

**LEADERSHIP FOR POSITIVE PEACE: TRANSFORMING
SOCIETIES THROUGH INCLUSION AND EMPATHY**

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*Democracy must be built through open societies that share information.
When there is information, there is enlightenment.
When there is debate, there are solutions.*

— Atifete Jahjaga, 4th President of Kosovo, 2011-2016

*One of the criticisms I've faced over the years is that I'm not aggressive
enough or assertive enough, or maybe somehow, because I'm
empathetic, it means I'm weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to
believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong.*

— Jacinda Ardern, 40th Prime Minister of New Zealand, 2017-2023

Abstract

Empathy and inclusion are transformative forces capable of healing nations, bridging divides, and fostering lasting peace. This chapter explores the leadership of Atifete Jahjaga,¹ Kosovo's first female president, and Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's former prime minister, who embodied these qualities while addressing systemic injustices, societal traumas, and national crises. Jahjaga championed institutional reform and reconciliation in the wake of conflict, confronting stigma and empowering marginalized voices. Ardern united her nation with compassionate and decisive leadership, particularly during the Christchurch mosque attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic. Their stories demonstrate the power of Positive Peace principles to inspire resilience, equity, and collective progress in an uncertain world.

Introduction:

Leadership and Positive Peace in a Changing World

The challenges of the modern era—cyber warfare, pandemics, systemic inequalities, and growing geopolitical tensions—underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of what sustains peace. The Global Peace Index (GPI), published annually by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), evaluates the peacefulness of 163 nations using a wide array of indicators.² Founded by Australian entrepreneur Stephen Killelea A.M., the IEP has pioneered innovative frameworks like Positive Peace, which shifts the focus from conflict avoidance to building the attitudes, institutions, and structures that foster resilient and equitable societies.³

At the heart of Positive Peace lies the transformative power of leadership—particularly empathetic and inclusive leadership capable of bridging divides and fostering long-term stability. This chapter explores the transformative potential of such leadership through the stories of two extraordinary figures: Atifete Jahjaga of Kosovo and Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand. Their efforts demonstrate how the principles of Positive Peace when embraced by visionary leaders, can guide nations through profound challenges. By analyzing their approaches, this chapter highlights how gender equality, systemic healing, and inclusive governance can serve as pathways to a more stable, just, and equitable world.

Understanding Leadership and Positive Peace

Positive Peace, as defined by IEP, transcends the absence of violence. It focuses on the systemic factors—attitudes, institutions, and structures—that sustain peaceful and equitable societies over time.⁴ The framework's eight interconnected pillars, including Well-Functioning Government, Acceptance of the Rights of Others, Free Flow of Information, and Good Relations with Neighbors,

provide actionable pathways for addressing vulnerabilities and fostering societal resilience.⁵

Leadership is central to transforming these principles into tangible outcomes. Within the context of Positive Peace, effective leaders demonstrate empathy, inclusivity, and a commitment to justice—traits characteristic of transformational and ethical leadership. Transformational leaders inspire change by articulating a compelling vision and fostering collaboration,⁶ while ethical leaders prioritize integrity, fairness, and the well-being of all members of society.⁷

In times of conflict or crisis, these qualities become indispensable. Leaders must serve as bridge-builders, uniting divided communities, addressing historical grievances, and fostering societal trust. Moreover, they must champion the inclusion of marginalized voices, recognizing that sustainable peace can only be achievable when every individual has a stake in the future.

This chapter illustrates these concepts through the leadership of Jahjaga and Ardern, demonstrating how visionary governance rooted in the principles of Positive Peace can transform societies and provide a blueprint for addressing the most pressing challenges of our time.

Case Studies: Jahjaga and Ardern

The stories of Atifete Jahjaga,⁸ the first female president of Kosovo, and Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, illustrate how leadership rooted in Positive Peace can transform societies.

- *ATIFETE JAHJAGA* confronted the trauma of wartime sexual violence and championed gender equality in post-conflict Kosovo.⁹ Her efforts aligned with the Positive Peace pillars of Acceptance of the Rights of Others and Well-Functioning

Government, laying the groundwork for long-term reconciliation and institutional reform.

