



DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT, ENFORCING SHARIAH

PAS's Dilemma in Terengganu

Azmil Tayeb

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Delivering Development, Enforcing Shariah: PAS's Dilemma in Terengganu

By Azmil Tayeb

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Whenever the Islamist party PAS comes to power in Terengganu, its political agenda has been to combine populist-type development programmes with the wish to turn Terengganu into a shariah-compliant state.
- Terengganu's state budget is however heavily dependent on the federal government, to the tune of 80–90 per cent. This hinders the state government's policymaking and implementation, especially when the federal government is controlled by its political opponents.
- This article argues that the politics of development play a more central role in determining the durability of the PAS state government in Terengganu than it does in neighbouring Kelantan. In other words, PAS cannot simply carry out its Islamic agenda without being complemented by tangible economic progress if it aspires to govern beyond a single term; PAS's loss in the 2004 election after being in power for one term is a prime example of this dynamic.
- One reason that the current PAS state government managed to get re-elected in 2022 was the unimpeded flow of oil royalty payments into state coffers since 2018, which allowed the state government to fulfil its campaign promises; PAS's inclusion in the Perikatan Nasional federal government in 2020 further improved the state government's financial standing.
- When the reins of the federal government changed hands to PAS's political opponents in 2022, the oil royalty payment to Terengganu again became an acrimonious issue, in many ways reprising the post-1999 situation.

- The key for the PAS state government to rule beyond the current term is its ability to negotiate the tense federal-state relationship, develop other sources of revenue, and find ways to claim credit for economic progress, in addition to burnishing its Islamic governing credentials by making Terengganu a shariah-compliant state.

Delivering Development, Enforcing Shariah: PAS's Dilemma in Terengganu

By Azmil Tayeb¹

INTRODUCTION

In the 2022 general election and the 2023 state elections, Perikatan Nasional (PN) swept across Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu and made inroads into states long held by Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH), such as Pahang, Penang and Selangor. In the 2023 state elections, PN won 146 of 165 Malay-majority seats (90 per cent) that were up for contest. The force of PN's "green wave" was felt the most in Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) strongholds in the north and northeast regions of peninsular Malaysia or the so-called Malay heartlands, where Malays comprise more than 75 per cent of the population.² PN won fourteen of fifteen parliamentary seats and thirty-three of thirty-six state seats in Kedah; three of three parliamentary seats and fourteen of fifteen state seats in Perlis; fourteen of fourteen parliamentary seats and forty-three of forty-five state seats in Kelantan, and; eight of eight parliamentary seats and thirty-two of thirty-two state seats in Terengganu.

¹ Azmil Tayeb is Associate Professor of Political Science at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang and former Visiting Research Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. He would like to thank Rebecca Neo for drafting Figure 1 in this article.

² PN's component parties are PAS, Bersatu (a Malay nationalist party), and Gerakan (a Chinese-dominated party). The green wave refers to the colour of PAS's flag.

PAS has governed Kelantan and Terengganu on and off since 1959. The two states share many commonalities such as being homogeneously Malay, predominantly rural, deeply conservative, and steeped in Islamic learning traditions. But unlike Kelantan, where PAS has been in power continuously since 1990, Terengganu's political fortune has repeatedly changed hands between BN and PAS over the past decades. This means that the political dynamic in Terengganu is more competitive than in Kelantan, especially after 2008 when even Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) candidates managed to win seats in Terengganu as part of the then-Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalition with PAS. However, the tide turned in PAS's favour in the 2018 state election when it regained control of the Terengganu state government from BN by winning twenty of thirty-two seats in the state assembly. In the 2023 state election, Terengganu voters returned the PAS-led state government to power with an even stronger mandate when PN won all thirty-two state seats. For now, it looks like PAS is firmly ensconced in Terengganu, bringing the state politically closer to Kelantan.

The question now is, will PAS be able to retain control of Terengganu over the long term the way it has done in Kelantan? Many of the tactics employed by PAS in Kelantan can also be observed in Terengganu such as polarizing Islamic discourse (*politik syurga-neraka* or politics of heaven-hell), utilizing local religious leaders to spread PAS's agenda in their respective mosques, reaching out to out-of-state voters, among others.³ But PAS's track record in Terengganu has been spotty despite the similarity in tactics. The political landscape is more competitive in Terengganu—at least up until 2018—and historically BN strongholds can be found throughout the state from Besut in the north to Kemaman and Dungun in the south. Economic development plays a huge role in determining which way the political wind blows in Terengganu. Unlike Kelantan, whose economy is primarily based on agriculture and the

³ See Azmil Tayeb, *Explaining PAS's Dominance in Kelantan*, Trends in Southeast Asia, no. 17/2022 (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022).

service industry, Terengganu has a much stronger economic base, at the heart of which are the oil and gas and tourism industries. PAS in Kelantan has been able to elude voters' scrutiny of the state's poor socio-economic indicators by projecting a model of Islamic government, one of its kind in Malaysia. PAS in Terengganu simply does not share the same political latitude to focus exclusively on Islamic governance at the expense of the state's economic development. Accustomed to higher standards of living, Terengganu voters are less forgiving when it comes to poor developmental progress and would not hesitate to vote out the incumbent state government when it fails on that front. It explains why whenever PAS comes to power in Terengganu, it is confronted with the dilemma of staying true to its hardline religious agenda and needing to attract foreign direct investment to spur the state's economic development. This article argues that PAS's struggle in balancing these two objectives—moral policing and economic development—is the reason why it is difficult for the party to have a hegemonic hold over Terengganu the way it does in Kelantan.

OVERVIEW OF TERENGGANU

Terengganu is located on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, bounded by Kelantan to its north and Pahang to its south. Its population is 1.17 million, with Malays making up 97.6 per cent.⁴ Its economy relies heavily on the oil and gas industry, which is mainly found in the southern part of the state. Tourism also figures prominently; Terengganu is blessed with beautiful islands popular with scuba divers and vacation goers such as Redang, Perhentian and Kapas islands. These two industries allow Terengganu residents to enjoy higher income than their counterparts in Kelantan, and therefore play a crucial role in shaping state politics. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for Terengganu is RM30,901 in

⁴ *Laporan Sosioekonomi Negeri Terengganu (Socio-economic Report of the State of Terengganu)*, Department of Statistics Malaysia, pp. 115–16: <https://cloud.stats.gov.my/index.php/s/vWc2TDt6qtXE79L#pdfviewer> (accessed 10 January 2024).

2021, almost double Kelantan's RM15,584.⁵ As such, Terengganu voters tend to have higher expectations of their state government when it comes to development and economic prosperity to the point of voting it out if it fails to deliver, unlike the case in Kelantan. This is a lesson learnt by PAS in Terengganu when it only governed for one term after wresting the state from BN in 1999.

