Movement or revolution?
– A case study of demonstrations in Iran 2017 and 2022

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Abstract

The following paper analyses the similarities and differences as well as the motives and strategies of the demonstrations in Iran which occurred in 2017/2018 and since September of 2022. The findings are discussed using the Rentier State Theory. A pure comparative analysis is not made, rather a case study with the demonstrations as two components. The demonstrations that started in September 2022 is ongoing as of the writing of this paper, despite this are several findings made. Similarities are seen in the participating people between the years, as well as some recurring cities. The biggest differences are the longevity of the demonstrations despite interventions of the regime, the greater unity amongst socioeconomic groups in the ongoing demonstrations as well as the grievances of electoral frauds leading up to the demonstration of 2022. The motive of 2022 is more focused on revolution instead of the reforms of 2017, these differences is however partly uncertain. The strategies were in the beginning similar, with taking of the headscarf as a more prominent action in the demonstrations of 2022. Many of the underlying grievances can be discussed via the Rentier State Theory, for example the democratic deficit and economic hardships. The details and observations are several, but the main conclusion is how the ongoing demonstrations are greater in both numbers, motives, and strategies. The theory is found useful to explain this phenomenon of instability and grievance between state and civilians.

Key Words: Mahsa Amini, Rentier State Theory, Dey protests, Girls of Revolution Street, Demonstrations

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1. Introduction

Elaheh Mohammadi and Niloofar Hamedi, two reporters from Iran together with Kurdish human rights activist Narges Mohammadi were given the 2023 World Press Freedom Prize by UNESCO/Guillermo Cano¹. The journalists where the two whom reported the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, and from her following funeral. They told the story that provoked the widest demonstration in Iran since the revolution in 1979, with many people chanting the words “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi”². The demonstrations have been ongoing for over seven months and have gained wide attention partly for its feminist elements, by both world media and Swedish members of the parliament amongst others³. The events are one amongst multiple waves of demonstrations since the revolution in 1979. The protest in 2017 for example, reached almost all of Iran, and women, like now, took their headscarves of in protest towards the compulsory hijab- laws⁴. This shows that the ongoing demonstrations after the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini seems to be a unique part of reoccurring protests. The demonstrations are therefore important to understand and examine as a way of learning about Iran, demonstrations, and political change. What causes the demonstrations and is there connections to previous political rebellions in Iran?

Similar questions have previously been answered by using the Rentier State theory. It has also been used to explain previous situations in Iran⁵. The theory has been widely used by scholars for its way of understanding the balance between the state and civilians and finding similarities between event and/or countries. By using this theory, the events of Iran will both be put in the international context and the understanding of the events will be deepened. It also tests if the theory not only explains the ways of the regime, but also the grievances amongst the people. Automatically, the theory will also be tested in its usability over time.

¹ UNESCO (2023)
² Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 18)
³ Ahmadi Högfeldt (2022) & Billström (2022)
⁴ Rouhi (2022)
⁵ Mahdavy (1970)
1.1 Purpose and analytical questions

This paper aims to analyze strategies and methods via chants and other means, as a way of understanding the motives or underlying causes of the 2017 and 2022 demonstrations. The most prominent differences and similarities will be discussed to highlight changes within Iran and the demonstrations as well as deepening the analysis. The findings will be further analyzed and explained using Rentier State Theory which simultaneously will broaden the applicability of the findings and avoid data fitting.

This gives the following analytical questions:

1. What are the motives and strategies of the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022?
2. What are the most prominent similarities and differences between the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022?
3. How can each year’s motives, strategies, and their shared differences and similarities be explained by the Rentier State Theory?
1. From monarchy to Islamic republic, a background

This part will outline the background of modern Iran and the most relevant parts of the history of the country. The chapter will highlight the historical context of the demonstrations and explain important parts of how Iran has been formed.

2.1 From democratization to revolution

The history of Iran, or Persia as it was called internationally before 1935, is long and diverse. What we see in Iran today is mainly a consequence of the revolution in 1979. The country had changed in many ways during the 20th century, attempts for democratization, diversified economy and beneficial relations with other countries were made by the shah and his prime ministers. The people remained dissatisfied because of the lacking democratic output and the challenges with the increasing inflation, additionally the international relationships didn’t always benefit the leadership as hoped. Big projects took a lot of money from the state while the population struggled to make ends meet during the inflation, and the differences between the rich and poor became increasingly large. The big incomes from the oil industry went into luxury consumption and lavish purchases of the leaders and the elite, rather than benefiting the entire population. This resulted in electoral outcomes that lead to several changes of prime ministers. Some won the elections by promoting liberalization, and others by promoting conservative amendments or religion.

The older parts of the population had grown up with traditions on the countryside in a conservative society and were now living in modern industrial cities. This made them appreciate and see the words of the populistic Ayatollah Khomeini as reassuring, and the shah’s leadership with the prime minister as inadequate. The feeling of too much change, too quickly with too little success was common inside Iran. The shah understood his declining popularity and answered with persecution of, and violence against the opposition. The shah also dissolved the other political

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6 Landguiden (2022a)
7 Britannica (2023)
8 Landguiden (2022b)
9 Skocpol (1982, p. 280)
10 Britannica (2023)
11 Britannica (2023)
parties and made Iran a one-party state in 1975\textsuperscript{12}. Despite this, the protests, in the beginning led by student and young unemployed immigrants, intensified and spread all over the country. The protesters had different views on politics and religion but were subsumed under Shi’i Islam with Ayatollah Khomeini as an increasingly prominent leader\textsuperscript{13}. It was also a way for unemployed, the poor and other lower classes to revolt against the wealthy upper class\textsuperscript{14}. In 1979 the unwell shah felt compelled to leave the country, and a few days later the armed forces announced their neutrality in the conflict between supporters of the Shah and Khomeini\textsuperscript{15}. With that came the revolution and a change of the leadership.

\textbf{2.3 The aftermaths}

After an election in April, Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic state with a revolutionary council as the leadership, and himself as the political and religious leader in perpetuity\textsuperscript{16}. Allies of the shah, west wing politicians and other opponents were killed, put in jail, or fled the country. Even though the revolution in the beginning was supported by both political left and right, anyone who opposed Khomeini’s religious or anti-west-propaganda was now to be eliminated\textsuperscript{17}. Mainly American citizens or west friendly people were targeted. Women’s rights were restricted, Islamic dress codes were imposed and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, or The Revolutionary Guards) engaged in violent actions with the goal of intimidating anyone opposing the Islamic revolution\textsuperscript{18}. There were additional factions within the new leadership when several people were taken hostages by young revolutionist in the American Embassy in Tehran. The leaders who didn’t support the hostage situation were slowly stripped of their power\textsuperscript{19}. Another important fraction was the many Kurds who did not support the new leadership and called for independency\textsuperscript{20}.

\textsuperscript{12} Landguiden (2022b)
\textsuperscript{13} Britannica (2023) & Skocpol (1982, p. 267)
\textsuperscript{14} Skocpol (1982, p.265)
\textsuperscript{15} Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{16} Landguiden (2022b) & Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{17} Landguiden (2022b)
\textsuperscript{18} Britannica (2023) & Skocpol (1982)
\textsuperscript{19} Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{20} Landguiden (2022b)
2.4 The mediating dictator

Theda Skocpol writes in “Rentier State and Shi’a Islam in the Iranian Revolution” from 1982 how this social revolution was puritanical, and that the consequences seemed to be an enforcement of Islamic morals and mores, rather than a change in work ethics and oil dependency\textsuperscript{21}. Today, a few years later, we indeed see that the result of the revolution is the Islamic republic. It’s a governance based on religious institutions and laws, with political institutions such as a president and a parliament, both elected in different national referendums held every fourth year. Ayatollah Khamenei is the supreme and religious leader with the ability to hinder any decision he dislikes. The position makes it necessary for him to mediate between religious, political, and other powerful groups. This different type of governance is neither a democracy nor a dictatorship, rather a political oligarchy\textsuperscript{22}.

