

LORENZO VIDINO

IMPACT: Lorenzo Vidino is an Italian American legal scholar whose research promotes conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe and the United States. Vidino is connected to numerous anti-Muslim think tanks in the United States and Europe, and has published in various anti-Muslim outlets. He has served as an advisor to governments in Europe and is currently the director of George Washington University's Program on Extremism.

- Lorenzo Vidino is an Italian American legal scholar. He received a law degree from the University of Milan and a doctorate in international relations from Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Currently the director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University (GWU), Vidino has previously held positions at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the RAND Corporation, and the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zürich. **Vidino's GWU biography states that he is "an expert on Islamism in Europe and North America" and has "advised law enforcement officials around the world."**
- **Vidino's research focuses on the Muslim Brotherhood**, an organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna to revitalize Islamic life and challenge European hegemony. In an interview with NPR in March 2017, Vidino stated, **"I've been studying the brotherhood for 15 years...I maybe understand 10 percent of how it works."** Vidino has also been interviewed or featured in national and international media on issues concerning terrorism and radicalization, including *Foreign Policy*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *PBS*, *CNN*, *Fox News*, *MSNBC*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Al Arabiya*. He also has a column in *La Stampa*.
- In November 2006, **Vidino published an essay titled "Aims and Methods of Europe's Muslim Brotherhood" for the Hudson Institute**, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank with a history of anti-Muslim actions that include bringing Geert Wilders to the United States to warn against the Muslim plot to "rule the world by the sword." In the essay, Vidino discusses "Europe's Muslim Brotherhood," arguing that **"It is not unreasonable to assume...the ever-flexible Brotherhood would embrace violent tactics in the West as well."** Vidino published another essay for the think tank in August 2008, titled "Islam, Islamism, and Jihadism in Italy."
- **In his 2010 book *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, Vidino draws on a 1982 document that allegedly indicated the Muslim Brotherhood's aspiration to take over the world.** He also cites French journalist Sylvain Besson's 2005 book *La conquête de l'Occident: Le projet secret des Islamistes (The Conquest of the Occident: The Secret Project of the Islamists)*. Vidino presents these conspiracy theories as reasonable and substantiated facts.
- In a 2011 publication for the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (CES), the think tank of the European People's Party (EPP), **Vidino argued that "only authentically European Muslim organizations that act independently of foreign influences can become valid representatives of Europe's Muslim communities,"** implying that those linked to non-European countries or to transnational Muslim movements are illegitimate. According to Vidino, Muslim organizations in the West are formally disconnected from, but ideologically influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. His CES publication **further** the claim that Muslim Brotherhood organizations are "modern-day Trojan horses, engaged in a sort of stealth subversion aimed at weakening European society from within, patiently laying the foundations for its replacement with an Islamic order." Vidino has also stated that this "new" Muslim Brotherhood network has a "remarkable propaganda machine" that can discredit opponents with accusations of Islamophobia and racism.
- In November 2013, **Vidino published a report for the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zürich on "Jihadist Radicalization in Switzerland."** Although the report focuses primarily on militant movements, he dedicates three pages to the Muslim Brotherhood. **Vidino quotes the British 'counter-extremism'**

LORENZO VIDINO

think tank the Quilliam Foundation, arguing that in several European countries, Brotherhood networks have been criticized for creating “the mood music to which suicide bombers dance.” He also argues that Arab regimes and Israel “have often accused Brotherhood networks operating in Europe of financing terrorist activities with funds they collect among European Muslim communities,” without giving any proof or discussing the validity of this claim.