Ironically, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), Terengganu has been a net migrant exporter in the past few years. The increasing rate of out-migration of Terengganu residents to other parts of Malaysia occurs despite the existing oil and gas and tourism industries. In 2020, 1,500 Terengganu residents migrated to other states, compared to just 200 in 2018. The share of between-state migration in total migration (which includes migration within Terengganu), increased from 43.2 per cent in 2019 to 48.4 per cent in 2020. Perhaps this phenomenon can be explained by the inability of these industries to create enough jobs for locals and by their preference for out-of-state workers. Favourite domestic destinations for Terengganu migrants are Selangor, Penang, Pahang, Johor and Sarawak, presumably for better economic opportunities on offer in these states.⁶ It can be construed as an indication of the state government's inability to create enough jobs for its residents. Net out-migration also means that out-of-state voters are especially vital for any party that wants to be competitive in Terengganu, akin to what we see in Kelantan. According to Alias Razak, Deputy Commissioner of PAS Terengganu, there are an estimated 60,000 out-of-state Terengganu voters, who make up around 6.5 per cent of the total number of registered voters in the state; their turnout rate can make a difference in deciding election outcomes.⁷

⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

⁷ Nurfaadlina Izzati Moktar, "PRN: SPR Perlu Sedia Bas Bantu Pengundi Luar Balik Mengundi", *Sinar Harian*, 2 August 2023, <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/271465/berita/politik/prn-spr-perlu-sedia-bas-bantu-pengundi-luar-balik-mengundi>; and "PRN: 930894 Pemilih Bakal Mengundi di Terengganu", *Utusan Malaysia*, 12 August 2023, <https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2023/08/930894-pemilih-bakal-mengundi-di-terengganu/> (accessed 10 January 2024).

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN TERENGGANU

At present, there are eight parliamentary seats and thirty-two state seats up for contest in Terengganu (Table 1). The parliamentary seats are Besut, Setiu, Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu, Marang, Hulu Terengganu, Dungun, and Kemaman (Figure 1). In the past twenty years, political control of Terengganu has shifted back and forth between PAS and BN. Unlike Kelantan, where BN's influence has waned since PAS took over in 1990, BN in Terengganu has been able to hold its own during the same period. As mentioned earlier, for the longest time, BN had maintained strongholds throughout the state, particularly in the parliamentary districts of Hulu Terengganu, Besut, and Kemaman. Firstly, most of the Federal Land Authority Development Agency (FELDA) settlements in Terengganu are located in these three districts.⁸ FELDA settlements have

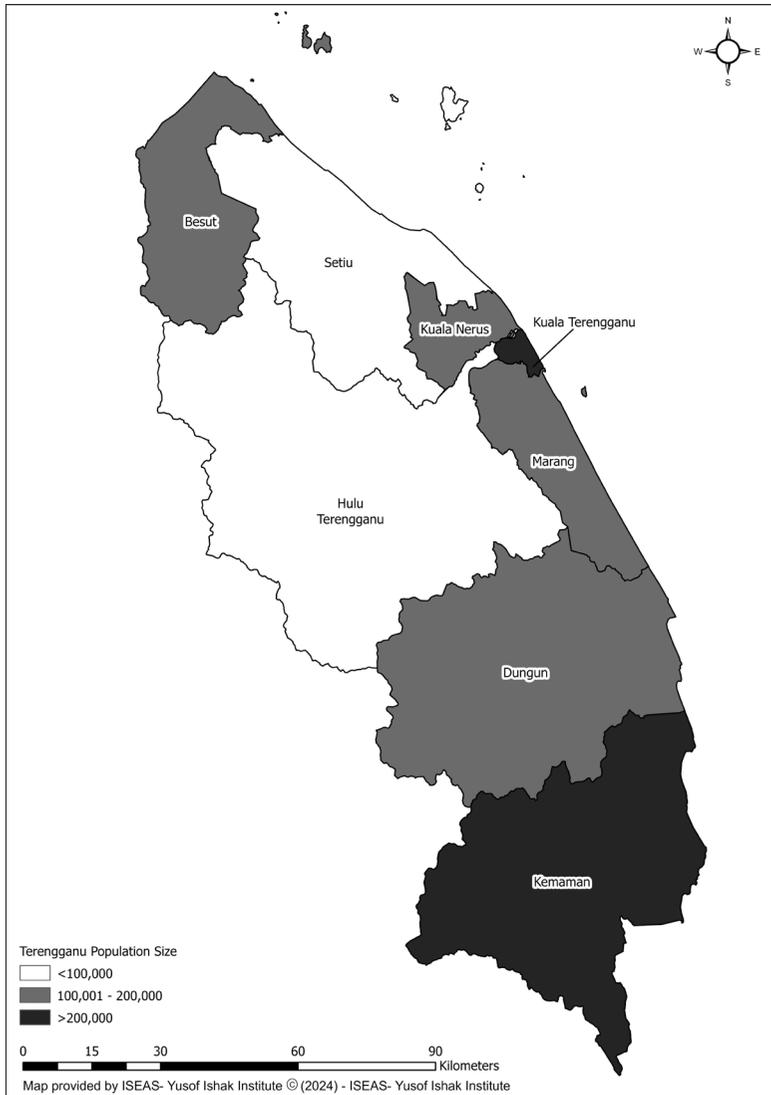
Table 1: Seats Held by PAS in Terengganu

	Parliament	State Assembly
1999 general and state elections*	8/8	28/32
2004 general and state elections*	0/8	4/32
2008 general and state elections**	1/8	8/32
2013 general and state elections**	4/4	15/32
2018 general and state elections***	6/8	20/32
2022 general election****	8/8	
2023 state election****		32/32

Notes: *Barisan Alternatif; **Pakatan Rakyat; ***Solo; ****Perikatan Nasional
Source: <https://undi.info/>

⁸ FELDA is a federal agency that resettles and subsidizes poor rural Malays into newly cleared land to produce cash crops such as palm oil. For figures on FELDA settlements in Terengganu, refer to *FELDA, Terengganu*: <https://www.felda.gov.my/peneroka/lokasi-rancangan/terengganu> (accessed 10 January 2024).

Figure 1: Rate of Urbanization by Parliamentary District



Source: *Population and Housing, Census Malaysia 2020*, Department of Statistics Malaysia: <https://www.mycensus.gov.my/index.php/125-newsletter-infographics/1641-terengganu-scdp> (accessed 22 April 2024).

long been a reliable vote bank for the then BN-led federal government. Similarly in neighbouring Kelantan, FELDA settlements can only be found in Tanah Merah and Gua Musang, two districts long known for electing BN Members of Parliament. In addition, the oil and gas industry in the southern part of the state has elevated the living standard of local residents while bringing in out-of-state workers who end up as residents and vote in Terengganu. Material development and diversified voting demographics have long worked in favour of BN in this part of the state.

