The minor lapses notwithstanding, Saravanamuttu, the Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, has provided a perceptive analysis of Malaysia's foreign policy dynamics during the first fifty years. The book is based upon considerable research and reflection. The data for this study came from a variety of sources including interviews with major players over the years and the wisdom displayed by the author in earlier publications. The author has argued convincingly for the model he has adopted for studying Malaysia's foreign policy. The book explains in a lucid style how Malaysia crafted its foreign policy in a rapidly-globalizing world without losing sight of its regional solidarity, and without sacrificing it Islamic credentials. The book is well structured and can be read by a broad spectrum of readers and hence it is well-worth having it on the library shelves.

Islam and democracy in Malaysia: Findings from a national dialogue. Edited by Ibrahim M. Zein. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2010, pp. 201. ISBN 978-983-9379-54-9.

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A number of questions have been raised by scholars regarding the relationship between Islam and Democracy. For example, in *Muslims in democracy*, Abdou Filali-Ansary (in L. Diamond, M. F. Plattner & D. Brumberg [Eds.], *Islam and democracy in the Middle East.* Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) posed the question: What is the status of democracy in Islam? He provides two possible answers to his questions: the first answer "accepts the strict identification between Islam and *sharia*-bound systems and thus rules out any possible future for democracy in this particular environment; the second answer hovers around the implied assumption that liberal democracy constitutes an ideal polity where

the common good is realized by means of the population deciding issues through the election of individuals who carry out the people's will" (p. 200). Saudi Arabia fits nicely into the mould of the first answer. However, for a number of other Muslim-majority states such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, etc., democracy still remains a dream – something like an ideal form. In many of those states most of the components of liberal democracy such as the independence of the judiciary, legislature and other constitutionally-made and bound bodies; freedom of speech; choices in terms of access to alternative sources of information, and others are often either absent or are restricted.

Malaysia, a Muslim-majority state of more than 27 million people, is fast becoming an important voice on the world stage. Whether in Southeast Asia or the Muslim world, Malaysia's views are increasingly being listened to on a wide variety of issues such as free trade, climate change, human rights, freedom of media, rights of governments to detain citizens, holding of free and fair elections, etc. There is no denying that these issues are intricately related to the question of democracy. Therefore, Malaysia's political system has attracted its fair share of attention from scholars. No matter how Malaysia's democracy has been described, the following may be identified as the salient features of a Malaysian democratic system: holding of regular General Elections; smooth transfer of power at the Federal level; a top-down system; a highly institutionalised but at the same time a personalised system; curtailed freedom of media and freedom of speech; and a no-censorship policy on the Internet.

Like the above-mentioned issues relating to democracy in Malaysia, the role of Islam in Malaysian politics have not escaped the attention of scholars on Malaysia as Islam remains central to the Malaysian Muslims. *Islam and democracy in Malaysia: Findings from a national dialogue,* edited by Ibrahim M. Zein, is a welcome addition to a number of recent scholarly works published on the relationship between Islam and democracy in Malaysia. The volume is aimed to publish the results of a research project "National Dialogue on Islam and Democracy" funded by the Asia Foundation and carried out by the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia; the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS); and the Merdeka Centre. In

addition, the book under review also aims to utilize "the public forum as a major tool for both educating the public about the subject matter and collecting data" (p. 1). Besides conducting the public forums between July 2009 and January 2010, the researchers also conducted telephone interviews to gather public opinion on the issues covered by the researchers. Merdeka Centre used its Household Telephone Database which is distributed throughout Malaysia to collect the data. The data of the public opinion poll is published as an appendix (pp. 145-197), and an executive summary of the Public Opinion Survey Component can be found between the pages 135 and 142 of the book. This reviewer feels that these two sections of the book are most important because they not only report the findings of the survey but also share the data with the public. This would perhaps encourage scholars to utilise the data for their own research.