- In August 2017, Vidino published a report on the “**Muslim Brotherhood in Austria.**” This report was financed by Austria’s domestic intelligence agency—the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung)—as well as the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds), which has a history of producing anti-Muslim research and promoting Muslims who support anti-Muslim legislation, such as Vidino’s European Foundation for Democracy (EFD) colleague Ahmad Mansour of Germany. EFD is an anti-Muslim, Brussels-based think tank linked to the Washington, D.C.-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracy. **In his role as EFD Senior Policy Advisor, Vidino publishes articles ranging from the so-called threat of Sharia, ‘Islamist extremism,’ and conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood with EFD’s affiliate scholars.**
- **Vidino’s Austria-funded report accused nearly every Muslim organization in Austria of ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. The following year, this report was the only source in the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism’s 2018 annual report.** This report was unprecedented, as the Austrian state for the first time targeted not only ‘violent Jihadists,’ but the legally recognized Islamic Religious Authority in Austria, (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich). **The intelligence agency’s report framed religious teacher training and Islamic education in public schools for Muslim pupils—previously supported initiatives by the state—as ‘Islamist’ threats and strategies to create a “counter-society” in Austria.**
- **Vidino published his latest book on the Muslim Brotherhood, *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, in March 2020.** The book description claims that “The Muslim Brotherhood in the West remains a mysterious entity. In *The Closed Circle*, Lorenzo Vidino offers an unprecedented inside view into how one of the world’s most influential Islamist groups operates.”
- **Vidino has a history of advancing unscientific theories and anti-Muslim tropes.** A proponent of the discredited ‘radicalization theory,’ Vidino argues that U.S. cooperation on ‘counterradicalization’ programs with “nonviolent Islamists could provide results in the short term, but there are doubts as to their long-term implications.” For him, the problem is not only ‘violent extremism,’ but also ‘non-violent extremism.’ Vidino argues that “nonviolent Islamist” organizations in Europe, such as those influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, advocate “a rejection of many core Western values.”
- **Vidino is the director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.** According to its website, the program “provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism” and “aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public.” The program employs a “multidisciplinary team of experts from across the globe, including government officials with experience in public safety and law enforcement, scholars, former extremists, and counter-extremism practitioners providing first-hand assistance to families grappling with radicalization.” **The program also supports the U.S. Congressional Counter-Terrorism Caucus by providing “non-partisan analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism through reports, briefings, and academic inquiries.”** Launched in June 2018, the caucus is described as “the leading bipartisan voice in Congress for pragmatic approaches to tackling extremism and radicalization.” In February 2020, **GWU announced** that the Program on Extremism would become “part of a new consortium of academic, industry, government and laboratory partners throughout the country to support the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with research focused on extremism and counterterrorism.”

LORENZO VIDINO

- **According to October 2019 reporting in the GW Hatchet, Vidino attempted to prevent a former employee from writing a story about the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi for The Atlantic.** According to MEMO, leaks reveal that in May 2017 Vidino and UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Bin Zayed arranged to meet, together with Mokhtar Awad, a research fellow in the GWU Program on Extremism. **This meeting was organized by the UAE Ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al-Otaiba, who in email exchanges expressed his goal to “defeat the voices of islamism [sic]” in the U.S.**
- Lorenzo Vidino has maintained connections with many anti-Muslim organizations and writers in the United States and Europe. In 2004 and 2005, **Vidino served as Senior Analyst with Steve Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) in Washington, D.C.** Emerson has a long history of propagating anti-Muslim conspiracy theories, such as the existence of ‘no-go zones’ in Europe and ‘radical’ Muslim organizations infiltrating the United States. **Emerson wrote the foreword for Vidino’s book Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad (2006).**
- In November 2005, **Vidino gave an interview to the far-right, anti-Muslim website FrontPage Magazine.** The website is edited by David Horowitz, who is described as the “godfather of the modern anti-Muslim movement” by the U.S.-based Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). When asked if Europeans were witnessing the end of Europe, **Vidino responded with the ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theory, stating, “Demography doesn’t lie: in a couple of decades non-ethnic Europeans will represent the majority of the population in many European cities and a large percentage of them will be Muslim.”** He also responded, “It is crucial for Europe to find its soul and be proud once again of its history, tradition and values.”
- In late 2005, **Vidino published an article titled “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Conquest of Europe” in the Middle East Quarterly (MEQ), which is published by Daniel Pipes’ anti-Muslim Middle East Forum. Vidino argues that Muslim political organizations in Germany, which he describes as “duplicitous” and ‘terrorist’-linked, are working to spread Islamic law throughout Europe. MEF translated the article into multiple languages, including French, German, Arabic, Danish, and Italian. His article has also been linked on the German anti-Muslim weblog PI-News.**
- **Vidino regularly quotes Udo Ulfkotte (d. 2017), a German anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist who believed that Germany was being ‘Islamized.’** Ulfkotte claimed that the alleged poor hygiene of Turkish women was to blame for an E. coli outbreak in Germany, stating that Muslims are waging a “fecal matter jihad” against Europeans. In his 2015 book *Mekka Deutschland – Die stille Islamisierung (Mecca Germany – The Silent Islamization)*, Ulfkotte wrote, “Seven times per hour, a Muslim cuts off the head of a non-Muslim [...] or kills him in another way and loudly shouts out ‘Allahu Akbar.’” Vidino has drawn on Ulfkotte’s book *Der Krieg in unseren Städten – Wie radikale Islamisten Deutschland unterwandern (War in Our Cities. How Radical Islamists Are Infiltrating Germany)*; 2003). Vidino also interviewed Ulfkotte as an expert source on ‘Islamic terrorism’ in February 2004 in Frankfurt for one of his publications.
- **Vidino’s publications have been cited by the anti-Muslim blogger who goes by the pen name “Fjordman,” whose texts Norwegian white nationalist and mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik copied into his manifesto.** Breivik murdered seventy-seven people in Norway, arguing that his targets—politically leftist youth and the Norwegian government—and their pro-immigration policies were to blame for enabling ‘Islamization.’ **“Fjordman” cited Vidino’s texts in an attempt to demonstrate that the Muslim Brotherhood was ‘infiltrating’ Europe.** “Fjordman” has repeated these conspiracy theories while citing Vidino on the influential anti-Muslim blogsites Gates of Vienna and Jihad Watch.
- **Vidino’s work has impacted policy in Austria and Germany, as well as Europe more broadly. He is primarily connected to center-right conservative parties in Europe.** In 2010, he was invited along