2.3 War and ongoing factions

The revolution caused uncertainty within Iran and the neighboring country Iraq took the advantage and invaded Iran in 1980. This war became a way for the Iranian leadership to enforce their power. The experience of an enemy attacking created a rally around the flag and silenced some of the critique against the revolution. This served the leadership well in the beginning\textsuperscript{23}. However, the war was long and costly in both money and human lives. That was perhaps the reason to why Iran unexpectedly signed a UN resolution of ceasefire and the common border, in 1988\textsuperscript{24}. Tensions and critique were increasing despite Khomeini’s efforts of executing and imprison the opposition. The government was separated in different factions. The traditional opponents the “Leftists” and the “Conservatives” were both challenged by the new faction “Reformists” who wanted to improve relationships with the West and people’s living conditions by opening the political structures\textsuperscript{25}. This tension has continued after Ayatollah Khomeini’s death 1989 and under his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Since then, conservative and reformist presidents have superset each other, always facing obstructions from the opposition. The people have become

\textsuperscript{21} Skocpol (1982, p. 280)
\textsuperscript{22} Landguiden (2022c)
\textsuperscript{23} Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{24} Landguiden (2022b)
\textsuperscript{25} Britannica (2023)
increasingly dissatisfied and several violent and nationwide protests have occurred. The Green Revolution, led by parts of the middle class in 2009, can be seen as one of the first of these greater protests. Its motives were of supporting the reformist party after an election where the radical conservatives had won once again, which provoked accusations of election fraud and made the middle class agitated. The demonstrations went on for several months and were internationally recognized via social media. Despite this, the protests did not gain necessary support of people outside the middle class. This wave of demonstrations was one of many times when the regime violently silenced the people\textsuperscript{26}. It’s also an example of how Iran previously has been described as a rentier state\textsuperscript{27}.

\textsuperscript{26} Landguiden (2022b)
\textsuperscript{27} Benli Altunişik (2014) & Mahdavy (1970)
2. Theory and analytical concepts

For this chapter previous findings will be explained as a way of understanding today’s research. The previous findings will examine how the theory of rentier states has been used to analyze countries in similar situations as Iran. An explanation and discussion of the theoretical concept of rentier states will then follow. This gives both an example of how to use the theory, and thereafter an explanation of it.

3.1 Previous findings

In “Exploring the Causes of Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt” by Maria Syed a couple of factors are listed as to why the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia happened\textsuperscript{28}. Her article mentions some different causes which she divides into internal and international causes.

The internal factors include how well the state performs its duties and desired goals. This alludes a great deal to rentier states theory. When a state can’t be effective and meet the needs of its people, it loses its legitimacy. The international factors relate to what other countries gain or lose by a revolution. Another country can support a revolution if the leaders will gain from the competitor’s downfall, or conversely, support a leader facing revolution. According to Syed, this changed over time in Egypt and Tunisia. Other countries were initially supportive of the leaders but changed when the demonstrations persisted over time\textsuperscript{29}.

Syed continues by noting that the internal conditions in Egypt and Tunisia were ripe for revolutions. Both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the states had been lost and no elite nor group gained enough to support the leadership. She also concludes that these causes were necessary all together. The internal causes would not been enough without the external support and vice versa\textsuperscript{30}.

\textsuperscript{28} Syed (2014)
\textsuperscript{29} Syed (2014)
\textsuperscript{30} Syed (2014)
The theories of rentier states are discussed further in the article “Rentier State Theory and the Arab Uprisings: An Appraisal”, written by Meliha Benli Altunişik. The piece analyzes what implications the Arab spring had on the theory of rentier states. Benli Altunişik concludes that few of the rentier states in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) experienced revolutions or even demonstrations during the Arab spring. Several countries are seen as rentier states by heavily relying on externally generated oil revenue. This money replaces the revenue that is normally created through projects, companies, or taxes. Several countries in MENA have been seen as rentier states over the years. However, Benli Altunişik points to Libya as the only rentier state in the region with a complete revolution during the Arab Spring. This is explained to be possible only through international interventions, which according to her, makes it necessary to incorporate international interventions into rentier state theory.

Benli Altunişik also highlights the correlation between oil money and lack of democracy, but question how to explain the causality. To improve the causality in the theory, she argues that socioeconomical groups and conditions shall be included in the analysis of a country. This combined with an analysis of the international context and/or International Social History gives a more nuanced understanding of why revolutions occur in rentier states.

A rentier state could be seen as one who is dependent of the oil money, but both articles highlight how countries and states are affected by international and internal conditions as well. The money and taxation of the people are important, but socioeconomic and international factors are also crucial in predicting political protests.

3.2 Rentier State Theory – Trust and accountability between state and civilians.

The Rentier State Theory (RTS) focuses on how the economic balance affects a state. If a state is dependent on rent-based revenues (revenues from abroad that are possible

31 Benli Altunişik (2014)
32 Benli Altunişik (2014)
33 Benli Altunişik (2014)
by owning natural resources such as oil) it is likely to affect how the country works\textsuperscript{34}. There are a few things that characterize a rentier state. Firstly, the main income must be the rent from abroad, rather than through taxation of the people, which is the common procedure in production states\textsuperscript{35}. Second, the external rent is allocated and used by a small group of the elite and does not benefit the civilians as much as could be expected of taxations, instead it goes directly to the state and its leader is tempted to use the money for the elite\textsuperscript{36}. This can also be explained in a way that few people are creating the good that gives revenue, and many people are living of the revenue. In practice this often means that a few people work, and more people use the money for luxury and/or power\textsuperscript{37}. It is important to note that the money need to come from the rest of the world and not the state itself, as that would not change the relationship between state and civilians. Lastly, the Rentier State Theory highlights how this monetary distribution harms a country’s possibility of democratization\textsuperscript{38}. It creates a mentality that affect a country and its people, both leadership and civilians\textsuperscript{39}. The leaders are released of their accountability to the people, and the civilians does not get revenue for their work. Work does not equal reward as in, food or money, in rentier states\textsuperscript{40}. A regime can exploit this balance too much and make harm on its civilians and have non-functioning state structures. When these circumstances are too severe, a state transitions from rentier state to being a “failed state”\textsuperscript{41}. That however is only a negative development of a rentier state, and not the subject of this paper and will therefore not be investigated further.

Michael Herb claims in the article “No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy” that rent doesn’t harm or hinder the democratization, but it does not help either – especially not as much as the amounts of money could do if used differently\textsuperscript{42}. Herb also explains what underlying mechanisms allows for
a rentier state to function. Firstly, and as understood by the title of the article, the lack of taxation is a key factor. When the taxes are low or nonexistent, the politicians are released of the accountability that normally comes with using tax money. The people do not need the same reassurance that their money has been well spent, and their support for politicians is gained depending on what the politicians can give them, rather than through well spent taxes\(^\text{43}\). Since the money are not from the people, are the state independent and able to do more as they like\(^\text{44}\). This gives the second mechanism that Herb mentions: when, or if, opposition is rising, the leaders have other ways to handle this than in a market economy. They can buy off or repress the opposition in violent ways because of the autonomy. Herb’s last mechanism is of constant class structures\(^\text{45}\). During democratization, the middleclass is increased and the differences between all classes lessened. This change is important in democratization but does not happen as easily in rentier states since the money is used mainly by the elite\(^\text{46}\). This hindering of democratization in rentier states has been seen to be stronger in rentier states with greater tribalism\(^\text{47}\).

Finally, Herb also mentions some of the critiques for the theory and wonders why the citizens can’t ask for accountability even without taxes\(^\text{48}\). Herb highlights the democratic situation in surrounding countries as another important factor of democratization of rentier states\(^\text{49}\). The democratization is hindered in many ways, but the temptation of a new ruler to take control and gain on the power and money efficiently undermines the democratic structures, and few are eager to create a slow system that fail in the first election\(^\text{50}\). Perhaps that’s why democracy in the region is necessary\(^\text{51}\) – that could be a way for the country to see possible examples of democratic systems.

