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The New Regulatory Space: Reframing Democratic Governance by Frank Vibert

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Vibert, Frank. *The New Regulatory Space: Reframing Democratic Governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014. vi + 230 pages. Hardcover, \$110.00.

In this interdisciplinary text, Frank Vibert, a political economist, examines the adapting regulatory process; the role of government, market, and society in regulation; and the content of the ‘regulatory space.’ Vibert’s contribution is unique in that he explores how changes in authority impact the regulatory space. Vibert argues that the need to analyze the new regulatory space results from: the wide scope in which regulatory activities reach into all systems and sectors; the need to have a normative theoretical discussion of who should have authority and legitimacy to regulate in a democracy; and the pertinent evolution of collaborations, partnerships, and coordination we experience in outsourcing and privatizing governance with the need and regulation.

Traditionally, when we think of regulation, we see it as an “activity to alter or influence behavior through the promulgation and enforcement of rules of behaviour” (p. 13). In Vibert’s quest to examine the relationships that result from regulation, he also focuses primarily on the role of democratic governance. In this work, Vibert provides an explanation of how regulatory relationships have changed and continue to impact democratic governance. In the discussion of democratic governance and authority, Vibert acknowledges the importance of whose voice counts in making and imposing regulations, filling an important gap of applying representative democracy principles to regulatory policy-making. Traditionally, the regulatory space granted authority and decision making to elites, which sometimes resulted in coercive relationships; however, Vibert offers a new perspective to making the regulatory policy space more inclusive and representative.

Decision-making and imposing regulations in a fair manner are a task due to the “questions of competence” (p. 76). Typically, each individual involved in the process of governance and regulation would have knowledge to contribute to the process; however, Vibert acknowledges a major challenge in achieving democratic representation. He notes, “They [politicians] may be experts in reading the public mood but seen as not well able to make judgments on the substance of public policy where the substance is about economics or the market” (p. 76). A discussion of global political systems and their problematic approach to fiscal policy strengthens Vibert’s argument that politicians internationally, have substantial influence, discretion, and authority in regulating the economy, while an average citizens’ voice is overshadowed or restrained. However, when examining the regulatory space, “the challenge to the integrity of democratic politics is usually presented in terms of a challenge to the legitimacy of curtailing the policy reach of politics” (p. 88).

Another beneficial and universally relevant component of Vibert’s work is his recommendations for rethinking a modern constitution that can be useful in understanding the new regulatory space. To further support his recommendations of rethinking constitutional principles, Herbert Simon’s concept of satisficing could be applied once more.

In fact, Vibert provides an interesting discussion of political ideas and theoretical frameworks that are applicable to public policy, economics, and sociological ideas of representation and voice, making this work applicable to scholars and graduate students of many social sciences. Since regulations are imposed on all sectors, and involve a variety of different political and non-political actors, Vibert’s offering of a new regulatory space is relevant to many seeking to understand how regulations are made and imposed, as well as how the regulatory process could be improved to serve citizens in a democracy.

The contemporary approach of redefining regulatory space in an ever-changing society is important, and Vibert incorporates traditional theoretical frameworks to build a clear connection between authority and democratic governance. Major policy theories, such as punctuated equilibrium, bounded rationality, and incrementalism, are all applied throughout Vibert's definition of the new regulatory space, which effectively illustrates mainstream approaches to regulatory policy-making. Vibert's approach of redefining regulatory space is unique and an important contribution to his and others' fields of study.

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