- *JACINDA ARDERN* demonstrated empathetic and decisive leadership during crises like the Christchurch mosque attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰ Her focus on transparency and inclusion embodied the pillars of the Free Flow of Information and Good Relations with Neighbors, fostering trust and unity during periods of uncertainty.

These leaders illustrate how the principles of Positive Peace can be applied to address systemic injustices, strengthen institutions, and inspire collective action. Their examples show that leadership is not merely about managing crises but about creating systems and cultures that sustain peace and equity.

Breaking Barriers: A Woman's Rise to Power in Post-War Kosovo

In a nation scarred by war and grappling with its newfound independence, Atifete Jahjaga emerged as a symbol of hope. At just 36 years old, she became the first female president of Kosovo, leading the country through a turbulent period of post-conflict recovery from 2011 to 2016.

Kosovo had declared independence from Serbia only three years earlier, following a brutal conflict marked by ethnic cleansing and systemic violence.¹¹ Over 10,000 lives were lost,¹² more than 1.5 million were displaced,¹³ and an estimated 20,000 women endured sexual violence as a weapon of war.¹⁴ Against this backdrop, Jahjaga, a former police officer who had risen through the ranks to become Deputy Director, navigated a troubled political landscape, burdened by the lingering wounds of war and the pervasive stigma surrounding survivors of sexual violence. Rejecting the divisive infighting that plagued Kosovo's leadership, she fostered unity, healing, and reconciliation,¹⁵ embodying the Positive Peace pillar of

Well-Functioning Government, which prioritizes institutional reform and governance grounded in inclusivity and integrity.

Despite societal norms deeply entrenched in patriarchy, Jahjaga's leadership broke barriers, though not without resistance. Media outlets often trivialized her contributions,¹⁶ focusing on appearance over policy. Reflecting on these challenges, Jahjaga remarked, "I was judged by the public with different lenses... not for the content of my character or for what I said, but by how I said it and what I was wearing when I said it."¹⁷ Yet, undeterred by such criticism, Jahjaga became a powerful advocate for women's rights and gender equality.

Recognizing the untapped potential of Kosovo's young, educated female population. She hosted the landmark International Women's Summit, "Partnership for Change—Empowering Women," which convened over 200 global women leaders and resulted in the creation of the Pristina Principles. This framework affirmed women's rights to political participation, economic resources, and access to security and justice, directly addressing the Positive Peace pillar of Acceptance of the Rights of Others. Jahjaga's leadership exemplified how prioritizing these rights not only uplifts marginalized groups but also strengthens societal resilience.

A Diplomatic Partnership in Leadership

Jahjaga's commitment to increasing women's representation in leadership was evident throughout her presidency as she assembled a diverse team of professionals dedicated to advancing Kosovo's diplomatic and societal goals. Under her guidance, the number of women in Kosovo's Foreign Service grew significantly, exemplified by the trailblazing career of Ambassador Zana Rudi, who embodied the President's vision for empowering women in diplomacy.

Rudi served as Kosovo's senior diplomat in Panama from 2013 to 2019, overseeing relations across Latin America and the Caribbean. Holding the positions of Chief of Mission and later Ambassador, she made history as the first Chief of Mission to give birth while in office. Balancing the demands of representing Kosovo on the international stage while building a family, Rudi exemplified resilience and dedication, breaking new ground for women in diplomacy.

During Jahjaga's visit to Panama, her leadership took on a deeply personal dimension. Amid high-level meetings, Rudi vividly remembered a moment of humanity where Jahjaga emphasized the importance of self-care and women supporting one another: "Leadership is as much about humanity and solidarity as it is about achieving goals."¹⁸ This approach reflected the Positive Peace pillar of Acceptance of the Rights of Others, demonstrating how empowering individuals can bolster societal resilience. Rudi later reflected, "Under Jahjaga's leadership, women were empowered to enter leadership roles with strength and confidence."¹⁹

Jahjaga's heartfelt speech in flawless Spanish during the visit, delivered as she received the key to Panama City,²⁰ underscored her commitment to diplomacy and cultural respect. The gesture, which strengthened ties between Kosovo and Panama, also symbolized the profound collaboration between two women breaking barriers in leadership.

Through her governance, Jahjaga demonstrated how principles like Well-Functioning Government and Acceptance of the Rights of Others can anchor the rebuilding of post-conflict societies. By fostering institutional reform, gender equality, and reconciliation, she left a legacy that continues to inspire leaders committed to fostering long-term peace and stability.

