

**IHSS Research Seminar Program 2023**

## **Questions for an Institutional History of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Filippo Benedetti (LUMSA/ACU)**

Co-chairs: Dr Kristie Flannery and Dr Killian Quigley

**Tuesday 3 October, 2-3pm AEDT**

To be held in room 460.3.01 and online via Teams

**Abstract:** When talking about “Islamic Republic” in Iran, many authors highlight the uniqueness of the 1979 Iranian Constitution. A peculiar product of a kind of Islamic constitutionalism made even more peculiar by its Shi’i feature, the 1979 Constitution of Iran has indeed shaped a complex institutional framework apparently unmatched by any constitutional model. At the top of the system is the Leader of the Revolution, acting as substitute of the twelfth Imam – who is the sole legitimate ruler according to “Twelver” Shi’ites, deemed to be in occultation since the 10<sup>th</sup> Century CE – and entrusted with capital constitutional and political prerogatives. Popular sovereignty and universal



*Mehdi Bazargan (standing) is appointed prime minister of Iran by Khomeini (L) in the hall of Alavi Madrasa, 4 February 1979. Source: [Wikipedia](#)*

suffrage are exercised mainly through parliamentary and presidential elections taking place every four years, though the political system is firmly controlled by religious institutions: not only the Leadership, but also the Council of Guardians – exercising a pervasive judicial review – and the Judiciary. Nevertheless, if uniqueness might be considered one structural feature of republican constitutionalism in Iran, conversely studying constitutional genealogies may help connect it to specific models. Firstly, the Leader is comparable to constitutional monarchs wherein they share analogous legitimacy, powers, and mandate. And secondly, the form of government of the Islamic Republic developed many characteristics ascribable to assembly regimes, or monistic parliamentary governments: a powerful Parliament facing a weak Executive; parliamentary confidence which is not counterbalanced by any power of dissolution of the Parliament; a Prime Ministership which is entirely a parliamentary rather than a presidential choice. The 1989 amendments and the death of Khomeini the same year profoundly reshaped this system, paving the way for the current sclerotisation of the regime – which is not only a political sclerotisation, but also an institutional one.

**Bio:** Filippo Benedetti holds a master's degree in international relations. Currently he is a Ph.D. candidate in Contemporary Humanism (LUMSA-ACU), and the topic of his research concerns the Islamic Republic of Iran. His main academic interests involve the religious dimension of political institutions – especially in the Arab and Islamic world –, the development of political institutions in Italy, and the historical relevance of legal entanglements from the West to the Middle East throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