While PAS has been a permanent fixture in Terengganu's politics since its first state election was held in 1959, it was only in recent years that the party has managed to give BN a run for its money. PAS first contested in Terengganu in 1959 and against all odds gained thirteen of twenty-four state seats, giving it the reins of the state government. The PAS-led state government, however, was short-lived. A successful vote of no confidence orchestrated by UMNO members of the state assembly, which involved defections and "kidnapping" of PAS state assemblypersons, caused the state government to collapse in 1961.⁹ It was not until 1999 that PAS was finally able to regain Terengganu.

⁹ The crisis started from the moment PAS took over the state government. Its first choice for the Chief Minister post, Ahmad Azzam Hanapiah, who was the PAS Terengganu commissioner, was bypassed by the sultan, who instead appointed the second-choice candidate, Mohd Daud Abdul Samad, who was a Malay nationalist with English and Islamic educational background. Ahmad Azzam later opted to abstain during the state assembly's vote of no confidence against the Chief Minister, Mohd Daud, who was forced to step down and dissolve the government. Several PAS assemblypersons were also "kidnapped" and spirited away to Kuala Lumpur by UMNO to ensure that PAS did not have enough support to defeat the no-confidence motion. These PAS assemblypersons later switched their allegiance to UMNO. PAS subsequently expelled Ahmad Azzam and two other state assemblypersons who abstained from voting, for "disloyalty". For more details on events leading to the downfall of the PAS government in Terengganu in 1961, refer to "PAS Cipta Sejarah Dalam Pilihan Raya Umum Negeri Terengganu 1959", *Ensiklopedia Harian PAS*, <https://berita.pas.org.my/pas-cipta-sejarah-dalam-pilihanraya-umum-negeri-terengganu-1959/> and "Pembentukan Kerajaan PAS Terengganu 1959", *Ensiklopedia Harian PAS*, <https://berita.pas.org.my/ensiklopedia-harian-pas-pembentukan-kerajaan-pas-terengganu-1959/> (accessed 10 January 2024).

BN in Terengganu has had more success in keeping PAS out of the state government than its counterpart in Kelantan, where PAS has been in control of the state government from 1959 to 1978 and then from 1990 until now. The ascendant *ulama* leadership within PAS succeeded in capturing the Kelantan state government in 1990 but was not able to replicate the achievement in neighbouring Terengganu. The explanation can be found in the disparity of economic development between the two states, particularly after the national petroleum company Petronas discovered oil and gas on the southern coast of Terengganu in 1981.¹⁰ Under the agreement signed between the Terengganu state government and the federal government, Terengganu is entitled to a 5 per cent royalty payment annually. The massive revenue infusion, which makes up between 80 to 90 per cent of the state's annual budget, provided the then BN-led state government with the financial wherewithal to develop the state and further entrench its political dominance.¹¹ It was the primary reason why PAS in Terengganu had not been able to mount a serious challenge to oust the BN-led government; ideological zeal could only carry the party so far.

PAS's fortune changed for the better in 1999 when it finally took the Terengganu state government away from BN. The critical juncture that buoyed PAS into power and national prominence was the Reformasi movement that followed the sacking and imprisonment of then-Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. PAS teamed up with the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN), Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) to form the opposition coalition, Barisan Alternatif (BA). BA did respectably well by winning forty-two parliamentary seats, holding onto the Kelantan state

¹⁰ "Local 'Boy' Makes Good in Petronas", *The Borneo Post (Sabah)*, 26 November 2018: <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-borneo-post-sabah/20181126/281771335243902> (accessed 10 January 2024).

¹¹ Jan Stark, "Constructing an Islamic Model: PAS Rule in Kelantan and Terengganu", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 19, no. 1 (April 2004), p. 71.

government, and taking Terengganu from BN.¹² In Terengganu, BA's victory was a near clean sweep, the like of which would not be seen until 2023, when PN won all parliamentary and state seats.

PAS's choice for Chief Minister of Terengganu was Abdul Hadi Awang, who was then the deputy president of PAS and the PAS state commissioner.¹³ Abdul Hadi Awang, a Middle East-educated religious scholar, is an Islamist firebrand who was until then notoriously known for his "Amanat Hadi", a 1981 speech where he castigated BN-UMNO as a colonial stooge for upholding a colonial constitution and un-Islamic laws.¹⁴ "Amanat Hadi" drew a sharp line between PAS and UMNO, which in turn precipitated the "*takfiri*" culture in which those who opposed PAS were deemed to be lesser or inauthentic Muslims. In Malay heartlands such as Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah, the *takfiri* culture led to separate prayer congregations, mosques and religious programmes, effectively splitting communities apart. Abdul Hadi Awang never quite shed his hardline ideology when PAS was part of BA and later when he assumed the Chief Minister position in Terengganu. But as he soon found out, solely relying on rigid dogma is not enough to sustain PAS's control of the Terengganu state government. By 2004, PAS not only lost DAP as its BA coalition partner due to irreconcilable ideological differences, but it was also soundly defeated by BN in that year's general election (see Table 1).

After winning the 1999 state election, PAS had the intention of turning Terengganu into an experimental ground that balanced its economic prerogatives and religious duty to make Terengganu a shariah-

¹² Meredith Weiss, "The 1999 Malaysian General Elections: Issues, Insults, and Irregularities", *Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (May–June 2000): 413–35.

¹³ Abdul Hadi Awang is currently the president of PAS, a position he has held since 2005.

¹⁴ The Malay text: 'Kita menentang dia [BN-UMNO] kerana dia mengekalkan perlembagaan penjajah, mengekalkan peraturan kafir, mengekalkan peraturan jahiliah', <https://twitter.com/apizglaxo88/status/1112520565569404929/photo/1> (accessed 6 March 2020).

compliant state, presumably helped in no small measure by oil royalty revenue from the federal government. However, its aspiration was dashed to pieces as the retribution from the federal government was swift and severely punitive. Less than a year after PAS took over Terengganu, the federal government stopped channelling oil royalty payment to the state government; instead, the oil royalty went to a central development fund that had full discretion to disburse the money, usually in a highly partisan manner. Using a broken marriage metaphor, Hashim Ismail, the then-parliamentary secretary for the Ministry of Finance, remarked, “[t]here’s no husband in the world who wants to support his ex-wife who has now remarried. Only a stupid husband would do something like that.”¹⁵ The oil royalty payment made up 80 per cent of the state budget at the time, which thwarted any plans conceived by the state government to develop the economy.¹⁶ The Terengganu state government, represented by Tommy Thomas, who later became the Attorney General during the PH administration, took Petronas and the federal government to court in 2001 contending that the federal government’s decision to halt the oil royalty payment was in violation of the signed agreement.¹⁷ It was not until 2009 that the oil royalty payment was restored, and by that time Terengganu was safely back under BN’s control.