\(^{43}\) Herb (2005 p. 298)  
\(^{44}\) Luciani (2019 p. 121)  
\(^{45}\) Herb (2005 p. 298)  
\(^{46}\) Herb (2005 p. 297)  
\(^{47}\) Beblawi (1987 p. 387)  
\(^{48}\) Herb (2005 p. 299)  
\(^{49}\) Herb (2005 p. 311)  
\(^{50}\) Luciani (2019 p. 122)  
\(^{51}\) Herb (2005 p. 311)
3. Method

The method will be described in this chapter. First by introducing qualitative methods and thereafter different types of sources, which will be critically evaluated. The validity of the paper will be discussed, and the analytical framework will be presented.

4.1 Qualitative method, case studies or comparisons?

If quantitative methods are recognized by numbers and surveys, the qualitative method is characterized by analyses of interviews, texts, or videos to understand a deeper connection. Peter Esaiasson et.al describes in the book “Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad” that the qualitative text-analysis has a way of understanding the text by seeing some parts as more important than others, instead of seeing each part as equally valuable and the meaning as the sum of each part\(^{52}\). This gives us that the qualitative perspective allows for a deep and broad analysis of multiple sources.

Case studies are used to create new, or to test established, theories in political science\(^{53}\). Comparative studies are similar and can be done between cases that are either as similar or as different as possible (“Most-Similar Comparison” or “Most-Different Comparison”). When successful, these studies prove to be very useful, but the comparisons are often easy to make but hard to learn from\(^{54}\). The method of pure comparison is therefore precarious and case studies which analyze multiple components in one context are often preferred. This allows for comparison, without the same risk of not learning of it\(^{55}\). Esaiasson et.al describes how these components are same in time or context and therefore allows for several analyzes at the same time\(^{56}\). This, for example, can be the same political text before and after an election, or two different texts about the same election. Case studies with only one component and without comparison do occur but are rare because of the difficulty of being

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52 Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.211)
53 Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.108)
54 Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.106)
55 Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.108)
56 Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.109)
consistent and gaining insights applicable to other examples\textsuperscript{57}. Todd Landman and Ediza Carvalho refines the practice of case studies of countries in the book “Issues and Methods in comparative politics”\textsuperscript{58}. Their book describes when and how to do comparative case studies to prevent previous mentioned difficulties and optimize the benefits. The single country study is the preferred method when researching underlying processes, mechanisms or testing the applicability of a theory. This is possible due to the intensiveness of the studies, which is harder to ensure in studies of additional countries\textsuperscript{59}. This also makes single country studies useful for understanding significant political processes and for giving contextual descriptions, as well as new important hypothesis or analytical question to examine\textsuperscript{60}.

An important part of planning the research is to decide if the work is theory creating, or theory testing. Do we use the theory to see if it works on a specific situation, or do we look on situations to develop new theories? Esaiasson et.al concludes that the two often intertwine since most of the theory creating studies also have elements of testing theories. The important thing to remember according to them, is to see if the conclusions are based on the theory or the empirical data. Studies based on the testing of a theory are generally more reliable since they don’t have the problem of data fitting – when a new theory is created to include every explanation with the risk of being useless outside of its example.\textsuperscript{61}

### 4.2 Research design – method and limitations

This paper will examine the recent (and as of the writing of this paper, ongoing) demonstrations in Iran, as well as the previous demonstrations that started in the winter of 2017. As explained above, the pure comparative methods are not appropriate for this study. The different explanations and the many small differences would make the conclusions too uncertain, even if a “Most-Similar Comparison”\textsuperscript{62} would be interesting. The method of a case study with multiple components

\textsuperscript{57} Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.109)
\textsuperscript{58} Landman & Carvalho (2017)
\textsuperscript{59} Landman & Carvalho (2017 p. 91)
\textsuperscript{60} Landman & Carvalho (2017 p. 86 & 90)
\textsuperscript{61} Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.113)
\textsuperscript{62} Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.101)
previously explained by Esaiasson, and the ways of a single country study explained by Landman and Carvalho, will instead be used. The two waves of demonstrations are the two components.

This paper will not analyze every wave of demonstrations in Iran after the 1979 revolution. Many more events would be interesting, but as in many cases of research, limitation are tradeoffs are necessary due to time and space amongst other things. Every limitation has been done with the goal of an as balanced and useful analysis as possible. 2017 was chosen since it was pioneering and because of its great extent in both people, geographical magnitude, and research available. It also has, as will be shown, interesting similarities with 2022 and women taking of their headscarves etc. The waves from 2009 and 2019 would both be interesting, but the first is considered being too long ago, and before important changes of 2017. Several studies and comparisons of 2009 and 2017 waves have, in addition, already been done, whereas it would be beneficial to use previous research rather than reproducing it. The wave of demonstrations in 2019 are close in time and does therefore not have the same amount of research as the events in 2017. It is also too equal to the events two years earlier, to nuance the analysis if it was to be used as a third analytical component. Other big events could also be used but are excluded because of time limitations and in favor of the interesting similarities and connections between the 2017 and 2022 demonstrations. Even if the demonstrations of 2009 and 2019 will not be analytical concepts for this paper, they will be mentioned and referred to as a way of nuancing and explaining the happenings of 2017 and 2022. By analyzing the chosen years this paper hopes to contribute to the research of such a resent event as the 2022 (and ongoing) demonstrations.

Since this paper tries to explain the reasons for, and connections between the two demonstrations, the theory testing approach is used. The main theory is the Rentier State Theory, which avoids the risk of data fitting the findings and gives a clear structure to the research and the conclusions. Even if theory testing is the purpose of
the analysis, this could lead to examples of ways to improve the theory in the future, as mentioned by Landman and Carvalho\textsuperscript{63}.

The time spent on this paper is ten weeks in the spring of 2023 by one student at Linköping University. No financial recourses are connected to this paper.

4.3 Critical analysis of sources
Nothing of the above will be possible without reliable sources, and the understanding of source criticism is sometimes seen as particularly important for conflict or peace research\textsuperscript{64}. Esaiasson et.al helps by explaining how to recognize better or worse sources. "Authenticity, autonomy, currency, bias."\textsuperscript{65} are used throughout the writing process to evaluate each source and increase the reliability of a study. The same words are used to explain why, and which sources are used. This case study will be based on several types of sources, mainly reports from countries or organizations, news articles and research articles. Together, they will create a picture of current events that have been reported on in the news but not yet been researched. Using the reports and research papers, the history will be thoroughly explained and analyzed. A discussion of different sources and evaluation of their different types will follow.

Reports from the UN, the EU, and NGOs such as Amnesty International or The Red Cross/Halfmoon give detailed insights in the events of the demonstrations 2017 and 2022. They are secondary sources and have a good understanding of the context and history and acts as a supplement to the news. They are current enough to be reliable and made long enough after the events to be able to check most of the facts. However, reports from these organizations present issues such as bias. The EU are not neutral in this conflict, and organizations such as Amnesty International can use a report to both highlight a problem and earn money for their work. The biases are necessary to remember and is handled by checking different reports and news outlets to confirm information.

\textsuperscript{63} Landman & Carvalho (2017 p. 87)
\textsuperscript{64} Dulić (2011 p. 45)
\textsuperscript{65} Esaiasson et.al (2017 p.288), my own translation
Articles and other forms of news are used to understand more recent events, such as the latest happenings in the ongoing demonstrations from 2022. They are however more important to confirm through other news outlets or triangulation to prevent misinformation or biases\textsuperscript{66}. Triangulation is a method of using several independent sources to confirm or estimate the plausibility of specific information. It can also be a tool of estimating and pointing toward what’s a reasonable amount of people etcetera. The method is useful but often difficult to fulfill\textsuperscript{67}. Material from news outlets in different countries/regions can be part of triangulation and also helps with understanding how a conflict has been depicted and understood in that context. They could for example describe how The United States understood the protests in 2017, by examining how or why the news are told.

Research papers have probably used and evaluated all these different types of sources already. However, how, when, why, and by whom the research has been written, is still relevant. The analyses and findings are harder to confirm, since it can be the first one made. How the research uses source materials and discusses source evaluation combined with looking at who and why it has been made, determines if the research is useful or not.