*Addressing the Scars of War:
The “Thinking of You” Exhibit*

President Jahjaga’s commitment to women’s rights extended beyond increasing political and diplomatic participation. She worked to address the profound trauma of wartime sexual violence, embodying the Positive Peace principle of Acceptance of the Rights of Others. The *Thinking of You* exhibit, unveiled in Pristina in 2015, became a powerful embodiment of this effort. “We all donated dresses for it,” recalled Blerta Zeqiri,²¹ a Kosovar filmmaker, of the exhibit, where thousands of dresses and skirts fluttered in the wind—a haunting tribute to the estimated 20,000 survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo War.

Jahjaga championed the exhibit, donating the first of what would become over 5,000 dresses—a symbolic act that underscored her administration’s commitment to breaking the silence around sexual violence and including survivors in Kosovo’s reconciliation process. By publicly supporting this initiative, Jahjaga demonstrated her alignment with the Positive Peace principle of the Free Flow of Information, ensuring that the stories of survivors were acknowledged and amplified, not hidden.

The exhibit, conceived by artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa in collaboration with Anna Di Lellio, transformed a Pristina football stadium into a profound statement of resilience and acknowledgment. Inspired by harrowing stories she heard upon returning to Kosovo in 2013, Xhafa-Mripa created the installation to provide survivors with a platform to be seen and their experiences recognized.

The *Thinking of You* exhibit not only honored the suffering of survivors but also reshaped national discourse on justice and healing. Jahjaga’s unwavering support for the initiative exemplified her determination to challenge stigma and integrate survivors into Kosovo’s future, addressing both cultural and systemic violence. This act aligned with the Positive Peace principle of Acceptance of

the Rights of Others, fostering reconciliation by emphasizing dignity and equality for all citizens. Ultimately, the exhibit stood as both a stark reminder of the collective trauma endured and a testament to the resilience of Kosovar women, solidifying Jahjaga's legacy as a leader committed to justice and inclusion.

*A Pivotal Moment:
Confronting Stigma and Shame*

In the fall of 2012, just over a year into her presidency, Jahjaga had a deeply moving encounter with survivors of sexual violence from the Kosovo War. This reinforced her commitment to the Positive Peace principles of Well-Functioning Government and Acceptance of the Rights of Others. Among the stories shared, one was particularly harrowing and left an indelible mark on her. A woman who showed Jahjaga the scars of her suffering—"S" symbols, the Serbian cross, brutally carved into her skin along a trail of cigarette burns. Lifting her blouse, she revealed a bright white scar bearing the same symbol, accompanied by more cigarette burns on her stomach. Jahjaga later learned the full extent of the woman's tragedy: her husband and three-year-old daughter had been killed on the same day she was subjected to this horrific abuse.²²

This encounter solidified Jahjaga's resolve to challenge the stigma surrounding wartime sexual violence and ensure that survivors were included in Kosovo's national narrative. Her actions reflected the Acceptance of the Rights of Others, a cornerstone of Positive Peace, by prioritizing the voices and experiences of a marginalized group.

*Taking Action:
The National Council for Survivors of Sexual Violence*

In the spring of 2014, Jahjaga took a groundbreaking step by establishing the National Council for the Survivors of Sexual Violence, a pivotal initiative aimed at addressing the long-neglected

needs of these women. This effort embodied the Well-Functioning Government principle by institutionalizing justice and support for survivors. The Council successfully pushed the Kosovo Assembly to amend the law on war veterans to recognize survivors of sexual violence as civilian victims of war, granting them long-overdue acknowledgment and access to vital support services. This marked a dramatic reversal of the Assembly's rejection of a similar directive the previous year.

Jeta Krasniqi, a political adviser and the Council's coordinator hailed this as a transformative moment, stating that it exemplified Jahjaga's commitment to "put this issue on the highest level possible...and talk about it as a national issue."²³ Jahjaga's leadership reflected the Positive Peace principle of the Free Flow of Information, ensuring open dialogue about survivors' experiences and systemic changes to address their needs.