During the 1999 election, PAS campaigned on populist promises to boost the state’s economy such as abolishing the toll on the Sultan

¹⁵ Original quote: “[t]idak ada suami di dunia yang mahu menanggung jandanya yang telah kahwin lain. Hanya suami yang bodoh sahaja akan berbuat begitu.” Cited in Mohammad Agus Yusoff, “Politik Terengganu Selepas Pilihan Raya Umum 1999: Dari Royalti ke Wang Ehsan”, *JEBAT: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies* 31 (2004), p. 94.

¹⁶ Jan Stark, “Constructing an Islamic Model: PAS Rule in Kelantan and Terengganu”, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 19, no. 1 (April 2004), p. 71.

¹⁷ The Terengganu state government finally dropped the lawsuit in 2012 after reaching an undisclosed out-of-state settlement with the defendants. “Terengganu Drops Petronas Suit”, *The Edge*, 23 April 2012, <https://theedgemaalaysia.com/article/terengganu-drops-petronas-suit> (accessed 14 April 2023).

Mahmud bridge, providing 17,000 job opportunities within three years of governing, assessment tax exemptions, free water supply, land redistribution, thirty-day paid salary for wives who had just lost their husbands, and a poverty alleviation scheme.¹⁸ PAS had hoped that success in delivering economic progress would ease public acceptance of its moral policing efforts. However, deprived of oil royalty revenue and unable to carry out much development on its own, PAS now only had the second prong of its governing agenda to focus on: making Terengganu a shariah-compliant state. The state government and local authorities proceeded to enact laws that banned gambling outlets, bars, and nightclubs, and enforced sex segregation in public places.

In 2002, the state government introduced its shariah *pièce de résistance* in the form of the so-called Hudud Bill. The primary objective of this Hudud Bill was to increase punishment currently meted out by the state's shariah law. The Hudud Bill proposed that rape victims who wrongfully accused the perpetrators must be punished by lashing or stoned to death. This provision was later dropped after heavy criticism from the opposition, the federal government, and civil society groups. The Hudud Bill also wanted to criminalize theft, robbery, extramarital sex, alcohol consumption, apostasy, and armed rebellion.¹⁹ The Hudud Bill was gazetted into the state shariah criminal code but remained unenforceable as it exceeded the limit set for shariah criminal punishment, which is three-year imprisonment, six lashes, and a RM5,000 fine. PAS's

¹⁸ "Manifesto Awal PAS Merupakan Janji Yang Gagal Ditunaikan", *Borneo Post Online*, 13 March 2013, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2013/03/13/manifesto-awal-pas-merupakan-janji-yang-gagal-ditunaikan/> (accessed 14 April 2024).

¹⁹ Yoon Szu-Mae, "Terengganu Tables Hudud Bill, Drops Two Controversial Provisions", *Malaysiakini*, 7 July 2002, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/12108> (accessed 10 January 2024). For a side-by-side comparison between the proposed Kelantan's 1993 Hudud Bill and Terengganu's 2002 Hudud Bill, refer to Lee Long Hui, "Differences in Kelantan and Terengganu Hudud", *Malaysiakini*, 11 May 2014, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/262479> (accessed 10 January 2024).

single-minded zeal in implementing shariah-compliant ordinances hurt its chances to develop the economy as much as its dried-up oil royalty funding by scaring off outside investors, particularly non-Muslims. Tired of the lack of development, Terengganu voters overwhelmingly voted out PAS in 2004 after one term and brought BN back to helm the state government.

While local issues are crucial in shaping the political climate in Terengganu, the state also tracks national political trends closely. PAS's inability to govern effectively did help BN's campaign in Terengganu, but the 2004 general election was also a testament to BN's sheer dominance nationwide to the point of winning 90 per cent of the seats in the parliament. After suffering heavy blows in the 1999 general election, BN, in particular UMNO, rejuvenated and rebranded itself leading up to the 2004 general election; Mahathir Mohamad had resigned in 2003 after being Prime Minister for twenty-two years, and had been succeeded by Abdullah Badawi, known as "Mr Clean" for his incorrigible image. It was almost a foregone conclusion that BN would win in Terengganu regardless of PAS's track record. In the ensuing years, we can observe the alignment between state political dynamics and national political climate. When Pakatan Rakyat was on the cusp of winning the federal government in 2013, of which PAS was part, the BN-led Terengganu state government almost collapsed, following the national backlash against BN. Similarly in 2018, riding on the nationwide anti-BN sentiment, PAS finally regained Terengganu and a majority of the state's parliamentary seats. This time no amount of development projects could overcome the deeply pervasive anti-BN sentiment nationwide.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICS IN TERENGGANU (2018–PRESENT)

When PAS retook the state government in 2018, there were worries that a vindictive federal government would repeat the politics of retribution it exercised in 1999, namely stop oil royalty payment to the state. Fortunately for PAS, BN was no longer in control of the federal government. The then-PH government decided not to emulate its BN predecessor by restricting funding to PAS-governed states such as

Kelantan and Terengganu. In Kelantan, the federal government started channelling funding directly to the state government, instead of doing so through a federal intermediary.²⁰ In Terengganu, the federal government contributed RM2.1 billion in 2019, which comprised RM1.7 billion in oil royalty and RM220 million in past arrears, amounting to 92 per cent of the state budget. Petronas would deposit Terengganu's oil royalty in a special fund called "Dana Khas Kerajaan Persekutuan" (Federal Government's Special Fund) under the Ministry of Finance, which would in turn channel it to the Terengganu state government.²¹ Having a full state budget this time around was the big deciding factor in distinguishing the one-term PAS state government in 1999 from the present one when it comes to carrying out its planned development and social welfare agenda.

In the 2018 general election, PAS in Terengganu campaigned on a "Manifesto Dua Puluh" that contained twenty promises, some of which were carried over from the 1999 general election manifesto. These promises were populist in nature and a projection of PAS's image of Kerajaan Berkeadilan (Welfare Government). Some examples of the promises were one plot of land and a house for every qualified Terengganu resident, RM300 per person allocation for motorcycle licence, free Islamic marriage solemnization for first-time couples, thirty-day paid salary for wives who have just lost their husbands, opening child nursery at every state government agency, exemption from assessment tax (*cukai pintu*), and a RM5 million annual scholarship fund for high-achieving

²⁰ Azmil Tayeb, *Explaining PAS's Dominance in Kelantan*, pp. 9–10.

²¹ *Laporan Sosioekonomi Negeri Terengganu*, p. 165, <https://cloud.stats.gov.my/index.php/s/vWc2TDt6qtXE79L#pdfviewer> (accessed 14 March 2024). However, according to the Chief Minister, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, the then Ministry of Finance, headed by Lim Guan Eng, deducted 50 per cent from the 2019 funding (25 per cent in March disbursement and 25 per cent September disbursement) for Terengganu's debt repayment. "Perjalanan Hidup Samsuri, Masa Depan PAS & PN, Prestasi Kerajaan Madani", *Keluar Sekejap*, Episode 89, 14 March 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fx4JIGVcEww> (accessed 14 March 2024).

students, among others.²² A flush state budget meant that PAS state government was able to fulfil its manifesto, in stark comparison to what happened after the 1999 general election.