Lastly, as much information as possible will be confirmed through additional sources or even triangulation. The events are well covered in both the news and partially in the research. This will allow for verification of numbers, information, attitudes amongst other things.

\textbf{4.4 Validity and replication}

Research becomes valid through a correct use of concepts, logical argumentations and analyses, and reliability according to Esaiasson et.al\textsuperscript{68}. Validity can be understood as the question “are we studying what we aim to study?”\textsuperscript{68}. To achieve this, one must be mindful of sources used, the correct meaning of concepts and making an

\textsuperscript{66} Dulić (2011 p. 42)  
\textsuperscript{67} Dulić (2011 p. 39)  
\textsuperscript{68} Esaiasson et.al (2017 p. 58)
understandable argumentation for one’s analysis. Esaiasson et al also mentions internal and external validity, which encompasses whether the analyzes of limited observations are well-founded and logical, and if they are applicable in other situations. Single country studies do have the benefit of providing in depth and contextual analyses and understandings. This however is at the cost of wider applicable generalizations, mentioned as a part of validity. The provided issue is managed in this paper, by using the widespread Rentier State Theory, and increasing the number of observations. A small number of observations would be one or two events of demonstrations. Instead, this paper studies waves or cycles of demonstrations as well as the participating groups, chants and so forth. The validity of this research is improved by increasing the numbers of observations, providing widely applicable conclusions via Rentier State Theory, avoiding systematical errors, describing concepts thoroughly and using a correct and precise language.

Because of this research being made when the demonstrations from 2022 are ongoing, someone who replicates this research later in time, can find other conclusions. This is also a possibility if someone includes the demonstrations of 2009 or 2019 as an analytical concept rather than as important parts of the context, as in this paper. The years have knowingly not been included in this paper, as argued above. This exclusion is necessary and has been made with the goal of balance and validity. Nonetheless, more information does always give the possibility of new conclusions. Because of the practicable limitations, and the argumentation above of the best method to use in this case, this paper will continue its case study with two analytical concepts and through the Rentier State Theory.

4.5 Analytical framework
All information will be processed using the previous explained analytical framework. To be able to structure the information, find patterns or similarities each wave of demonstration will be analyzed based on this framework. The choice of years has been discussed in previous paragraphs and each concept is based on what has been

69 Esaiasson et al (2017 p. 58)
70 Esaiasson et al (2017 p. 59)
71 Landman & Carvalho (2017 p. 94)
seen as prominent factors in each wave of demonstrations. Both demonstrations started the year that they are labeled after but proceeded into the following year. The two waves of demonstrations will be referred to based upon the year they started, and not to both years in which they took place. This gives that this paper studies the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022, not 2017/2018 and 2022/2023. When necessary, a more exact date will be used. This way of referring to each wave is to keep the language consistent and the analyses easy to understand.

Below is a visual representation of the analytical framework.

![Analytical Framework](image)

The two waves of demonstrations are individual concepts and has motives and strategies that will be analyzed into smaller parts. Those will be seen through the rentier state theory which gives discussion and thereafter a conclusion.
4. Analysis

This analysis will describe what happened during the 2017 and 2022 demonstrations, highlighting the motives and strategies by investigating what slogans were chanted, who participated and where the protests occurred amongst other things. This is to give concrete happenings and fact about the periods to enable the discussion of each demonstration based on the Rentier State Theory in the next chapter.

5.1 Socio economic factors during the demonstrations in 2017

In late December 2017 people gathered in protests, on the streets of Iran’s second largest city, Mashhad, chanting and expressing their frustration. This would continue into the first month of the new year, before the regime violently silenced the chants. Today these main demonstrations are known as the Dey protests, referring to the Iranian month in which they occurred. They, together with other demonstrations occurring almost simultaneously, are seen as part of, and climax of a revolutionary process that has been going on for a long time.

It is described by several scholars that the protests began as a political act against the then President Hassan Rouhani, staged by his opponent, the presidential candidate that lost the election the same year: Hojjat ol Eslam Ebrahim Raisi and his father-in-law and fellow politician Alam ol Hoda. They had the power and connections in eastern Iran to mobilize people and stage a demonstration against the President Rouhani. However, they soon lost control of the people and the demonstrations spread into nearly 100 cities of Iran, and the chants targeted not only the president, but also the religious regime. The latest presidential election had been held earlier in 2017 and Rouhani’s second win was a landslide.

5.1.1 The economic hardships as a cause

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72 Said & Amir (2018 p. 1)
73 Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 6)
74 Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 5 & 8)
75 Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 7)
76 Said & Amir (2018 p. 3)
77 Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 6)
78 Britannica (2023)
The motives for the rapid spreading demonstrations, were mainly about the socioeconomic and economic situation. This can be seen in a number of examples. During 2017 the Gross domestic product (GDP) was increasing, and inflation relatively low\textsuperscript{79}. Even if this often is a positive for a country, it created economical complaints that was addressed in the demonstrations\textsuperscript{80}. Mainly the food prices were addressed. The egg prices increased with 50\% only a few days before the protest\textsuperscript{81}. Iran had previously had subsidies that lowered the food prices, but they were ended as a way of balancing the budget and resulted in the skyrocketing prices\textsuperscript{82}. It became the last straw for many people since increasing food prices had been a problem for many years\textsuperscript{83}.

Additionally, President Rouhani released a budget mid-December which created reactions over the increased fuel prices and decreased cash payouts to the civilians. The people did not want to have less money to spend and increased costs at the same time. Many Iranians already had problems with their economy because of previous economical scandals where presidents had benefited the elites\textsuperscript{84}. Money was also spent on international interests of the regime, which was not appreciated by the people\textsuperscript{85}. Vast amounts of money were spent on interventions in other countries, where the Iranian regime supported Hizbolla and islamists in Gaza amongst others. One example of the civilian resentment of these interventions is the students that made actions protesting the Iranian intervention that was supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime in the Syrian war\textsuperscript{86}. Many were angry about the money going to international investments or conflicts and not the people of the country\textsuperscript{87}.

Lastly the budget and the price changes were details of a frustration towards the improper use of oil revenues and monetary distribution. The GDP was increasing, as

\textsuperscript{79} Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{80} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{81} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{82} Said & Amir (2018)
\textsuperscript{83} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{84} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{85} Ghasseminejad et. al (2020 p.149)
\textsuperscript{86} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 15)
\textsuperscript{87} Ghasseminejad et. al (2020 p. 149)
mentioned partly because of the increased oil trade under Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also called JCPOA (an agreement between Iran, EU, the US amongst others, about the nuclear program in Iran with the goal of hindering nuclear weapons using trade and eased sanctions as tools\textsuperscript{88}), but this benefitted the groups with high income or much power as well as funding the previous mentioned international interventions\textsuperscript{89}. In the meantime, monetary inequalities were growing which was seen mainly in smaller cities\textsuperscript{90}. An example of this is the religious city Qom where people felt the difference between classes increasing. The privileged got it increasingly better, which others saw as unjust and immoral\textsuperscript{91}.

