

## Seminar\*

Organized by:  
Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE)  
& Center of political researches of Sciences Po (CEVIPOF)

### Corruption as a Self-Reinforcing “Trap”: Implications for Reform Strategy

**Monday 8 April 2019**

12.30 - 2. pm

Sciences Po, Room Annick Percheron  
98 rue de l'Université, 75007 Paris

Corruption is widely believed to be a self-reinforcing phenomenon, in the sense that the incentive to engage in corrupt acts increases as corruption becomes more widespread in the relevant community. Leading scholars have argued that corruption's self-fulfilling property implies that incremental anticorruption reforms cannot be effective, and that the only way to escape a high-corruption equilibrium “trap” is through a “big bang” approach. This paper demonstrates that this widespread view is mistaken: After surveying the reasons corruption might be self-reinforcing (or in some cases self-limiting), the paper demonstrates that corruption's self-reinforcing property does not imply the necessity of a “big bang” approach to reform, and indeed may strengthen the case for pursuing sustained, cumulative incremental anticorruption reforms.

#### Speaker



**Matthew C. Stephenson**, Eli Goldston Professor of Law, Harvard Law School

Matthew Stephenson is Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, where he teaches administrative law, legislation and regulation, anti-corruption law, and political economy of public law. His research focuses on the application of positive political theory to public law, particularly in the areas of administrative procedure, anti-corruption, judicial institutions, and separation of powers. Prior to joining the Harvard Law School faculty, Professor Stephenson clerked for Senior Judge Stephen Williams on the D.C. Circuit and for Justice Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court. He received his J.D. and Ph.D. (political science) from Harvard in 2003, and his B.A. from Harvard College in 1997.

#### Collective Discussion

*\*Key Theme: Tensions in representative democracy*

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