The newly appointed PAS Chief Minister, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, was able to take advantage of the oil royalty allocation without interference from the federal government, and use it to fund state government programmes that PAS managed to claim full credit for. An aerospace engineer by training with a PhD from Leeds University in the UK, Ahmad Samsuri does not fit the typical profile of a PAS leader. After a stint in academia, he went into politics full-time by becoming political secretary for Abdul Hadi Awang, the president of PAS. It was on Abdul Hadi Awang's insistence that he ran for the Ru Rendang state seat, a PAS stronghold. Abdul Hadi Awang also cajoled and persuaded senior PAS leaders in Terengganu to make way for the political novice Ahmad Samsuri, and for the latter to assume the Chief Minister position.²³ His selection as the Chief Minister was PAS clearly signalling its intention to project a more professional and technocratic party image, with Terengganu as its laboratory. Carrying out these populist programmes has bolstered Ahmad Samsuri's popularity with Terengganu residents and strengthened PAS's legitimacy, made apparent by Ahmad Samsuri's resounding win in the Kemaman parliamentary by-election and PN's clean sweep of all state seats in the 2023 state election.²⁴

²² From the Facebook page of Ahmad Shah Muhamed, current PAS state assemblyperson of Bandar in the Kuala Terengganu parliamentary district. Bandar state seat includes the Chinatown in the state capital, Kuala Terengganu, which makes it the only state seat with more than 20 per cent (31.5 per cent) Chinese voter, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2117096861937860.1073741830.2106293113018235&type=3> (accessed 14 March 2024).

²³ "Perjalanan Hidup Samsuri, Masa Depan PAS & PN, Prestasi Kerajaan Madani".

²⁴ Noor Atiqah Sulaiman, "Dr Sam Menang PRK Kemaman Dengan Majoriti 37,220 Undi", *Berita Harian Online*, 2 December 2023, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/12/1184476/dr-sam-menang-prk-kemaman-dengan-majoriti-37220-undi> (accessed 15 March 2024).

When PN took over the federal government after the infamous Sheraton Move in February 2020, PAS finally had a taste of power at the federal level. It also meant that the oil royalty funding would continue to flow unimpeded to the Terengganu state government. In 2022, for instance, the Terengganu state government received RM1.4 billion from the federal government, constituting 78 per cent of its overall budget.²⁵ PAS claimed that it had fulfilled all 20 promises during its first term in power (2018–22), so much so that it confidently added 10 more promises during the state election campaign in 2023.²⁶ PN had to relinquish its control of the federal government after its loss in the 2022 general election and was succeeded by Anwar Ibrahim’s Madani government comprising the unlikely alliance of PH and BN, alongside the Borneo coalitions. The Terengganu state government again had to assume its old familiar role as opposition and with it renewed the dispute over oil royalty payments—to be discussed in the next section.

The PAS state government has also been promoting its development vision through *Pelan Induk Terengganu Sejahtera 2030* (Prosperous Terengganu Master Plan 2030), or better known by its acronym PITAS2030. Its main objective is to increase employment opportunities in Terengganu (presumably to stem the increasing out-migration and depopulation rates) and to develop new sources of revenue in order to reduce the state’s dependency on oil royalty payments.²⁷ PITAS2030 contains fifty milestones, which include ramping up production of fruits and food products such as melons, watermelons, *kelulut* honey, rice, goat

²⁵ *Laporan Ketua Audit Negara, Terengganu, Tahun 2022*, p. 45, <https://lkan.audit.gov.my/documents/lkan/1880/TERENGGANU-LKAN-PENYATA-KEWANGAN-KERAJAAN-NEGERI-DAN-AGENSI-SERTA-PEMATUHAN-JABATAN-AGENSI-TAHUN-2022.pdf> (accessed 14 March 2024).

²⁶ “20 Perkara Masih Dilaksana, Tambah 10 Tawaran Baharu”, *Harakah Daily*, 7 August 2023, <https://harakahdaily.org/index.php/2023/08/07/20-perkara-masih-dilaksana-tambah-10-tawaran-baharu/> (accessed 14 March 2024).

²⁷ “Apa Itu PITAS2030?”, *Pelan Induk Terengganu Sejahtera 2030*, <https://pitas2030.terengganu.gov.my/pitas2030/> (accessed 14 March 2024).

milk, and big-sized cows (*lembu sado*), among others; shariah-compliant housing; attracting high-impact investments; opening new industrial zones; expanding Kemaman port; establishing a cultural village; empowering housewives; and building Islamic schools and colleges.²⁸ Some of these milestones, however, are under federal jurisdiction such as the East Coast Rail Line (ECRL), East Coast Highway 3 (Lebuhraya Pantai Timur 3), and Kemaman port, making it difficult for the Terengganu state government to claim credit for their development. At the heart of PITAS2030 is the wish to balance the development and moral well-being of Terengganu residents. The stated outcome of PITAS2030 is that it should generate people who are religious, community-oriented, and charitable (*beragama, bermasyarakat dan berkebakjikan*).²⁹ This vision of wanting to fuse economic progress and moral policing presents a dilemma for the current state government: How much is PAS willing to compromise on both sides in order to make it work, or is combining the two governing prerogatives even feasible, to begin with? As we can see in the next section, the conundrum is not as simple as it might seem.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VERSUS MORAL POLICING

In the 2022 general election and the 2023 state election, PAS in Terengganu campaigned on its success in fulfilling all the twenty promises it had made in the 2018 manifesto. The PAS state government was able to achieve the feat primarily due to the continuous flow of oil royalties into state coffers. PAS's brimming confidence in running on its track record was such that it even offered ten additional promises during the state election, which included, among others, providing motorcycle loan without interest (*riba*) up to RM4,000, finishing the coastal highway

²⁸ "Mercur Tanda", *Pelan Induk Terengganu Sejahtera 2030*, <https://pitas2030.terengganu.gov.my/mercu-tanda/> (accessed 14 March 2024).

²⁹ *Pelan Induk Terengganu Sejahtera 2030*, <https://pitas2030.terengganu.gov.my/> (accessed 14 March 2024).

from Kemaman in the south to Besut in the north, and establishing a social security scheme for housewives.³⁰ PAS, as part of PN, went on to sweep all thirty-two seats in the state election, not only due to the anti-BN backlash among Malay voters sustained from the 2022 general election but also voter approval of the PAS state government's one-term record.