When asked how she prioritized this issue alongside others, such as European Union integration and UN membership, Jahjaga replied, "How are we going to have economic growth and prosperity if 20,000 people [rape victims] in my country do not believe in justice?" Her focus on justice and recognition for survivors highlighted the inseparable link between societal healing and national stability, further aligning her efforts with the pillars of Well-Functioning Government and Acceptance of the Rights of Others.

A Legacy of Empowerment and Inclusion

Atifete Jahjaga's legacy extends far beyond her presidency. As Kosovo's first female president, she shattered glass ceilings and demonstrated the transformative power and impact of inclusive leadership. Through her commitment to empowering women, fostering interethnic reconciliation, and addressing societal traumas, she became a powerful symbol of progress in a post-conflict nation. By embodying the Positive Peace principles of a Well-Functioning

Government and Acceptance of the Rights of Others, Jahjaga institutionalized systemic changes that continue to shape Kosovo's trajectory.

When asked for advice to female leaders, Jahjaga emphasized authenticity and resilience: "Do not surrender to the pressure to change and to conform to certain rules that men have established as norms of leadership and policy-making. I say to women leaders: bring your own unique persona to the office."²⁴

Her leadership serves as a case study of how a focus on gender equality and inclusion can drive meaningful reform, shift cultural norms, and inspire future generations of leaders. Jahjaga's unwavering dedication to justice and healing remains a beacon for women in post-conflict societies worldwide, demonstrating that transformative leadership can pave the way for a more equitable and peaceful world.

Leading with Empathy:

Jacinda Ardern and the Power of Inclusive Leadership

Jacinda Ardern's tenure as Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2017 to 2023 exemplified the transformative potential of empathetic and inclusive leadership. Steering her nation through unprecedented crises—the Christchurch mosque attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the volcanic eruption on Whakaari/White Island—Ardern demonstrated compassion, transparency, and decisive action. Her governance resonated deeply, domestically and internationally, setting a new standard for fostering unity, resilience, and trust in times of adversity.

Responding to Tragedy:

The Christchurch Mosque Attacks

On March 15, 2019, New Zealand faced one of its darkest days when a gunman attacked two mosques in Christchurch, killing 51 people and injuring dozens more.²⁵ Targeting the Muslim community, the

attack revealed systemic vulnerabilities, including insufficient mechanisms to address hate speech, inadequate monitoring of extremist ideologies, and the marginalization of minority communities within a society often celebrated for its peacefulness.²⁶

Ardern's swift and empathetic response became a hallmark of her leadership.²⁷ Condemning the attack as an act of terrorism, she declared, "They are us," affirming the inclusion and equality of New Zealand's Muslim community.²⁸ Donning a hijab as a gesture of solidarity,²⁹ she visited survivors and victims' families, offering comfort and embodying her commitment to inclusion.³⁰

Beyond rhetoric, Ardern spearheaded swift legislative action, banning military-style semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles within weeks.³¹ This decisive move addressed both the immediate tragedy and systemic risks, aligning with the Positive Peace principle of Acceptance of the Rights of Others. By fostering a culture of inclusion and taking concrete preventive measures, Ardern transformed collective grief into collective action, strengthening societal cohesion.

Leading Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic tested Ardern's leadership on a global stage. Employing a "go hard, go early" strategy, her government prioritized lives over economic concerns, implementing strict lockdowns and border closures.³² Regular press briefings emphasized transparency, collective responsibility,³³ and kindness, with Ardern urging New Zealanders to "Be kind."³⁴

Her empathetic communication style and reliance on accessible, accurate information embodied the Positive Peace principle of the Free Flow of Information, fostering trust between the government and its citizens. By addressing pandemic-driven inequalities through enhanced social support and increased funding for mental health services, her government further reinforced the Equitable Distribution of Resources and High Levels of Human Capital.

New Zealand's pandemic response achieved remarkable outcomes, keeping COVID-19 fatalities among the lowest globally during the early stages.³⁵ More importantly, Ardern's leadership nurtured a sense of unity and shared purpose, showcasing the role of governance in building societal resilience.³⁶

*Responding to Disaster:
The Whakaari/White Island Eruption*

On December 9, 2019, a volcanic eruption on Whakaari/White Island claimed 22 lives and injured dozens of tourists and guides.³⁷ The sudden disaster struck one of New Zealand's most popular tourist destinations, leaving the nation reeling.

