

Politics

With podcasts and influencers, the Liberals fight to win back lost ground with younger voters

Liberal support has cratered among millennial and Gen Z voters in recent years

[Ashley Burke](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 25, 2024 4:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: May 25



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau holds a local town hall with students from Durham College in Whitby, Ont. on Wednesday, April 5, 2023. One pollster warns that the Liberals have no path to re-election unless they can mend fences with younger voters. (Chris Young/The Canadian Press)

Trailing in the polls among the younger voters who could help decide the next general election, the federal Liberals are trying to bring up their social media game and sell their recent budget to skeptical millennials and Gen Z.

After releasing a budget last month built around promises to help younger generations struggling with housing and the cost of living, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau went on an online media binge, sitting down for interviews with popular podcasts and YouTube channels about health care ([The Gritty Nurse](#)), economics and personal finance ([The Plain Bagel](#)) and even women's basketball ([The Pick Up](#)).

Trade Minister Mary Ng recently paid out of pocket for a drone she uses to record content when she's travelling on international trade missions. MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith hired a millennial filmmaker to produce his videos full-time.

And Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault's Gen Z staffers have taken over his feeds. They've been leaning into social media trends that the minister said have increased his reach by 300 per cent in the past month.

One poll suggests that what the Liberals have done since releasing the budget could be starting to move the needle for them. [A new survey from Abacus Data](#) says the Liberals have narrowed the gap to five points behind the Conservatives among younger voters — a substantial change from the 23-point gap reported in April. It's the second recent survey showing some movement in the Liberals' direction.

Dan Arnold, who conducted polling for the federal Liberals' last three election campaigns, said younger generations will make up 40 per cent of eligible voters in the next election.

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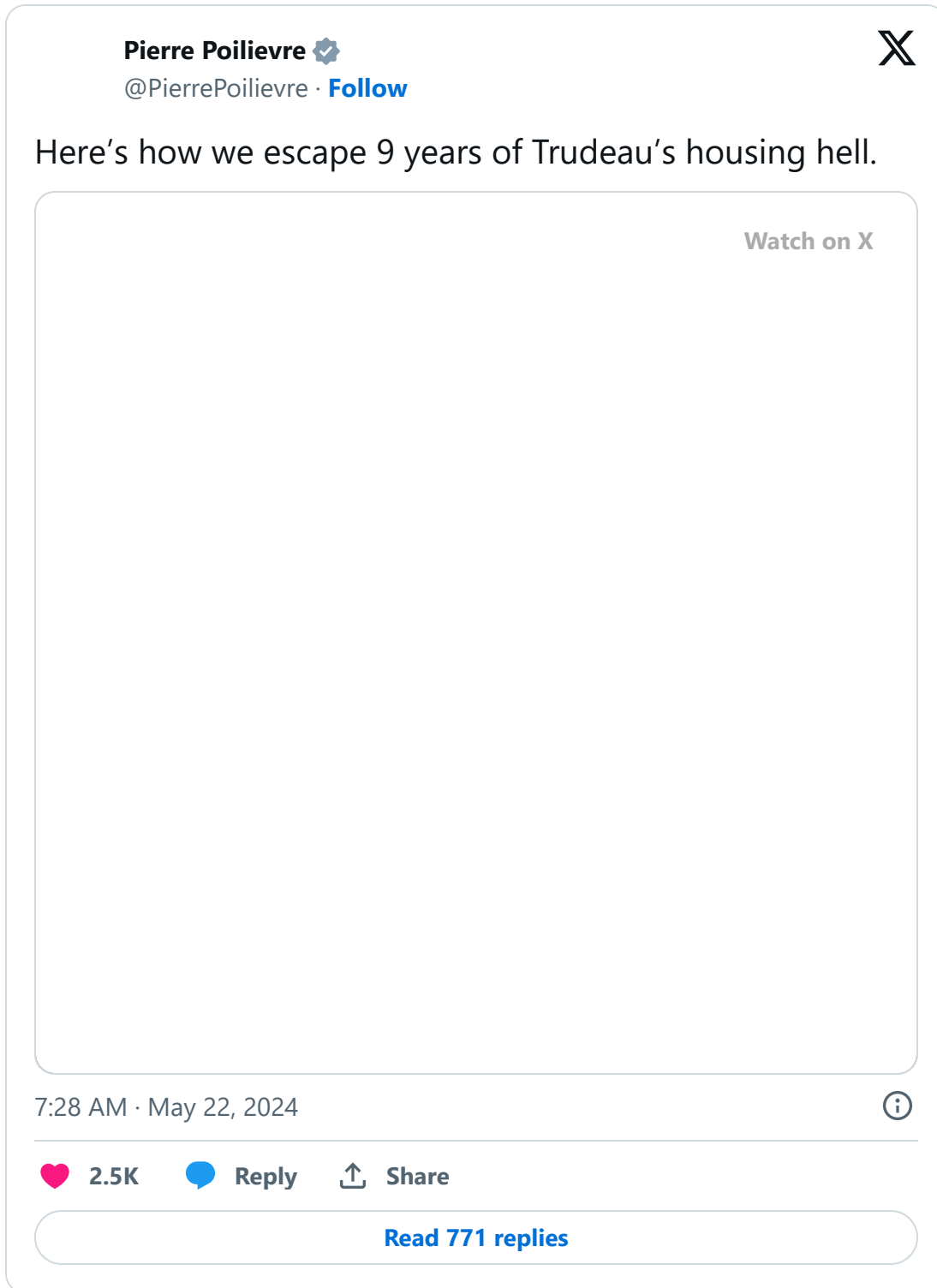
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"Right now, the Liberals are in the worst position they've been in with millennials," said Arnold, chief strategy officer at Pollara Strategic Insights and former director of research and advertising in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Millennials came out in record numbers to help catapult Trudeau into power in 2015. By 2019, said Arnold, "some were a little disillusioned by the party and felt maybe Trudeau didn't deliver on all of his promises, the image they had in their head of what he was going to do.