The PAS state government now is claiming that the Madani federal government has been derelict in its obligation to channel the oil royalty payment to Terengganu, which makes it harder to focus on development. According to its Chief Minister, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, as of September 2023, the federal government has only disbursed RM405 million of the RM1.5 billion budgeted for the fiscal year.³¹ This federal-state tension is reminiscent of what happened in 1999 when the then-BN federal government stopped channelling oil royalty payment directly to the PAS state government.³² As explained earlier, the disruption in oil royalty payment resulted in PAS not being able to carry out its planned development agenda, which was one of the main reasons why it was defeated only after one term.

The Madani federal government, meanwhile, disputes the Terengganu state government's claim that the federal government is marginalizing Terengganu and engaging in politics of retribution. The director of Terengganu state development at the Implementation Coordination Unit

³⁰ "PAS Terengganu tawar 10 manifesto dalam PRN 2023", *Berita Harian*, 9 July 2023: <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/07/1124225/pas-terengganu-tawar-10-manifesto-dalam-prn-2023> (accessed 14 March 2024).

³¹ "Dana Khas Kerajaan Persekutuan: Terengganu Terima RM405 Juta Setakat September", *Berita Harian*, 3 October 2023, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/10/1160129/dana-khas-kerajaan-persekutuan-terengganu-terima-rm405-juta-setakat> (accessed 14 March 2024).

³² One PAS state assemblyperson (ADUN) speculated that it was UMNO people in the Madani government who talked Anwar into stopping the oil royalty payment to Terengganu as a retribution. Interview with Ariffin Deraman, ADUN Alur Limbat, state exco member for tourism, culture and information technology, and PAS state election director, 9 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

(ICU), which is a federal agency in charge of state development, Abdul Kahar Abdul Latif, said that for 2023, a total of RM1.39 billion had been approved for 407 projects, out of which RM1.19 billion had been spent thus far. Some of the projects included building hospitals in Kemaman and Dungun, flood mitigation, low-cost housing, a water treatment plant in Serantau, a network of water pipelines in Kuala Terengganu Selatan, targeted assistance to hardcore poor, construction of new mosques, Islamic schools, and community centres, among others.³³

It seems that at the heart of this federal-state tension is not the lack of development funding for Terengganu since the federal government knows the only way to win back the state is through development; rather, the real issue is who gets to claim the credit for development in Terengganu. It is difficult for PAS to make the claim since most of the big-ticket projects have been earmarked for federal programmes such as government hospitals and low-cost housing. Recently, Ahmad Samsuri announced that the East Coast Economic Region Development Council (ECERDC) had realized RM2.4 billion (S\$684 million) in investment in Terengganu in the first quarter of 2024.³⁴ ECERDC is a federal-state joint effort to economically develop the east coast of Malaysia, which includes Terengganu. While ECERDC brings into Terengganu much-needed development and jobs, its achievement is not for the PAS state government to claim since ECERDC is a federal creation designated to carry out federal projects on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia. The ECERDC state committee overseeing implementation and coordination

³³ “Terengganu Tidak Dianaktiri, Peruntukan Pembangunan Terus Meningkatkan”, *Sinar Harian*, 11 December 2023, <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/639087/berita/nasional/terengganu-tidak-dianaktiri-peruntukan-pembangunan-terus-meningkat> (accessed 14 March 2024).

³⁴ “Terengganu Realised RM2.4bil in Investments in Q1, Says Dr Sam”, *The Star*, 24 March 2024: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/03/24/terengganu-realised-rm21bil-in-investments-in-q1-says-dr-sam> (accessed 15 April 2024).

in Terengganu shows a strong presence of federal officers.³⁵ Simply put, without an independent source of revenue, the PAS state government is simply unable to compete with the federal government when it comes to developing the state.

The vicissitudes of federal contributions are not the only factor affecting development in Terengganu. As with the previous state government in 1999–2004, PAS has never abandoned its goal to make Terengganu a shariah-compliant state. As previously stated, the then-PAS state government introduced the so-called Hudud Bill, which was then gazetted as the 2002 Terengganu Syariah Criminal Offences (Hudud and Qisas). In December of 2022, the state government introduced amendments to the 2002 shariah criminal codes by adding offences such as pregnancy or giving birth out of wedlock, witchcraft and sorcery, female person posing as a man, and preparatory acts to commit same-sex intercourse.³⁶

PAS's dogged pursuit of policing the morality of Muslim residents of Terengganu scares away potential investors, especially in the tourism and cultural promotion industries. The fear has risen again in contemporary Terengganu, as it did in the wake of the 2002 Hudud Bill. One local non-Malay businessman relates a story where his effort to bring in a group of outside investors willing to spend RM12 million on a project in Kapas Island, a popular vacation destination, was scuttled at the last minute by a single statement made by a PAS ADUN (state assemblyperson), who insisted on the project being shariah-compliant.³⁷ The businessman also

³⁵ *Jawatankuasa Pelaksanaan dan Penyelarasan (ICC) Terengganu*, East Coast Economic Region Development Council (ECERDC), <https://www.ecerdc.com.my/ecerdc/org-chart/implementation-and-coordination-committee/icc-terengganu/> (accessed 15 April 2024).

³⁶ "Analysis: Terengganu Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment", *Sisters in Islam*, December 2022, <https://sistersinislam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Analysis-of-Terengganu-Syariah-Criminal-Offences-Enactment.pdf> (accessed 14 March 2024).

³⁷ Interview with Andrew Lai (a pseudonym), businessman, 6 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

lamented the creeping of moral policing into local culture promotion. He said that proposed guidelines for cultural performances always suggest rejection especially when it involves dancing. Cultural performances must also not include any woman performers; only men and girls under 12 years old are allowed to perform.³⁸ PAS's technocratic leaders might have plenty of latitude in formulating and implementing development policies but when it comes to religious matters they still have to defer to the *ulamas* (religious scholars) in the party for course of action. PAS, after all, is an Islamist political movement with the end goal of establishing an Islamic state in Malaysia.

The party however disagrees that its aim to make Terengganu shariah-compliant is at cross-purposes with its need to develop the state's economy. Ariffin Deraman, the state exco member for tourism, culture and information technology and also the PAS state election director, said that so far no enforcement of the shariah enactments has been carried out and the state is still in the phase of socializing the enactments to the general public. According to him, the criticism is fear-mongering tactics used by PAS's enemies to scare away potential investors. He invites critics and detractors to come to Terengganu and see for themselves. He then adds, "if the tourists wear bikinis inside Pasar Payang [a famous traditional market in Kuala Terengganu], of course we will fine them because it is indecent. But it's different if they wear bikinis at an island resort."³⁹ The tourism industry has taken a hit, as the number of visitors to Terengganu has dropped from 5.5 million people in 2019 to 3.5 million people in 2023.⁴⁰ Enacting a slew of shariah criminal codes that mete out

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with Ariffin Deraman, ADUN Alur Limbat, state exco member for tourism, culture and information technology, and PAS state election director, 9 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

⁴⁰ "Interview with Mr Fadli Yusof Bin Haji Zakaria, Terengganu State Tourism Department Director", *Gaya Travel Magazine* 17, no. 1 (2022), https://issuu.com/gayatravel/docs/gtn_17.1/s/16329643; and "Terengganu Targets 4.5m Tourist Arrivals Next Year", *The Sun*, 18 December 2023, https://thesun.my/local_news/terengganu-targets-45m-tourist-arrivals-next-year-AA11882376 (accessed 15 March 2024).

punishment for personal “moral failing” might not be the sole reason for the reduction in the number of visitors, but these shariah enactments certainly do not endear Terengganu to those who value personal privacy and who would rather go to more welcoming and less judgmental destinations, such as neighbouring Thailand and Indonesia.