5.1.2 Girls of Revolution Street
Two days prior to the protest in Mashhad, on 26 December 2017 and in the Iranian capital Tehran, a woman is climbing on top of a utility box. Her name is Vida Movahedi and she wears jeans and a sweatshirt instead of the required clothes. She takes off the mandatory headscarf, ties it to a stick and waves it like a white flag. Her action is seen and filmed by many on the busy street called Revolution Street, after the 1979 revolution. Her actions will be replicated by individual women in many places of Iran the following months\textsuperscript{92}. The hijab has been mandatory to women in Iran since 1989. Women shall cover both clothes and hair when out in public, with different types of hijabs (such as a chador and a maghnaeh) being sanctioned by the regime\textsuperscript{93}. In the Facebook-group “My Stealthy Freedom” Iranian women had posted “secret” pictures of themselves taking of the headscarf. This Facebook-group has gained both support of US politicians and critique for their focus on western ideals and making tropes of the middle eastern culture\textsuperscript{94}. However, within the group the hashtag #WhiteWednesday was created. This was a campaign for women to wear white headscarves on Wednesdays to protests towards the mandatory hijab. This was most likely an inspiration for Movahedi and the following protesters that got called

\textsuperscript{88} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{89} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)
\textsuperscript{90} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 11)
\textsuperscript{91} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 12)
\textsuperscript{92} Ranjbar (2021, p. 347)
\textsuperscript{93} Ranjbar (2021, p. 359)
\textsuperscript{94} Ranjbar (2021, p. 353)
the Girls of Revolutions Street\textsuperscript{95}. An important but often missed detail of Girls of Revolution Street was that even religious women who wore hijabs voluntarily supported the actions. One important figure of the movement is an unidentified woman in the city Mashhad who wore the facial veil \textit{pichih} and a \textit{chador} over her clothes, covering herself but still waving a scarf from a utility box\textsuperscript{96}. After the protests the utility boxes in Tehran were changed – triangular shapes were added on top of them, as a way of hindering people standing on them and thereby hinder further protests\textsuperscript{97}.

\textbf{5.1.3 Division within demonstrations}

The previous motives, money distribution, budget changes and increased food prices appealed to many of the protester. In addition, there were several causes that were supported by subgroups of protestors, The Girls of Revolution Street being one of them. This is examples of how the protests in 2017 gathered new groups of people, conservatives and liberals and even practicing Muslims opposed the religious regime\textsuperscript{98}. This was new, since the 2009 Green Movement mainly gathered people from the richer middle class in cities.

The different groups were not necessarily against each other, but not unified either. For instance, both young students and workers protested, but one for their right of good wages, the other to get a job after their graduation\textsuperscript{99}. The actions against the regime and its laws, happened at the same time, sometimes in the same places and can be seen as a reaction to partly the same conditions, but was expressed in different ways\textsuperscript{100}. The most common motives of 2017 were the economics, Iranian involvement in international affairs and conflicts, about replacing the regime with the former shah, and to end corruption and marginalization of minorities\textsuperscript{101}.

\textsuperscript{95} Ranjbar (2021, p. 360)
\textsuperscript{96} Ranjbar (2021, p. 361)
\textsuperscript{97} Sveriges Radio (2022)
\textsuperscript{98} Ranjbar (2021, p. 361)
\textsuperscript{99} Bayat (2023 p. 23)
\textsuperscript{100} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 18)
\textsuperscript{101} Said & Amir (2018 p. 5)
5.1.4 Demonstrations, chants, and different strategies

In 2017 people from many different socioeconomical groups were involved, both women and men, students, workers, middle class, poor, religious, and nonreligious. A problem with this was the segregation between the groups, as previously mentioned\textsuperscript{102}. The different people involved is reflected in the places where demonstrations occurred. The places had evolved since the demonstrations of 2009. Now both big and small, east, and west of Iran and more liberal cities as Tehran or religious cities as Qom and the economic hub Mashhad had demonstrations\textsuperscript{103}. Qom and Mashhad are, as opposed to Tehran, also often seen as cities supporting the regime\textsuperscript{104}. Mashhad has also been described as a city identical to the entire country\textsuperscript{105}. The smaller cities with their middle-class poor were the ones who were driving the demonstrations\textsuperscript{106}.

One additional thing that was new in 2017 is important to observe: except from the common phrase “death to the president/dictator/Khamenei”, several new chants were heard\textsuperscript{107}. There were different kinds of chants that could be heard during the demonstrations, according to Ali Fathollah-Nejad in his paper “The Islamic Republic of Iran Four Decades On: The 2017/18 Protests Amid a Triple Crisis”\textsuperscript{108}. He mentions slogans against firstly economic injustice, secondly, critique towards the regime and lastly against the international interventions affecting the domestic shortcomings\textsuperscript{109}. In the religious towns chants about reinstating the old shah were heard the first time but spread to many of the demonstrations\textsuperscript{110}. This has been explained as a way of scaring the ruling regime. Some may want the old shah back, but the chant is mainly a threat, showing the regime that there are alternative rulers\textsuperscript{111}. The critique against the regime was also visible through chants about how the regime had turned Islam

\textsuperscript{102} Bayat (2023 p. 23)
\textsuperscript{103} Ranjbar (2021, p. 358) & Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 11)
\textsuperscript{104} Said & Amir (2018 p. 4)
\textsuperscript{105} Ranjbar (2021, p. 357)
\textsuperscript{106} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 6)
\textsuperscript{107} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 12-13)
\textsuperscript{108} Fathollah-Nejad (2020)
\textsuperscript{109} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 9)
\textsuperscript{110} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 12)
\textsuperscript{111} Said & Amir (2018 p. 3)
into an oppressing tool\textsuperscript{112}. This is similar to, but not the same as the actions of the Girls of revolution street. The chants about the international interventions mentioned mainly the Russian use of Iranian airbases and withdrawing from Syria. These slogans were said to be most common in the more unemployed regions\textsuperscript{113}.

5.1.5 Violence and reforms, the regime’s answer

During the demonstrations in 2017 it was evident that the regime was unwilling to implement meaningful reforms\textsuperscript{114}. The corruption and high numbers of unemployment was not dealt with, and the environmental struggles was partially but not sufficiently handled with\textsuperscript{115}. The violent treatment, the deep routed grievances and the lack of meaningful reforms are part of why the 2017 demonstrations are seen as the beginning of the end\textsuperscript{116}. The events did however die down quickly sometime in January 2018\textsuperscript{117}. The regime easily struck down on many demonstrations with their police forces\textsuperscript{118}. With that they broke the wave or hindered the amount of protest to increase. However, actions, turbulence amongst other things, has happened a lot since then, especially in 2019 when huge demonstrations were held over gas prices\textsuperscript{119}. A key to the reoccurring demonstrations after 2017, and a lesson from previous demonstrations, is the lack of a prominent leader, and a flat structure of the leadership. This makes it harder to hamper the demonstrations by hindering its leader and benefits smaller, unplanned demonstrations to occur\textsuperscript{120}. The benefits of them have been describes as collective, but the costs are personal\textsuperscript{121}.

The union within the regime was strong, even the moderates were against the demonstrations becoming riots. Only the youngest inside the reformist branch

\textsuperscript{112} Said & Amir (2018 p. 12)
\textsuperscript{113} Said & Amir (2018 p. 5)
\textsuperscript{114} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 5)
\textsuperscript{115} Fathollah-Nejad (2020)
\textsuperscript{116} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 7)
\textsuperscript{117} Golkar (2018 p. 1)
\textsuperscript{118} Golkar (2018 p. 1)
\textsuperscript{119} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 18)
\textsuperscript{120} Ghasseminejad et. al (2020 p. 151)
\textsuperscript{121} Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 4)
showed some criticism against their own party and supported the Dey protests\textsuperscript{122}. American president Donald Trump used the protest as proof of working sanctions\textsuperscript{123}.

5.2 Perseverance but lack of leadership in the 2022 demonstrations
16 September 2022 was the day that the latest wave of demonstrations began in Iran. Mahsa Amini, with the Kurdish name Jina, was killed by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Guidance Patrol (also known as the “Morality police”) while in custody for the crime of wearing her hijab in an unproper way\textsuperscript{124}. The death sparked outrage amongst people and demonstrations began in her hometown, the Kurdish city Saqqez and soon spread to Tehran and large parts of the country\textsuperscript{125}. Amini was neither the first nor last to die in police custody in Iran, but when the picture and story of her spread, people recognized how she could have been themselves or someone in their family\textsuperscript{126}.

5.2.1 Women’s rights as the spark
Even though Amini was the spark for the demonstration, grievance was building amongst the people prior to September 2022. The dust had never fully settled since the demonstrations in 2017, which as mentioned, flared up with even greater demonstrations 2019 over skyrocketing gas prices\textsuperscript{127}. Small protests against the compulsory hijab were also ongoing, which brought further attention to the cause of Amini being in custody\textsuperscript{128}. The COVID-19-pandemic was difficult for many countries to handle. In Iran people were disappointed and frustrated with the regime. Hardships with testing, lockdowns, vaccination and banning of western vaccines were seen by the people as problems caused by the ideology-driven regime\textsuperscript{129}.