LORENZO VIDINO

with his EFD colleague, visiting fellow and former foreign policy advisor to Donald Trump [Walid Phares](#), to the Austrian Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*) in Vienna. The talks were [published](#) in June 2011 by the [Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies](#) (CES), the think tank of the largest political group in the European Parliament representing conservative and Christian democratic political parties. Vidino has also been [interviewed](#) on the topic of the Muslim Brotherhood for the [Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung](#), the federal agency for civic education in Germany.

- In December 2018, **Vidino presented his work as the coordinator of the 'Study Commission on the Phenomenon of Radicalization and Jihadist Extremism'** (*Commissione di studio sul fenomeno della radicalizzazione e dell'estremismo jihadista*) alongside Italy's then-minister of interior, Marco Minniti (2016–2018) of the social democratic Partito Democratico (Democratic Party).
- **In July 2020, Austria's Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*) launched the Documentation Center for Political Islam (*Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam*) to monitor, surveil and map Muslims in Austria.** According to the Chancellery, the center is a "milestone in the prevention of extremism, in the fight against political Islam and research into extremism" and is the "first time" in Austria that "there is a body that deals independently and scientifically with the dangerous ideology of political Islam and provides insights into previously hidden networks." **At the launch of the center, Vidino spoke alongside the Austrian Minister for Integration Susanne Raab (ÖVP) and Islamic scholar and University of Münster professor Mouhanad Khorchide.** Vidino, who is a [member](#) of its [board of experts](#), described the center as a "[pioneer in Europe](#)." The center will [receive](#) half a million euros in funding from the Integration Ministry and will include five to seven "experts" and a scientific advisory board.
- Vidino's work has also carried influence in the U.S. Congress. **In April 2011, Vidino was invited to present testimony at a House Select Intelligence Committee hearing on the Muslim Brotherhood.** The hearing was initiated by then-Rep. [Sue Myrick](#) (R-N.C.), who [has bolstered](#) conspiracy theories about Muslim infiltration in U.S. institutions. During [this hearing](#), both Chairwoman **Myrick and Vidino referred to a 1991 "explanatory memorandum," an obscure document that is cited to further the conspiracy theory that the Muslim Brotherhood plans to take over America through a "civilization jihad."** This document [has been debunked and discredited](#). Vidino described the document as "absolutely shocking," and stated that some of the organizations listed in the document that still exist today have "just gotten better at presenting a more moderate facade." In his written testimony, Vidino again [furthered](#) the argument that the Muslim Brotherhood in the West is a "modern day Trojan horse engaged in a sort of stealth subversion aimed at weakening Western society from within." **He singled out the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil rights organization in the United States, as a prime example of an organization surreptitiously spreading a 'radical' ideology.** [According to CAIR](#), "[I]n 2014, U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry wrote a personal letter to CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad and said, 'Let me reiterate, first, that the U.S. government clearly does not consider CAIR to be a terrorist organization.'"