

DEMOCRACY DIGEST

Promoting modernized Islam to counter jihadist ideology



This week's [Brussels train station bombing](#) renews the focus on the attraction and motivating power of jihadist ideology, The New York Times reports. Meanwhile, the attack on Muslim worshippers at London's Finsbury Park mosque highlighted the [commonalities between different forms of violent extremism](#).

The far right's ideology differs from that of Islamist extremists, but the [process of radicalization is almost identical](#), Prevent co-ordinator William Baldet tells The Economist.

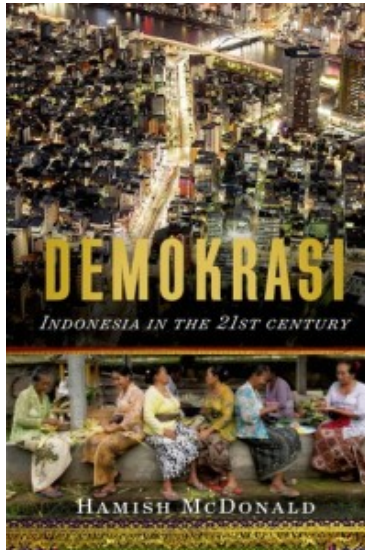
Saudi Arabia has been charged with promoting extremist ideology, most recently in [Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama](#), although its new generation of leaders is reportedly rejecting "antimodernist Wahhabi dogma" in favor of moderation.

Leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama's youth wing, known as Ansor, say that elements of [Shariah](#), which Muslims consider divine law, are being manipulated by groups like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda to justify terrorist attacks around the world, invoked to rally fighters to battle in the Middle East and elsewhere, and distorted by movements that seek to turn Islam into a political weapon, [The New York Times reports](#):

"The classical Islamic perspective is dominated by views that position non-Muslims as enemies or, at best, as suspicious figures not worthy of trust," H. Yaqut Qoumas, Ansor's chairman, said in an interview. "Fiqh," or the body of jurisprudence that applies Shariah to everyday life, "explicitly rejects the possibility of non-Muslims enjoying equal rights with Muslims in the public sphere, including the right to occupy certain positions," he said. "This classical Islamic perspective continues to possess



an extraordinarily powerful authority in the eyes of most Muslims, and is regarded as standard, orthodox Islam.”...



The Ansor initiative is seen as another move by young Muslims in Indonesia, as well as Islamic clerics and other Muslim organizations in Europe and the Middle East, to push back against extreme, conservative interpretations of Islam, [The Times](#) adds.

“The general impression we sometimes get in the West about Islam is one of radicalization,” said [Raphaël Lefèvre](#), a political Islam scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center, “while an equally if not more important trend is the ongoing struggle by Muslim clerics to redefine what Islamic law has to say about society and politics in ways deemed more compatible with modern life.”

While many Muslims are prepared to confront and counter jihadist ideologues, there is a real discomfort with calling out Islamic extremism among Western progressives, according to Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([@ayaan](#)), founder of the [AHA Foundation](#), and Asra Q. Nomani ([@asranomani](#)), a co-founder of the [Muslim Reform Movement](#).

“This is extreme moral relativism disguised as cultural sensitivity [which] leads good people to make excuses for the inexcusable,” [they write for The Times](#). “Call it identity politics, moral relativism or political correctness — it is shortsighted, dangerous and, ultimately, a betrayal of liberal values.”

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