Besides the appendix, the book is divided into seven chapters, which deal with the issues raised in the public opinion survey. These chapters, written by accomplished scholars deal with issues such as religious tolerance, good governance, women and minority rights. In an unusually lengthy (pp. 3-68) Chapter one of the volume, Abdelwahab El-Affendi deals with the modern debates on Islam and Democracy. He is of the opinion that serious debates on themes relating to democracy "rarely figured as a theme in its own right before the 1980s" (p. 3). In this chapter, El-Affendi not only succeeds in raising the main issues in the debates on democracy in Islam but also provides a historical perspective of the debate. After an analysis of contrasting views on democracy of the Iranian Islamic revolutionaries, the salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, and the Islamic Front for Salvation in Algeria, the author discusses the objections to democracy by some of these groups. He concludes, however, that "an Islamic alternative to liberal democracy is conceivable, even desirable" (p. 66). But he insists this alternative "will inevitably exhibit some of the features we ascribe today to democratic systems" (pp. 67-68). With regret, this reviewer would like to point out some serious editorial oversights in Chapter one. The concluding remarks of this chapter begin on page 57 but this is followed by a section (An Islamic Democracy, pp. 59-65) and then in turn followed by the concluding section (pp. 65-67)! In a similar fashion, the section on 'Further Readings' suddenly appears on page 38 although the chapter is not yet completed.

Chapter two (also written by El-Affendi) may be small in size (only nine pages), but it focuses on an important issue like the role of Islam in Malaysian politics. His analysis in this chapter underscores his conclusions that "in contrast to expressions of Islam elsewhere, in particular in the Middle East, Malay Islam is portrayed as inherently moderate, and inclusive" (p. 75), and that the "close association between Islam and Malay identity continues to complicate matters as far as Malaysian politics is concerned" (p. 74). In these opinions, he echoes those expressed on the same issue by other scholars such as Thirkell-White (Political Islam and Malaysian democracy, *Democratization. 13*, 421-441, 2006), Kortteinen (Islamic resurgence and the ethnicization of the Malaysian State: The case of Lina Joy, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia, 23*, 216-233, 2008) and Lee (Oversanctification, autonomy and Islam in Malaysia, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, *11*, 27-46, 2010).

Chapter four by Kaldun and Ibrahim M. Zein summarise the opinions of Malaysians on good governance, religious tolerance, women and minority rights in Malaysia. Once again, an editorial oversight needs to be pointed out – the title of this chapter in the Contents page contains a non-English word, which is, however, corrected on the title of the actual chapter. Written by Muddathir Abdel-Rahim, Chapter five "provides an overall view of the deliberations that took place on…good governance" (p. 97). The treatment by the author of such an important issue like that of governance in a short space of only eight pages is unsatisfactory. In comparison to the discussion in Chapter five, analysis made of the issues in Chapters six and seven are not only relevant but go to the heart of the book. In Chapter six, Mohammad Hashim Kamali presents a survey report on the opinion of women and minority rights. It was widely held by the participants of the national opinion survey that "except for a small minority of educated women, the general picture was that women were largely unaware of their rights, and how to access legal advice with regard particularly to marriage, divorce and child support matters" (p. 109). This should be of particular concern because of the fact that women constitute a substantial proportion (about 49%) of the people in Malaysia and democracy in the country would not go far if they are largely unaware of their rights. The survey findings suggest that "women faced

challenges in negotiating the Syariah court system, widely seen to be biased against them especially in divorce, maintenance, and polygamy proceedings" (p. 110). It was also reported by the participants that women were abused by commercial concerns and advertisement agencies (p. 111). The opinion of the national dialogue suggests that the participants are aware of the existence of laws protecting minority rights but these are not implemented (p. 115). The national dialogue finds that "[T]he indigenous people are often unable to seek judicial relief as they cannot afford legal fees, and their native courts are not influential any more" (p. 115).

Written by Osman Bakar, the main purpose of Chapter seven is "to provide an account of the prevailing perceptions of the Malaysian public on the state of religious tolerance in the country, the outstanding challenges to its progress, and the adequacy of measures being taken by the relevant authorities, agencies and organisation to deal with the challenges in question" (p. 118). The participants' at the national dialogue confirm the general view that in Malaysia religious tolerance exists because "it is a cultural imperative" (p. 130). Islam is the official religion of the state but all other religions have the right to practice in the country. The author notes that "if both Islam and the other religions were to all enjoy total freedom as envisaged by their respective followers in their totality then clashes would become inevitable" (p. 131). This is a great challenge for the state as well for the society. In order to avoid such clashes in the future space among the people needs to be negotiated.