Much of the grievance was related to the economy and the JCPOA, the agreement on trade between Iran, the US, and other countries as long Iran handled their uranium correctly. When it was installed in 2015 it led to lessened sanctions and an increased

\textsuperscript{122} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 15)
\textsuperscript{123} Jones & Newlee (2019)
\textsuperscript{124} Bayat (2023 p. 19)
\textsuperscript{125} Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 2)
\textsuperscript{126} Rouhi (2022 p. 193)
\textsuperscript{127} Bayat (2023 p. 23)
\textsuperscript{128} Bayat (2023 p. 22)
\textsuperscript{129} Rouhi (2022 p. 193)
GDP in Iran with more revenue from the oil trade. People in Iran hoped JCPOA would lead to economic and social developments, and better relations to Europe and the US. However, when President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the deal in 2018, it became impossible for many countries to continue the trade with Iran even if they tried. As anticipated the inflation did go from 8% to reach 34% in 2021. The hope of improvement due to JCPOA, faltered amongst Iranian citizens when President Trump withdrew from the agreement and the following President Biden did not reinstall it. Without the treaty, reforms were less likely to go through because of sanctions that were reinstated and hindered cooperation with the world. Financial challenges in Iran are not merely because of international sanctions, but their effects are substantial. Since the sanctions from the Obama administration through President Biden, eight million people in Iran have gone from being middle-class to being lower middle-class and the poverty in rural areas has doubled since 2010. A resent event in this decrease are the economic hardships amongst civilians due to the cut in subsidies on food as an effect of the Russian war against Ukraine, in which Iran supports Russia with drones.

5.2.2 Electoral frauds and lost hope

In 2020, 2021 and 2022 it was time for the people of Iran to vote. The first election was to the Islamic Consultative Assembly. It became an election marked by discontent and COVID-19. Two days prior to the referendum, Iran had their first official deaths by the virus, and many stayed at home or cast a blank vote. The guardian council had previous to the election disqualified over 7,000 reformist or centrist candidate to ensure the intended outcome – a hardline cabinet, benefiting the supreme leader Khamenei. The following elections, the hardliners tightened their grip, and the election seems to be increasingly rigged, mainly through the

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130 Rouhi (2022 p. 191)
131 Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 26)
132 Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 22)
133 Rouhi (2022 p. 191)
134 Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 22)
135 Britannica (2023) & Rouhi (2022 p. 192)
136 Britannica (2023)
disqualifications of candidates\textsuperscript{137}. Elections had previously given hope to the people in Iran, but this changed with the election of 2021\textsuperscript{138}.

With the economic hardships one could believe the people to be eager to vote for the president in 2021. Despite this, the election got the lowest voter turnout since the Islamic revolution 1979\textsuperscript{139}. The parliament of hardliners once again hindered reformists and relative hardliners from running as candidate\textsuperscript{140}. This was in theory nothing new, but in previous elections more diversity had been allowed giving the illusion of a freer choice. Or as Mahsa Rouhi describes it in her article “Woman, Life, Freedom in Iran”: “The Islamic Republic made clear that the optics of democracy no longer mattered.”\textsuperscript{141}.

Between 2017 and 2022 a new generation was forming in Iran. 63\% of the population are under 40 years of age, meaning, being born after the Islamic revolution\textsuperscript{142}. Those who were born around 1979 grew up with uncertainties caused by the revolution and the hardships during the Iran-Iraq war. This generation is called the Burnt Generation because they’re daunted by the hardships of a revolution and had a hard time believing in the possibility of demonstrations giving reform after the failures of the Green Revolution 2009\textsuperscript{143}. Their children however were raised and educated by their parents and have views on life, work, and relationships different from the regime’s\textsuperscript{144}. This new and younger generation was raised seeing mainly the 2017 demonstrations, living through the pandemic, and on the internet therefore seeing other parts of the world easier than their parents. They are now the ones pushing the ongoing demonstrations\textsuperscript{145}. Asef Bayat describes this as the new generation is inheriting the mantle, in his text “Is Iran on the Verge of Another Revolution?”\textsuperscript{146}.

\textsuperscript{137} Bayat (2023 p. 20)
\textsuperscript{138} Rouhi (2022 p. 192)
\textsuperscript{139} Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 22)
\textsuperscript{140} Bayat (2023 p. 20)
\textsuperscript{141} Rouhi (2022 p. 192)
\textsuperscript{142} Parsi (2023)
\textsuperscript{143} Rouhi (2022 p. 189)
\textsuperscript{144} Parsi (2023)
\textsuperscript{145} Rouhi (2022 p. 193–194)
\textsuperscript{146} Bayat (2023 p. 22)
5.2.3 Reappearance of people and chants

When it come to the use of chants, we see the once again reoccurring “Death to the president/dictator/Khamenei”. This chant requires change without pleading to any reformist party or other\textsuperscript{147}. However, a new chant is the most prominent: “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” in Kurdish or “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” in Persian which translates “Woman, Life, Freedom”. These words have become a mutual slogan that every protester identifies or acts upon\textsuperscript{148}. In other words, the unity is more prominent than the differences between groups\textsuperscript{149}. This is the case even though a wider range of socioeconomic groups attend and support the movement. The first example is the LGBTQ+ people whom for the first time are both open with their identities and are as a group taking a stand with the protests\textsuperscript{150}. A second example is the commitment within the Kurdish area, as well as the participation of Baluchis, Fars and other ethnic or religious minorities\textsuperscript{151}. A third sign of unity is how widespread the action of taking of headscarves has become. The actions are done by many and supported further by both secular and religious people, woman, and men\textsuperscript{152}. Lastly, both big and small cities, religious or not, has had demonstration and during the first weeks after the killing of Amini circa 1200 demonstrations were held in over 100 cities\textsuperscript{153}.

Yet again, the leadership and structure of the ongoing demonstrations are flat. The demonstrations occur without long times of planning, and without a prominent leader which is said to make it hard for the regime to forestall or silencing the events by bringing down their leader\textsuperscript{154}. The regime has also banned some websites and limited the use of internet to hinder demonstrators from communication and sending information to the diaspora and the outside world\textsuperscript{155}. The lack of leadership hinders the demonstrations from having a clear alternative than the regime, which hinders or makes a revolution complicated but helps avoiding the regime\textsuperscript{156}. Mahsa Rouhi

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\textsuperscript{147} Parsi (2023)
\textsuperscript{148} Bayat (2023 p. 24)
\textsuperscript{149} Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 9)
\textsuperscript{150} Kalbasi Isfahani (2023)
\textsuperscript{151} Bayat (2023 p. 24)
\textsuperscript{152} Bayat (2023 p. 23)
\textsuperscript{153} Bayat (2023 p. 24)
\textsuperscript{154} Bayat (2023 p. 28)
\textsuperscript{155} Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 8)
\textsuperscript{156} Bayat (2023 p. 28)
discusses this problem in her text “Woman, Life, Freedom in Iran” and points to the possibility that the longevity of the demonstrations gives them time to plan and structure both a revolt and the leadership\textsuperscript{157}.

\textbf{5.2.4 Gassing of schoolgirls and increased violence}

The ongoing protests have continued for long, and the regime has not been able to silence the demonstrations despite using more violent techniques\textsuperscript{158}. The number of executions has simultaneously increased severely in Iran\textsuperscript{159}. The regime convicts the executions due to crimes that not always have to do with the demonstration, and they are most likely used by the regime as a way of showing their strength and silence people by fear\textsuperscript{160}. Another occurrence has been gassing of schoolgirls in their classrooms. The regime views it as actions made by religious extremist, whilst activists accuse the regime\textsuperscript{161}. The brutality against the protesters is fueling their anger, rather than silencing them\textsuperscript{162}.