The federal-state tension and the single-minded insistence on making Terengganu a shariah-compliant state we are observing now seem to be a replay of 1999–2004. Back then, after failing to develop the state due to federal interference, PAS instead focused exclusively on the second prong of its agenda, which was moral policing. Now, same as then, PAS again faces a similar dilemma. A heavy dependency on federal funding limits how many development projects the state government can undertake when the federal government is led by PAS’s political opposition. PAS, nevertheless, has learned its lessons when it comes to Terengganu’s urgency in generating its own revenue independent of the federal government. The Chief Minister, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, has been stressing the importance of increasing non-federal revenue generation since PAS took over the state government in 2018. For instance, land management, which falls under the purview of the state, has become an obvious go-to solution for revenue generation. Terengganu started charging utility companies a fee for using Terengganu as a corridor for their pipes and fibre optic cables. Samsuri also claimed that Terengganu’s land contains 44 per cent of Rare Earth Elements (REE) out of a total of 16.1 million metric tonnes worth around RM1 trillion found nationwide.⁴¹ Unprecedentedly, Samsuri’s administration has started charging

⁴¹ “Perjalanan Hidup Samsuri, Masa Depan PAS & PN, Prestasi Kerajaan Madani”. The Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, however, announced that there will be a ban on REE export out of Malaysia to prevent exploitation and loss while maximizing returns to the country. Julia Chan, “Malaysia’s Rare Earths Elements Could Be Worth up to RM1t, Pahang Varsity Don Says as Putrajaya Mulls Export Ban”, *Malay Mail*, 15 September 2023, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/09/15/malaysias-rare-earths-elements-could-be-worth-up-to-rm1t-pahang-varsity-don-says-as-putrajaya-mulls-export-ban/91014> (accessed 15 March 2024).

residents for water usage, which has raised about RM100 million so far, and is in the process of revising land and assessment taxes, which have not been revised for many years.⁴² Considering the highly centralised federal system practised in Malaysia, Terengganu will be hard-pressed to generate enough revenue to fill the gap left by the stoppage of oil royalty payments.

SUSTAINING PAS’S CONTROL OF TERENGGANU INTO THE NEAR FUTURE

PAS’s hold over Terengganu is currently unassailable, plainly evident in PN’s clean sweep of all parliamentary and state seats in the last two elections. Winning the reelection for the second term was already unprecedented for PAS in Terengganu. Can PAS continue to get reelected by Terengganu voters like its counterpart in Kelantan? It is certainly doing all it can to ensure that the winning streak remains unbroken. The political dynamic has changed a lot since PAS last came to power in 1999. UMNO was a formidable opponent then but is now severely weakened and fragmented. In Malay heartlands such as Terengganu, the politics is primarily binary between PAS and BN. PAS has always profited from a crisis-ridden BN. Like in Kelantan, PAS in Terengganu must also work hard to engage its supporters and reach out to potential voters, particularly youths, to maintain its dominance.⁴³

⁴² “Perjalanan Hidup Samsuri, Masa Depan PAS & PN, Prestasi Kerajaan Madani”. Also interview with Ariffin Deraman, ADUN Alur Limbat, state exco member for tourism, culture and information technology, and PAS state election director, 9 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

⁴³ For examples of communal welfare programmes carried out by PAS to bolster support from Terengganu residents, refer to Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar, Che Hamdan Che Ahmad Razali, and Muhamad Fazil Ahmad, “Aktivisme Parti Politik Berintensiti Tinggi: Kajian Kes di Negeri Terengganu”, *E-Proceeding 8th International Conference on Public Policy and Social Science (ICoPS) 2021*, UiTM Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

The Terengganu state government promotes the idea of “Negeri Berkebijakan” (Welfare State), which PAS has campaigned on since its time with Pakatan Rakyat (2008–2015).⁴⁴ The notion of “Negeri Berkebijakan” is populist in nature as embodied in the Manifesto Dua Pulu mentioned above. Running on the slogan “Terengganu Maju Berkat Sejahtera” (TMBS), the state government strives to provide welfare to its residents from cradle to grave. During its freshman term, the state government allocated RM750,000 for each state constituency to be used for people-oriented development (*pembangunan untuk rakyat*). It is up to the state assemblyperson and his/her staff to disburse the funding however they see fit. The funding has been used to provide constituents with wheelchairs, beds, computers, paying university fees, among others.⁴⁵ The state government also distributed food assistance called “*bakul rakyat*” (people’s basket) worth RM100 each for the hardcore poor. There are also “*gerobok rezeki*” (cupboard of blessings) filled with essential food items and placed at numerous mosques for those in need. There are also subsidy programmes geared towards specific demographics such as i-Belia for youth, i-Pencen for retirees, i-Mahasiswa for university students, and i-Perantau for Terengganu residents who live out of state. Ariffin Deraman, the ADUN for Alor Limbat and PAS state election director, summarizes the efforts of “Negeri Berkebijakan” as “*projek menggembirakan rakyat*” (projects that make people happy). He adds, “if people are comfortable, there is no reason for them to change the government.”⁴⁶

Young voters played an influential role in the 2022 general election and 2023 state elections. Lowering the voting age to eighteen years of age

⁴⁴ “Negara Berkebijakan: Langkah Bijak PAS”, *DAP Malaysia*, 5 June 2011, <https://dapmalaysia.org/negara-berkebijakan-langkah-bijak-pas/> (accessed 15 March 2024).

⁴⁵ Interview with Ariffin Deraman, ADUN Alor Limbat, state exco member for tourism, culture and information technology, and PAS state election director, 9 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

has resulted in an additional 5.8 million new voters. PAS did an effective job in reaching out to newly enfranchised young Malays through social media, especially TikTok. They overwhelmingly voted for PN in the last two elections to the extent that allowed PN to win in BN strongholds such as in FELDA settlements where many second- and third-generation FELDA residents supported PN; this was clear in the voting pattern in the voting streams (young people voted in streams 4, 5 and 6).⁴⁷ Besides social media, PAS engages Malay youths through programmes and activities such as the Alternative Riding Club (ARC), a RXZ motorcycle gathering that attracted more than 60,000 participants, futsal and e-sports tournaments, among others.⁴⁸ While these activities are designed for young men, PAS also reaches out to young women through its Ameerah wing, Briged Muslimah, and government-supported NGOs such as Nisa' and HANEES. They organize programmes for young women such as charity work, sports, political education (*tarbiyah*), leadership training (*tamrin*), and others. They are also active in recruiting new members and inculcating them with the party's ideals ("cadrezation").⁴⁹ PAS realizes that if it needs to sustain youth support it must continuously interact with them since young voters generally do not owe allegiance to a particular party, unlike older generations. In other words, there is no guarantee that

⁴⁷ Polling stations in Malaysia are organized by streams (*saluran*). *Saluran* 1, 2 and 3 are reserved for older and physically challenged voters while young voters are channelled through *Saluran* 4, 5 and 6.

