

## THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



55 Canadian citizens and 30 permanent residents were among 176 people who were killed in a tragic plane crash. (Shutterstock)

# How we mourn the victims of tragedies depends on their citizenship status

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Some migrants are welcomed into the nation while others are not. The pandemic throws into sharp relief who is considered worthy and who is not in Canada.

This differentiation was also made clear by the Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 incident. On Jan. 8, 2020, Flight PS752 crashed shortly after taking off in Iran, killing everyone on board. The tragedy highlighted how some migrants are welcomed into Canada while others are not.

Unskilled migrants often arrive as temporary foreign workers or undocumented individuals. They are viewed by Canadian immigration policy as **good enough to work yet not good enough to stay**. They enter on limited work contracts and are barred from qualifying for permanent residency status. In effect, their entry is premised on their expected departure and future exclusion.

On the other hand, skilled migrants — like engineers, academics and business executives — are selectively recruited into Canada on the basis of their skills through a points system, where credentials, language proficiency and age are highly valued. Young, educated and English- or French-speaking migrants are most desired.

### Professional gains and losses

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faced racism and discrimination in workplace environments, social settings and at border crossings. As skilled professionals, however, the loss of their potential contributions to Canada was given due consideration in the wake of the Flight PS752 crash.

## **Unequal grief and mourning**

Although foreigners can become citizens, they are rarely seen — symbolically speaking — as equal to those born in Canada.

For example, the public fundraising campaigns for the victims of Flight PS752 struggled to raise money when compared to the 2018 campaign for the Humboldt Broncos hockey players. While the **Canada Strong Campaign** managed to exceed its \$1.5 million funding goal, smaller-scale, local efforts organized mainly to cover funeral and memorial costs, received low support.

One effort started by community member Shayesteh Majdina in Edmonton raised \$68,794 — a \$20,000 donation from the family that owns West Edmonton Mall represented 40 per cent of the entire amount. A similar crowdfunding push in Vancouver has not raised any funds.

By contrast, a campaign for 15 Humboldt Broncos hockey players killed in the 2018 bus crash raised over \$15 million. This was one of the biggest ever fundraising campaigns hosted on the GoFundMe platform, second only to the MeToo initiative that year.

Within 24 hours, the Humboldt Broncos fundraiser had raised \$1 million; by the fourth day it reached \$6 million, and within two weeks had reached \$15.2 million. This is approximately 15 times more than the \$885,602.94 that the Canada Strong Campaign managed to raise for the Iranian victims in over a month. Although an agreement from the federal government intended to match collected funds up to \$1.5 million, the matching of state donations was set to end on February 21, 2020, at a time when the campaign sat at half of its funding goal.


These markedly different outpourings of grief reflect the different ways that immigrants are seen in relation to symbols of Canadian culture: the Humboldt Broncos represent a Canadian national symbol.

## **National subjects and national values**


To attend a hockey game in Canada is to participate in a Canadian pastime, similar to celebrating Canada Day, skiing in the winter or shopping for clothes at Roots. Such social and cultural practices become markers of Canadian pride. Their ideological function is not only about maintaining national culture, but also about differentiating the outsiders from the insiders, the newcomers from the Canadians.

Labelled the “best and the brightest,” skilled immigrants are considered well-equipped to fully participate in Canadian society, contribute to the Canadian economy and strengthen the Canadian national fabric. Their presence is celebrated and their loss is mourned.

Of the Iranian Canadian passengers on board Flight PS752, most were skilled professionals: academics, scientists, doctoral students and medical trainees. The public outcry around the deaths focused on the loss of these professionals for Canada.

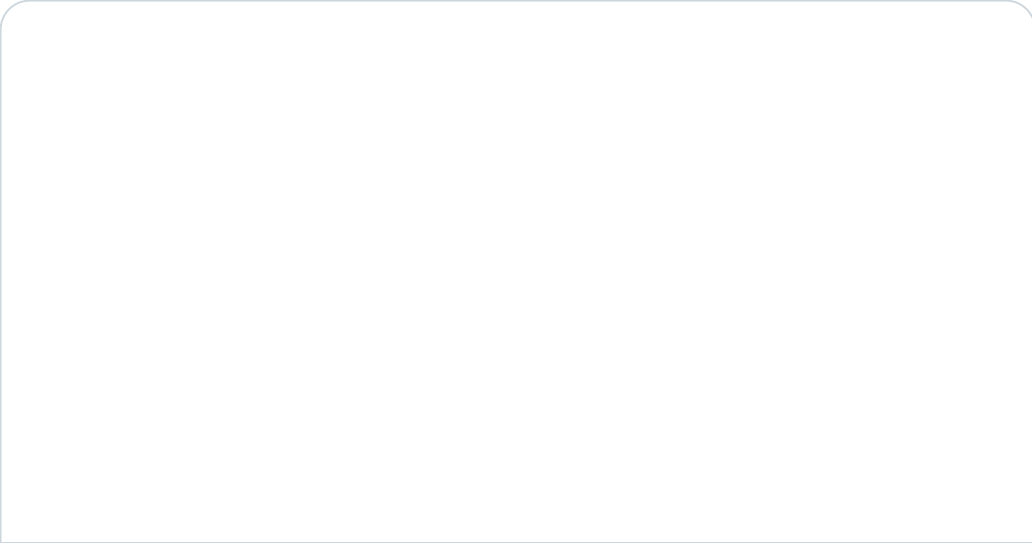


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It is extra hurtful to read that many of the victims of PS752 were students and academics from Iranian working in Canada. The academic world has helped to bring the United States and Iran closer together when everything else has pushed them apart.



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In other words, it is the Canadian state's losses that were mourned. The national frame of reference was stretched to include future contributors to Canadian national development.

Iranians were not woven into the Canadian national fabric prior to this tragic event. A 2017 survey conducted by the Iranian-Canadian Congress found that up to 65 per cent of Iranian Canadians have



Toronto Maple Leafs and Montréal Canadiens players stand for the Canadian national anthem prior to NHL exhibition hockey action ahead of the Stanley Cup playoffs in Toronto on July 28, 2020. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Frank Gunn

In the citizenship study guide “Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship,” hockey is shown as the **national winter sport**. Anyone who has ever attended a hockey game can recognize its associations with national pride, from people standing up during the anthem to the public recognition of Canadian soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hockey provides a manifestation of the socio-cultural universality of Canadian identity. Several professional hockey teams, such as the Pittsburgh Penguins, Toronto Maple Leafs and Calgary Flames, as well as the Calgary Hitmen Hockey Club, donated to the Humboldt Broncos fundraising campaign. There is no public information easily available to indicate that these teams donated to the Canada Strong incentive in support of the Iranian plane crash victims.

Skilled immigrants might be potentially included in Canada, but their inclusion and their value as subjects within the nation depends on their contributions. They can never be the type of nationals that signify what Canada is all about. Despite being highly educated and producing an economic benefit to the country, skilled immigrants can never embody the true spirit of national pride.

We might grieve their economic loss to the country — as in the case of the victims of Flight PS752 — and yet we do not grieve for them in the same ways as those born into the ideological confines of the Canadian nation-state.

Immigration Canada critical race newcomers Humboldt Broncos Canadian immigration