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\textsuperscript{157} Rouhi (2022 p. 194)
\textsuperscript{158} Landguiden (2023)
\textsuperscript{159} Human Rights Watch (2023)
\textsuperscript{160} Human Rights Watch (2023)
\textsuperscript{161} Tawfieeq & Heather (2023)
\textsuperscript{162} Rouhi (2022 p. 194)
5. Discussion

For this chapter the previous analysis of the two demonstrations will be discussed based on the Rentier State Theory. Similarities, differences in purpose, motives, strategies, and additional important findings will be discussed.

6.1 The rentier state Iran

In Rentier State Theory the focus is mainly on the economy of the country which in the case of Iran is built on the oil revenues\(^\text{163}\). This makes it evident that Iran still fulfills one main characteristic of a rentier state, namely basing the economy on external rents, including oil revenues\(^\text{164}\). As mentioned earlier, the distribution of money and wealth is characteristic to the rentier state. The money is produced by few, and consumed by many, mainly the elite, without benefitting the entire population\(^\text{165}\). When looking at Iran, we can presume this structure as well. The oil revenue is created by a relatively smaller group of workers compared to the revenue and the number of people who consume it\(^\text{166}\). The consequences of this have been discussed earlier in this paper, with demonstrators demanding increased salaries, increased poverty, and critique against the withdrawal of government payouts\(^\text{167}\). The governmental payouts to the majority of the people in a rentier state differ from the subsidies given because of unemployment or sickness by a production state. The Iranian regime adjusted the salaries in October 2022 as a way of pleasing the civilians and lessening the grievances in the demonstrations\(^\text{168}\). This can be seen as a Rentier State tool, with salaries and payouts as a way of “buying off” and appeasing the riots\(^\text{169}\). Bigger and more meaningful reforms have previously not been done, and problems such as corruption persist\(^\text{170}\).

\(^{163}\) Benli Altunişik (2014)  
\(^{164}\) Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 23)  
\(^{165}\) Beblawi (1987 p. 386)  
\(^{166}\) Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 21)  
\(^{167}\) Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 10)  
\(^{168}\) Bayat (2023 p. 27)  
\(^{169}\) Beblawi (1987 p. 392)  
\(^{170}\) Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 5)
6.2 JCPOA and international sanctions

Looking at recent years we also see how the Iranian economy is affected by the JCPOA. When the agreement was concluded, people standing both within and outside Iran hoped it would lead to a diversified economy and thereby democratic improvements\textsuperscript{171}. The GDP increased, but Iran stayed in the rentier structure and the elite kept accumulating wealth\textsuperscript{172}. When former American president Donald Trump made the United States withdraw from the agreement, the Iranian economy became even more strained. The sanctions that followed limited the income from both oil and the trade of other goods to or from Iran\textsuperscript{173}. This additionally showed the dependency of oil revenue in Iran and how distorted the economic distribution was. The state limited the payouts and the inflation skyrocketed and with that the numbers of low income and poor people increased in Iran\textsuperscript{174}. This development and its consequences resemble the situation where a rentier state becomes a failed state, as previously mentioned\textsuperscript{175}. However, that is not the subject of this analysis and will therefore not be discussed further.

When looking beyond the economy, and to the accountability between the rentier state and the civilians, interesting findings are made. The Iranian regime seems to lack in trust from the civilians, which would explain the reoccurring demonstrations. This has probably happened for several reasons. The elections have previously been a tool for the regime of gaining accountability and trust from the civilians. This has, as previously shown, changed in recent years\textsuperscript{176}. Through elections with disqualified candidates and results that only could benefit the supreme leader Khamenei, the idea of general elections was impaired, and the accountability weakened. Furthermore, the way the regime has handled - or perhaps not handled - the environmental challenges is presumably a supplementary reason for the lack of trust\textsuperscript{177}. The increasing numbers of poor people that has been repeatedly mentioned, should be

\textsuperscript{171} Rouhi (2022 p. 191)
\textsuperscript{172} Ghasseminejad et al. (2020 p. 149)
\textsuperscript{173} Rouhi (2022 p. 191)
\textsuperscript{174} Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 22)
\textsuperscript{175} Schwarz (2008 p. 113)
\textsuperscript{176} Britannica (2023)
\textsuperscript{177} Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 27f)
another factor, as well as the lack of human rights for women, LGBTQ+ people and religious minorities amongst others\textsuperscript{178}. In a balanced rentier state, this lack of rights or accountability is not a big problem for the regime, since they can pay off the people and make them content or brutally silence any demonstrations\textsuperscript{179}. Though this method has worked to quell previous demonstrations it does not seem to be effective this time, given that the demonstrations are ongoing, despite executions, gassing of schoolgirls and police brutality as previously mentioned. President Raisi has blamed foreign actors for the events in the resent demonstrations and is thereby not trying to take responsibility for the regime’s actions\textsuperscript{180}.

\textbf{6.3 The Burnt Generation}

The accountability and trust towards the regime could possibly vary between the generations. The Burnt Generation are said to be afraid of the consequences of a revolution and has lived with the rentier mentality that leads one to believe that work does not necessarily mean payment or reward\textsuperscript{181}. For this reason, it is easy to understand if they are not keen on demonstrations or changes that do not come through economy and reforms\textsuperscript{182}. The younger generation, raised by their politically frustrated parents has also grown up with (sometimes limited) Internet and has other expectations on human rights\textsuperscript{183}. Additionally, this generation has not yet fully joined the workforce so the rentier mentality (work does not equal reward) may not have kicked in at this time. Their incentive to fight for the wanted change may therefore be larger which could explain why they are the ones who push the demonstrations onwards, endorsed by their older generations\textsuperscript{184}.

\textbf{6.4 International playing field}

A few more things can be noted about the demonstrations and Rentier State Theory. The sanctions have affected the Iranian economy substantially\textsuperscript{185}. Even if they are

\textsuperscript{178}\textsuperscript{Kalbasi Isfahani (2023)}
\textsuperscript{179}\textsuperscript{Herb (2005 p. 298)}
\textsuperscript{180}\textsuperscript{Britannica (2023)}
\textsuperscript{181}\textsuperscript{Rouhi (2022 p. 194) & Beblawi (1987 p. 385)}
\textsuperscript{182}\textsuperscript{Rouhi (2022 p. 190-191)}
\textsuperscript{183}\textsuperscript{Bayat (2023 p. 25) & Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 8)}
\textsuperscript{184}\textsuperscript{Bayat (2023 p. 24-25)}
\textsuperscript{185}\textsuperscript{Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023 p. 22)}
not the sole reason for the economic hardships, Iran seems to make an effort to avoid them. As part of their international intervention, Iran and Russia have started building trade routes around the subventions to increase trading opportunities. According to Herb the democracy in the region is an important part for a rentier state to develop more democratic structures. Since there are few democracies around Iran, and the country is affected by surrounding conflicts, this can be an additional explanation to why the increased GDP didn’t bring democratization. An evident problem is thus the lack of effort towards a more balanced economy, and the excessive spendings on security, censorship, international undertakings, and surveillance.

6.5 The leadership and violence
As mentioned, the structures of the 2022 demonstrations lack a clear leader. This has benefited the movement with big demonstrations quickly being organized and appearing. This has in turn made it hard for the regime to stop them since they don’t know when and where they were happening. The efficient way of silencing a demonstration by capturing their leader has not been possible. However, the lack of leadership and a clear alternative to the regime makes it harder to bring the government down, and the many hardships makes it difficult to gain the energy and organization needed for a revolution. Perhaps this would be easier if people within the regime joined the demonstrations. During 2017 a small number within the regime were partly supporting the Dey protests, but not sufficiently many or strong enough to undermine the leadership.

