

LATEST INFORMATION INCIDENT (UPDATED 8/23): KIRKLAND LAKE BOT  
CAMPAIGN

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Information Incident - Featured - Kirkland Lake Bot Campaign Aug 21

## Incident Update 2 | More Bot than Bite: A Qualitative Analysis of the Conversation Online

Authors: Sara Parker and Esli Chan (Media Ecosystem Observatory)

*Beyond trying to better understand [the incident](#), we turn our attention to the impacts. Specifically, the topic of this update explores the impact on conversation. How did news outlets talk about the story? What voices were loudest in the conversation? How (if so) did the dialogue compare between partisan voices? How did engagement with the bots compare to the event itself? What did people say about it?*

### **Key Takeaways:**

- *News outlets were the superspreaders of the story, framing this incident as a threat to Canadian elections*
- *While the NDPs Charlie Angus appeared quite out-spoken about the incident, the NDP party, Liberals and Conservatives contributed little to the conversation*
- *The incident (thus far) seems to have had little impact on Poilievre's engagement*

Following the incident, we saw **a handful of news outlets, particularly [CTV News](#) and [CBC News](#)**, pick up the story. All stopped short of calling it “foreign interference,” instead focusing their coverage on what happened, reactions from the major political parties, and concern about “foreign bots” on social media platforms. Articles pointed out that it remains unclear who is the source of the bots, or what involvement the Conservative or any other political party may have played. Some news outlets also reached out to subject matter experts (such as [Elizabeth Dubois](#), [Fenwick McKelvey](#), and the [Social Media Lab](#), members of the CDMRN) to discuss the bots. The consensus from researchers seems to be that the attack itself was unsophisticated and would not have much of an impact on Poilievre, but could decrease how much Canadians trust their politicians and electoral system. An [opinion piece by Justin Ling](#), originally published in the Toronto Star and reshared by other outlets, also argues that the bot incident is not as severe as it seems, but is rather an example of the outsized (and dangerous) influence X (formerly known as Twitter) has on Canadian politics.

The discovery of the bot campaign on X quickly prompted strong reactions across political lines. Three politicians have commented on the incident, particularly NDP MP Charlie Angus who represents Kirkland Lake and took to social media (specifically Facebook and Instagram) immediately following the incident to call for an investigation into the Conservative Party’s involvement and potential collusion with foreign governments. Angus continued to discuss the bots on social media throughout the week, drawing attention to the letter he submitted to the electoral commissioner with NDP MP Lisa Marie Barron. Only one Liberal politician, Mark Gerretsen (MP), chimed in, alleging that the Conservative Party had purchased the bots. Aside from their public statement asserting that they had nothing to do with the bots, nobody from the Conservative Party has joined the online discussion about the incident, despite some members expressing their general concern about foreign interference online in the weeks before the rally. None of the accounts for the major federal parties have posted about the incident on social media.



Charlie Angus NDP - NPD

August 8 at 7:47 PM · 🌐



So Poilievre's rage tour in Kirkland Lake bombed.  
Then X was flooded with foreign bots saying it was great.  
When pressed to who paid the Bots the Cons claimed it was an "NDP conspiracy."  
Then they accused CBC of amplifying the conspiracy. When that didn't work, they admitted it was a serious issue and demanded the Liberal government explain.  
That's a bad week Pierre.  
Some advice: maybe hire BOTs for your damage control strategy.



👍👎 350

92 comments 244 shares

Notably, the rally itself garnered more online engagement than discussion about the bots. Poilievre created **the six most popular posts on Facebook and Instagram** about Kirkland Lake in the ten-day time period after the rally and the bot incident, surpassing any news coverage or political discussion about the bots online. In fact, Poilievre picked up almost 85% of the online engagement (as measured by likes on Facebook and Instagram) related to Kirkland Lake after the rally. While this may be mediated by Poilievre's success on social media (in July, he received [58% of all online engagement](#) with Canadian federal party leaders),

it does demonstrate that the incident does not appear to have significantly impacted Poilievre's popularity online.

Overall, we have seen low engagement on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok about the Kirkland bot incident. Besides a handful of news articles and some allegations from politicians, the incident does not appear to have had a major impact on the Canadian information ecosystem. Future updates will include analysis of the bot incident and its impacts on X.

CDMRN

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