Ardern's response exemplified her trademark empathy and decisive leadership. She reached out immediately to victims' families and first responders, offering solace and support amid the devastation.³⁸ Recognizing the tragedy's international dimensions—many victims were foreign tourists—Ardern's outreach extended globally,³⁹ reinforcing her role as a leader fostering international solidarity.

Her government also initiated a comprehensive review of safety protocols for high-risk tourism areas, implementing regulatory reforms to prevent similar tragedies.⁴⁰ This proactive approach embodied the Positive Peace principle of a Well-Functioning Government, prioritizing accountability and public safety.

Building Resilience Through Inclusive Leadership

Ardern's leadership extended beyond crisis management to tackle systemic inequality and foster long-term resilience.⁴¹ Her government introduced transformative policies, such as expanded paid parental leave,⁴² a comprehensive child poverty reduction plan,⁴³ and significantly increased mental health funding.⁴⁴ These proactive measures addressed the root causes of inequality,

reflecting the Positive Peace principles of Equitable Distribution of Resources and High Levels of Human Capital.

Her ability to connect across diverse communities distinguished Ardern as a transformational leader.⁴⁵ By fostering collaboration and collective problem-solving, she empowered individuals and communities to actively participate in solutions.⁴⁶ This inclusive approach aligned with the Positive Peace pillar of Well-Functioning Government, where transparency, accountability, and responsiveness foster trust and effective governance. Ensuring that New Zealand's institutions reflected the diversity of its people, Ardern built a governance model that was both equitable and impactful.⁴⁷

A Legacy of Empathy and Action

Jacinda Ardern's leadership offers a powerful blueprint for how empathy and inclusivity transform challenges into opportunities for societal growth and cohesion.⁴⁸ Her focus on addressing systemic inequalities while responding decisively to crises underscores the critical role of Positive Peace principles in fostering resilient societies.

Ardern's legacy demonstrates that effective leadership is not about exerting authority but about inspiring trust, empowering communities, and prioritizing collective well-being. Her government's emphasis on transparency, equity, and compassion left an enduring impact, proving that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, dignity, and opportunity for all.

Through her actions, Ardern showed that leadership grounded in humanity and inclusivity is a practical and transformative framework. Her legacy reminds the world that the most effective leaders are those who bring people together to create a more just, equitable, and united society.

**Conclusion:
Lessons for the Future**

In an era defined by difficult challenges and polycrises, Atifete Jahjaga and Jacinda Ardern's leadership provides an inspiring blueprint for building resilient, just, and inclusive societies. Their steadfast commitment to inclusion, equity, and humanity underscores the transformative potential of leaders who align their actions with the principles of Positive Peace.

This chapter underscores that peace is more than the absence of conflict—it is the presence of robust systems that uphold justice, dignity, and opportunity for all. By exploring the leadership journeys of Jahjaga and Ardern, we uncover valuable lessons on bridging divides and fostering long-term stability. Their legacies serve as a call to action for leaders worldwide to prioritize resilience, inclusivity, and collective well-being in shaping a sustainable future.

Jahjaga's leadership in post-conflict Kosovo exemplified the Positive Peace pillars of a Well-Functioning Government and Acceptance of the Rights of Others. Her dedication to institutional reform, gender equality, and amplifying marginalized voices transformed Kosovo's approach to governance. By confronting the stigma surrounding wartime sexual violence and ensuring survivors were integral to national reconciliation, she laid a foundation for lasting healing and stability. Her work redefined the role of women in leadership, proving that transformative change is achievable even under the most challenging circumstances.

Ardern's empathetic and decisive leadership through crises, including the Christchurch mosque attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Whakaari/White Island eruption, demonstrated how trust, transparency, and compassion can unify a nation. Her inclusive governance approach aligned with Positive Peace principles such as Equitable Distribution of Resources and the Free Flow of Information, addressing systemic inequalities while fostering societal resilience. Ardern's legacy reminds us that

leadership grounded in humanity is not only a moral imperative but also a practical framework for creating sustainable peace and prosperity.

Together, Jahjaga and Ardern show that leadership capable of bridging divides, addressing systemic injustices, and empowering marginalized communities can create societies that thrive in the face of adversity.⁴⁹ Their examples illuminate a path forward for leaders committed to building a more just, equitable, and resilient world.

Endnotes

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