⁴⁸ RXZ is a discontinued 135cc two-stroke motorcycle produced by Yamaha and was widely popular in the 1980s and 1990s. RXZ now has become a collector's item and is making a comeback in recent years. The Terengganu's RXZ Members 5.0 gathering attracts collectors not just from Malaysia but from around the region as well. "Organisers of RXZ 5.0 Members Gathering Issue Apology", *New Straits Times*, 11 September 2023, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/09/953780/organisers-rxz-50-members-gathering-issue-apology> (accessed 15 March 2024).

⁴⁹ Interview with Asma' Abdullah, Director of Ameerah (PAS's young women's wing) Terengganu, 7 December 2023, Marang.

young Malay TikTok users who flocked to PN in droves in the 2022 and 2023 elections will vote for PN again if circumstances change.

As such, the indoctrination process is central to PAS as it creates party cadres who are wholly committed to the struggle and would not be swayed by the political winds of the day.⁵⁰ Complete belief in PAS's Islamic struggle needs to be internalized by every party member and this is mainly accomplished through its compulsory *usrah* (study group) programme. There are three levels of *usrah*, each with its own syllabus. Sample readings include writings of Hassan Al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), Syed Qutb (a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue), and PAS's current president, Abdul Hadi Awang. *Usrah* are carried out one to three times a month with men and women having separate *usrahs*. Depending on the size of *usrah* participants, these can be held at PAS's state constituency (DUN) office or members' houses.⁵¹ A typical *usrah* session would include a discussion leader (*naqib/naqibah*), who would explain the readings and situate them within contemporary political contexts. *Usrah* is a powerful form of political education and indoctrination, which allows the party to focus on the quality, not the quantity, of its membership, separating the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. This is especially crucial for PAS since it is building a movement, not a mere political party. *Usrah* sessions strengthen PAS members' sense of self and remind them that they are struggling in the name of Islam. In the words of one PAS activist in Terengganu, "If there is no *usrah*, our struggle dies, our soul dies."⁵²

⁵⁰ Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar and Che Hamdan Che Mohd Razali, "Party Activists and Party Programs at Grassroots Level: The Intertwined Effect", *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews* 8, no. 3 (2020): 1336–38.

⁵¹ Interview with Abang Jeff (a pseudonym), a long-time PAS activist in Wakaf Mempelam, 7 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu and interview with Asma' Abdullah, Director of Ameerah (PAS's young women's wing) Terengganu, 7 December 2023, Marang.

⁵² Interview with Abang Jeff (a pseudonym), a long-time PAS activist in Wakaf Mempelam, 7 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

Finally, Terengganu is a state where PAS can showcase its professionalism and move away from the “*parti lebai*” moniker.⁵³ For it to remain relevant, PAS realizes that it needs to attract more urban Malay professionals to join its ranks. Thus, when PAS regained Terengganu in 2018, it made a surprise decision by choosing Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar as the Chief Minister even though he comes from a non-*ulama* background.⁵⁴ Better known as Dr Sam, he is one of the most popular politicians in Terengganu and has successfully led PAS in winning the reelection. When PAS had to vacate the Kemaman parliamentary seat, which then triggered a by-election, the party decided to put up Samsuri as a candidate. He won by a huge margin and is now presented with a national platform to promote the professional and technocratic side of PAS to audiences beyond Terengganu. It is now for him to show the rest of Malaysia that Terengganu is being run professionally and seeks development and is not merely a theocratic state wannabe that only cares about its residents’ souls in the hereafter. In other words, PAS needs to hold onto Terengganu and govern it well as a way to expand its attractiveness beyond its core supporters.

CONCLUSION

Currently, as the biggest party in parliament with forty-three seats, PAS has come a long way from being a mere provincial party just a few years ago. A leading party in the PN coalition, PAS now has the ambition to take over the federal government one day. To do that, PAS must convince the

⁵³ *Lebai* is a general term that refers to those who come from an Islamic education background. In the case of PAS, *lebai* has been used as a pejorative to describe a religious person who is unsophisticated and ignorant of the way the world works.

⁵⁴ Azmil Tayeb, “How Far Will PAS Deviate from the Ulama Leadership Model, and Why Does It Matter?”, *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 2023/88, 1 November 2023, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2023-88-how-far-will-pas-deviate-from-the-ulama-leadership-model-and-why-does-it-matter-by-azmil-tayeb/> (accessed 15 March 2024).

Malaysian public that it is more than just an Islamist party with no agenda other than turning Malaysia into an Islamic state. It needs to project its professional and technocratic side to show that it is more than capable of handling the challenges of the modern era. This is where Terengganu and its non-*ulama* Chief Minister, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, come into the picture. PAS was able to govern Terengganu effectively when PN was in control of the federal government (2020–22). But now that the federal government is under PAS’s political opposition and relationship with Terengganu is tense. After all, 80–90 per cent of Terengganu’s state budget comes from the federal government.

PAS’s model of governance consists of two intertwined prongs: developing the economy and making the state shariah-compliant. When it is not able to do the former, the public attention would be placed on the latter, which does not usually portray PAS in a good light. Without economic development, it is difficult for PAS to showcase its governing chops. In the past, Terengganu voters had punished PAS at the polls for not delivering on the development front. The question now is, will they do it again? This is the dilemma currently faced by Terengganu. In the 2022 and 2023 elections, Terengganu voters returned PAS to power at federal and state levels with no opposition. Will they vote out the current PAS if it does not perform economically or will they follow the path of their counterparts in neighbouring Kelantan who keep voting for a PAS state government simply for its Islamic image? Considering the deep polarization in Malaysian politics today, the latter is a distinct possibility, especially if the narrative of victimhood gains saliency among Terengganu voters. Samsuri recently issued a warning to the federal government, saying that “Terengganu’s patience has limits. Do not wake up a sleeping animal.”⁵⁵ How PAS navigates its tumultuous relationship with the federal government and its ability to find other sources of revenue will determine its governing viability in Terengganu, and perhaps nationwide as it seeks to expand beyond its traditional strongholds.

⁵⁵ “Perjalanan Hidup Samsuri, Masa Depan PAS & PN, Prestasi Kerajaan Madani”.

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