

Deloffre, Maryam Z., and Sigrid Quack, eds. *A Relational Approach to NGOs in Global Politics: Beyond Cooperation and Competition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. x + 320 pages. Hardcover, \$130.00

In *A Relational Approach to NGOs in Global Politics*, editors Maryam Z. Deloffre and Sigrid Quack bring together international relations and organizational sociology to push NGO scholarship in a fresh direction. Rather than treating NGOs as fixed entities defined by essence or mission, the collection emphasizes “NGOing”—the relational, iterative practices through which NGOs make claims, build legitimacy, and exercise influence within complex networks. The editors propose a nine-fold typology of interactions—ranging from divorcing and disregarding to brokering, cooperating, or merging—alongside a tripartite account of power (“power over,” “power to,” and “power with.”) This conceptual framing provides the intellectual backbone of the book, encouraging readers to see NGOs not as static actors, but as participants in dynamic, evolving webs of relationships.

The volume interrogates how NGO–NGO interactions shape agency, legitimacy, and governance across diverse domains: humanitarian crises, treaty processes, climate politics, national civic spaces, and organizational consolidation. Its central thesis is twofold: first, that NGO agency is constituted in and through interactions; second, that different interactional patterns systematically generate effects on identity, mobilization, legitimacy, and institutional ordering. By shifting the focus from organizations as units to organizations as relationally embedded, the book demonstrates how interactions themselves drive outcomes in global governance.

This collection’s strength lies in its rich empirical studies showing how NGO interactions shape agency and legitimacy. Carolei analyzes *Survival International v. WWF*, where conflict clarified Indigenous due-diligence standards, while Petropoulos highlights informal ties that

enabled refugee response coordination in Greece. Schmitz, Mitchell, and Chen reconceptualize NGO mergers as identity processes, and Reiners shows brokers' influence within CESC. Other chapters map Global South brokerage, NGO self-organization in Ethiopia, climate "super-networks," and meta-associations like AGNA and Forus. Appe and Borges Pinho examine Brazilian coalitions resisting restrictive laws. Collectively, these cases reveal interaction as central to NGO power and legitimacy.

Conceptually, the book makes a genuine contribution. By offering a nine-part repertoire of interactions, it gives scholars and practitioners a language to describe what NGOs actually do when they engage each other, as well as to anticipate potential effects on legitimacy and institutional order. The tripartite power framework similarly grounds abstract debates in observable practices while aligning with long-standing conversations in international relations.

Empirically, the cases are diverse, methodologically transparent, and analytically productive. They show, for example, how conflict can recalibrate standards (Carolei), how ties enable "power to" amid scarcity (Petropoulos), how consolidation must be legitimized relationally (Schmitz et al.), and how brokerage either broadens or entrenches access (Cheng et al.). The evidence is not only illustrative but also cumulative, building toward a relational account that has explanatory traction across issue areas.

The book's usefulness spans disciplines. International-relations scholars will see connections to transnational advocacy network (TAN) theory and debates on power. Organizational sociologists will appreciate the insights into meta-organizations and field-level ordering. Policy analysts and nonprofit managers will find practical guidance for coalition-building, coordination, and legitimacy-seeking under constrained conditions. Particularly notable is the "effects" framework—identity, mobilization, legitimacy, and ordering—which provides a

diagnostic tool for both researchers and practitioners to anticipate the consequences of different interaction strategies.

No volume is without limitations. Three stand out. First is the challenge of operationalizing the relational lens at scale. While the framework travels well in qualitative analysis, large-N testing remains difficult. Many chapters lean on UN co-attendance data or elite interviews; future studies could incorporate grant co-awards, co-authorship patterns, or multiplex social-media ties to reduce visibility bias and map causal pathways more rigorously.

Second is the need for deeper decolonial engagement. While the editors emphasize Global South perspectives and some chapters deliver, the structural realities of donor hierarchies, language regimes, and visa restrictions remain underexplored. More sustained attention to how relational practices reproduce or disrupt North–South asymmetries would strengthen the book’s critical edge.

Third, the emphasis on NGO–NGO ties sometimes sidelines how states and IGOs shape the interactional space—through funding modalities, accreditation rules, and legal frameworks. These structuring forces preconfigure which relational strategies are possible in the first place and thus deserve fuller consideration.

Still, these critiques point to research opportunities rather than fatal flaws. The book lays a strong foundation for mixed-methods agendas that combine network analysis with process tracing, for comparative designs across issue areas, and for design principles that foreground “power with” outcomes—such as shared authorship, rotating convenorships, or redistributing resources to peripheral actors.

A Relational Approach to NGOs in Global Politics succeeds in reimagining how we study NGOs: not as isolated organizations, but as relational actors embedded in complex fields

of interaction. By replacing static categories with dynamic interactions, the volume advances theoretical debates, grounds them in rich empirical cases, and points toward practical implications for coalition-building and governance. Although questions about measurement, decolonial grounding, and structural context remain, the book establishes a new benchmark. It is theoretically lucid, empirically grounded, and practically insightful—an essential resource for anyone seeking to understand or shape the relational politics of NGOs today.

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