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Confronting the classification problem: Toward a taxonomy of NGOs

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Abstract

Lack of consensus on how to define and classify nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has inhibited progress on both the theoretical and empirical fronts in the effort to better understand and facilitate the functioning of the NGO sector. This paper first reviews alternative definitions of NGOs and proposes some causes of the classification problem. The paper then outlines past efforts to classify NGOs and, based on this, presents a classification framework that focuses on two types of descriptors: essential and contingent. In concluding, implications of the proposed scheme for research and practice are discussed.



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