the time that "there are a lot of questions," and that Canada was taking the situation "extraordinarily seriously." He then said he would need to excuse himself from the House of Commons to deal with the matter.

Earlier on Wednesday, The Associated Press had published an alert that the FBI was investigating the explosion.

Hours after the exchange between Poilievre and Trudeau, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said there was "no evidence at this time that this was a terrorist activity."

Poilievre told reporters in Toronto on Thursday that he was referring to a report by CTV. That report, published Wednesday afternoon, cited unnamed national security sources saying that Canada was "operating under (the) assumption" that the vehicle explosion was "terror-related."

While some U.S. media had quickly linked the explosion to terrorism, the Conservative leader made his initial remarks in the House before CTV published its reporting, which included a post on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, from the reporter who wrote the story at 2:40 p.m. ET. Poilievre asked his first question in the House at 2:24 p.m. ET.

On Thursday, Government House leader Karina Gould accused Poilievre of jumping to conclusions and "riling" up Canadians.

"Instead of taking a step back and asking what is going on, demonstrating calm and leadership and reassurance to Canadians, he immediately jumped to the conclusion that this was a terrorist attack without any knowledge or

information that this was the case," she told reporters on Parliament Hill during a news conference on Thursday.

In an email sent late Thursday evening, Poilievre spokesman Sebastian Skamski did not address the discrepancy over the timing of the CTV report.

"Anyone watching developments at that time — a fiery car explosion at the border — was almost certainly thinking that terrorism was a very real possibility, as opposed to a dramatic and very unfortunate car accident," Skamski wrote.

He pointed to a statement by Hochul that the New York State Police were working with the FBI Joint Terrorism Task force "to monitor all points of entry," as well as a statement from a Trudeau spokeswoman that the prime minister had been briefed about the situation by his national security and intelligence adviser. He said these and other media reports all suggested the explosion could be terror-related.

"It is clear that there was extensive news coverage seriously speculating on terrorism prior to the leader asking his measured, reasonable question, and a suggestion that the leader was somehow being irresponsible or inflammatory is frankly disingenuous," Skamski wrote.

As for his plan to tackle a rise in hate crimes, Poilievre told reporters that he believes in free speech, even if what people say is "appalling," because "that is the price of living in a free country."

That comes as politicians and Jewish advocacy groups have raised concerns about chants and signage at protests related to the Israel-Hamas war that they fear could incite violence. They have also raised the alarm about a rise in hateful messages online.

"The alternative is to have state censors, who then decide what kind of speech is acceptable and what is not, and then who chooses those state censors," Poilievre said Thursday.

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