The last point to be made about the rentier state theory is how and whom it affects. Because of the increasing numbers of both people and socioeconomic, religious, or ethnic groups who join the demonstrations, are the grievances and hardships caused by the downside of rentier states, seemingly either increasing or affecting more

\[\text{References:}\]
186 Tirone & Motevalli (2022)
187 Herb (2005 p. 311)
188 Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 1)
189 Ghasseminejad et. al (2020 p. 149) & Britannica (2023)
190 Bayat (2023 p. 28)
191 Bayat (2023 p. 28) & Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023)
192 Fathollah-Nejad (2020 p. 16)
people\textsuperscript{193}. How people have united under one shared chant, is a sign of the same development, especially since not only women use the chant “woman, life, freedom”\textsuperscript{194}. Another sign of this cohesiveness is how taking of the headscarves has become a unifying symbol and action between both religious and not\textsuperscript{195}. If the hardships of a rentier state have affected more people, or in a more severe way, is difficult to determine, but it seems to have brought determination and the mentioned union. The increased level of violence used by the regime, with gassings and executions shows how it’s harder for the regime to buy off their citizens\textsuperscript{196}. In addition, the perseverance of the people continuing the demonstrations still, shows how the trust is lacking and the grievances increasing\textsuperscript{197}.

\textsuperscript{193}Bayat (2023 p. 24)
\textsuperscript{194}Jones & Newlee (2019 p. 9)
\textsuperscript{195}Bayat (2023 p. 23)
\textsuperscript{196}Human Rights Watch (2023)
\textsuperscript{197}Landguiden (2023)
6. Conclusions

For the last chapter, the conclusions will be drawn. The analytical questions will be answered, both about similarities, differences, motives, and strategies and thereafter the greater question relating to the Rentier State theory. Thereafter some further research and personal reflections will be presented.

The analytical questions were the following:

1. What are the motives and strategies of the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022?
2. What are the most prominent similarities and differences between the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022?
3. How can each year’s motives, strategies, and their shared differences and similarities be explained by the Rentier State Theory?

7.1 Motives and strategies of the demonstrations

Beginning with the motives and strategies of the demonstrations, some conclusions can be drawn. The demonstrations of 2017 had a slightly different motive compared with the ongoing demonstrations. The motive today is more focused on revolt or change of the regime instead of reforms. A possible explanation of the difference can be the younger generation who are more prone to revolt instead of reforms previously preferred by the Burnt Generation. It is evident that today’s demonstrations have a greater focus on human rights for women, LGBTIQ+ people and others. In 2017 the motives were many and different depending on which group you asked. Today’s demonstrations are more unified in their goals. One motive that appears to be more prominent in the 2017 demonstrations are the environmental struggles. The environmental struggles are mentioned in relation to the ongoing demonstrations as well, but more as a reason of disappointment than motive or goal. The environmental problems are one of several explanation to why the regime is unsuccessful, but solutions to the hardships are not the motives of the demonstrations, the change of regime rather is.

The strategies used to reach previously mentioned motives are of course mainly the demonstrations in the streets with different chants. Some of those are similar between the two waves of demonstrations mainly the “death to the dictator/ president/
Khamenei”. The primary chant of 2022 was not an equally big part of 2017. The words “Woman, Life, Freedom” gained wider dissemination after the death of Amini and are unifying many people from all over Iran. An additional similarity in the strategies are the flat structures and lack of a prominent leader. However, this has brought additional problems to the ongoing wave, because of its longevity. This could potentially result in a future political structure, not dependent on one singular prominent leader.

Two important differences in the strategies involves the regime. Their usual methods of violence and monetary incentives has not been enough to hinder the latest wave of demonstrations. They have therefore executed prisoners and executed schoolgirls significantly more this time. This forces the demonstrators to answer with strategies of information to the diaspora, ways of protecting the children and hindering as many arrests as possibly.

7.2 Prominent similarities and differences
Moving on to the second analytical questions and other similarities are found. Some of the people are the same as the last time, which is easy in this case, since the 2022 demonstrations has been shown to brings people from almost every social, political, ethnic, or religious group. The same can be said about the places where the demonstrations are held. It is mainly in the same places since the ongoing demonstrations are in more cities than 2017. Both the 2022 demonstrations as well as the 2017 were reactions and mainly the culminations of happenings in the previous months. Lastly are the underlying causes similar with economic grievances etc., which alludes to the motives previously mentioned. However, the situations were of course not identical.

The differences are therefore in the details. The lates demonstrations have been going on for longer than the ones in 2017, even if they resulted in reoccurring smaller demonstrations now and then. It has also engaged additional groups of people compared to 2017. This difference is seen in which generation that leads the 2022 demonstrations. Many in the generations who leads them were not old enough to be doing so in 2017. As stated in the previous paragraph, the causes of the demonstrations were similar. The big difference however is the grievance over the
election leading up to the 2022 events, considering the fact they were said to be the first elections where the regime did not try to maintain the image of democracy.

Even if the chants were mainly the same, the information regarding if chants about the shah was used, are few. The title is probably a part of some kind of chant, but it is less likely to be a reoccurring theme since big parts of the ongoing demonstrations seems to have another goal than previous waves. Finally, if the 2022 demonstration has gained more international recognition or not is hard to determine as of the writing of this paper, even if it seems most likely to be the case because of the proportion and intensity of the protests. As of now, there is no completed research on the subject. It is also yet to be seen if the ongoing demonstrations results in any meaningful reform, or if they are similar to previous protests.

7.3 The impact of rentierism
The third analytical question focused on the use of Rentier State Theory. From the previous analysis and discussion, we can conclude that Iran has been a rentier state at the time of the two demonstrations, as others previously stated about the country as well. The problems that follow a rentier state are also many of the reasons to why the demonstrations have occurred. The economy struggles, the non-improving socioeconomics, poor management of environmental issues and the broadened political dissatisfactions, are all possible to connect with the Rentier State Theory. The motives and the increase of involved groups points to the fact that more people are negatively affected by the downsides of the rentier state. The theory also tells us that the balance must be upheld between the state and the civilians, and through this analysis, this balance seems to be wavering due to the increased economical hardships and extensive use of violence of the regime. It is in this paper, not possible to conclude if that is the case, whereas further research should be done on the subject.

7.4 A general conclusion
The similarities between the demonstrations of 2017 and 2022 are as have been shown, many and evident. From similar rentier state-related causes, to the same chants and cities. What has happened in Iran these last months are similar as the events of 2017, but greater. The numbers of people, of cities, and the union and
cooperation are greater, and the stakes are also greater for many people. 2017 was violent, but the numbers of executions and the violence in the ongoing demonstrations have exceeded those of six years ago. This shows that the determination seems to be greater as well. With the people acting in a new way, as a collective (not only having temporary connections), enduring the brutality of the regime and uniting under the same slogan, they seem to have greater stakes which they are not willing to lose. Most importantly, the people seem to have a greater goal with these demonstrations. In the wave of 2009, the goal was to reform the country into something better, in 2017 and the following protests the bar was raised, but the goal seemed to get the personal problems fixed and maybe end the regime. This time, the people are identifying with the chant “Woman, Life, Freedom”. This has given them a greater goal than the personal and the reformist ones from before. This is a goal that has a vision of not only what to do, but what is to come afterwards and even the smallest person in Iran is included. It is however important to note that the people demonstrating today are unified in the goal, but not in the way towards it. The choice between revolution or reform may be one of the difficulties without a leadership.

7.5 Further research & concluding words

The findings of this paper create more questions whereof several are interesting to study further. The effects of international interventions have been mentioned in both a good and negative way throughout this paper and the literature that has been studied to make it possible. The sanctions from the US for instance, has as mentioned affected the people tremendously. Interesting questions would be about which interventions or sanctions that are helping and in what way? Furthermore, would a study of how to successfully structure a revolution or demonstrations and their leadership, be both interesting and worthwhile. This also applies to the study of inherited grievances and generational changes of demonstrations etcetera. Mainly, the question whether Iran is a failed state rather than a rentier state is raised and should be investigated.

As concluding words, the demonstrations in Iran are in many ways extraordinary. They are a clear evolution of what has happen before in the country, and if not a revolution, a big step closer to changes of the leadership in the country. When that change comes and how it does, is not a question to answer for this paper, but when it happens, the impact it will have on the region is extremely interesting. However
interesting the effect will be and however intriguing the events develop, we, as always, must remember that there are people behind the letters. When studying demonstrations, revolutions, or democratic developments, what we study is people whom we shall be respectful towards. We study what the Iranian people fight for, “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi”.
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