"And it's gotten worse since then, to the point where I've seen recent polling where the Liberals are polling at under 20 per cent among Gen Z and millennials. That's close to half the electorate. And if you are polling at 20 per cent or below with that group of voters there, it doesn't really matter what you do with boomers — you're not going to win an election campaign."

Conservatives, meanwhile, "are leading with millennials" and are "up among millennial women by almost 20 points over the Liberals," Arnold said. Younger Canadians want change, he added, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has been reaching them on social media by talking about the things they care about most — housing and the cost of living.



Conservative strategist and president of Creative Currency Dennis Matthews said Poilievre has tapped into what younger voters are looking for on their social feeds, whether it's shorter clips or long-form documentaries.

"You've got Pierre Poilievre who's obviously running for prime minister, but he could also be a content creator online," he told CBC's *The House*.

Trudeau's office last week released a video explaining its proposed capital gains tax. The video has received 4.7 million views on X, formerly known as Twitter.



Trudeau's office doesn't talk about strategy publicly. A Liberal source with knowledge of the PMO's communication strategy said the public can expect to see more policy videos from Trudeau, along with lighter content — like his [May 4 video with Canadian Star Wars actor Hayden Christensen](#) — more appearances on podcasts and traditional media and more work with unpaid content creators, including influencers.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland invited a group of five unpaid finance content creators to read the budget before it was released. Danica Nelson — a millennial herself — was one of them.

Nelson said she has almost 20,000 followers — mostly Black or Indigenous Canadians or women of colour who want to know how to manage their money better.

She said she travelled to Ottawa on her own dime for an opportunity to cover the budget, meet Freeland and ask a group of ministers questions. She then broke down the budget in a series of Tik Tok and Instagram videos.

She called the Liberals' outreach to content creators a "great approach."

"I think they know that a lot of millennials and Gen Z ... they don't necessarily watch traditional news anymore," Nelson said. "And they want to meet people where they are and they know people are on social media."

Boissonnault said he's having fun, being edgy and trying to deploy humour on social media to demonstrate authenticity and win younger Canadians' trust.

He said Gen Z staffers are the ones calling the shots and online engagement has gone up.

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"So they see the reels, they see the trends and they come and pitch me. And every single time I have said, 'I don't know about this, not sure how it's going to play, show me the results,'" Boissonnault told CBC News. "And every since time they've been right. And so I trust them."

Boissonnault's team has picked up on trends, such as [Sabrina Carpenter's popular song "Espresso"](#) or a catchphrase made viral on TikTok by American comedian and

actress Tiffany Haddish — ["The parasite in me wants the candy."](#)

Boissonnault said he doesn't always get it — but it doesn't matter.

"I don't need to understand the pathway that I'm taking to go knock on doors, in the same way that I don't need to understand the pathway that gets me to connect with a bunch of people who are Gen Z or millennials," he said. "I rely on the team to help me figure that out. And so far, it's working."

Liberal MP Julie Dzerowicz, who represents the Toronto riding of Davenport, said she's going to attempt to reach millennials and Gen Z in new ways because the traditional way isn't working. Her Davenport riding ranks 16th in the country for its percentage of younger voters.

"There's a trust issue," said Dzerowicz. "I think that more of them are feeling, 'Are you just messaging me? How do I know what the truth is between what different politicians are saying?' So that isn't something that I've had to address in a large way in previous years."

She said she is considering emulating in her social media output the fictional influencer in the popular Netflix series *Emily in Paris*, whose posts show off the beauty of the French capital. Her posts would showcase the best her riding has to offer.

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The Liberals are trying to win back millennials and Gen Z by courting them on social media through TikTok influencers and video.

Erskine-Smith has been reaching out to younger voters for a while. He regularly visits high schools to attend graduation ceremonies and is attending more than a dozen this year. He has his own podcast and is answering questions and posting videos on just about every online platform going.

"I'm not interested in chasing trends or memes," he said. "I do want to answer questions that people have with short videos, pointed videos, sharp videos."

He said he's also navigating an issue he calls "a bit thorny." His content is still going up on TikTok, even though the federal government banned the social media platform from government devices in February 2023, citing security concerns. A "young person in my office" manages the account on his personal device, he said.

A lot of Canadians get their news on TikTok, where misinformation is rampant, Erskine-Smith said.

"If we leave platforms entirely where so many people are, those platforms are going to be worse off," he said. "And so obviously, it's a challenge to navigate that as a parliamentarian."

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