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Political Dynamics and Strategies of the Pro-Plastic Advocacy Coalition in Brazil

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Abstract: This article analyzes the political dynamics and strategies of the hegemonic coalition advocating for the interests of Brazil's plastics value chain. This is a central issue in global debates on the causes of environmental crises and climate change. More specifically, the article examines this coalition's strategies, tactics, and narratives, using the pattern identified across 15 countries on five continents in the Changing Markets Foundation's report 'Talking Trash' as a reference. This qualitative study draws on secondary data from government reports, trade associations, civil society organizations, and academic studies to create a descriptive mapping of the coalition's key actors and the dominant interpretive frame in the plastics field. Thus, drawing on theoretical frameworks from public policy and the theory of strategic action fields (FLIGSTEIN and McADAM, 2012), the article examines how the strategic actions of the dominant coalition in the field. Advocating for the interests of Brazil's plastics value chain, how are configured and the extent to which the coalition's strategies, tactics, and narratives, which exhibit a consistent pattern across countries, shape the interpretive frame of the plastics field in Brazil.

Keywords: Plastics industry; strategic actions; tactics; advocacy coalitions.

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Introduction

The 'golden age' of capitalism (HOBSBAWM, 2007) can be understood as the 'age of plastics', insofar as the rise of large corporations in the twentieth century is closely intertwined with the highly intensive development of the plastics industry – an offshoot of the early twentieth-century petrochemical industry (MARQUES, 2019). For a long period, plastic was consistently seen as a 'modern and innovative product', an image grounded in a sociological convergence of values, ideas, and politico-institutional arrangements that structured the sector's interests.

The plastics monopoly, as conceptualized by Baumgartner and Jones (2009), is rooted in the strength and economic weight of the petrochemical industry, which is organized as a complex, far-reaching global value chain that includes sectors in which large corporations operate in a denationalized manner. Across different socioeconomic contexts, a range of positive images, ideas, and narratives about plastic use has been constructed, while the sector has simultaneously organized to advance its interests within national political systems through corporate lobbying, think tanks, corporations, and industry associations representing manufacturers and distributors. From the 1970s onward, in the era of financialized and oligopolistic capitalism (STREECK, 2014), the image of plastic began to deteriorate: today it is described as the "plastisphere" (ZALASIEWICZ et al., 2016, p.10) or as the "most ubiquitous waste on the planet" (GEYER et al., 2017; MARQUES, 2019, p. 206).

Plastic has maintained its economic dominance for decades, driven by the global power of an oligopolistic market, despite the work of the international environmental epistemic community[1] (HAAS, 1992), which has been establishing the link between plastic and climate (STOETT and VINCE, 2019; VILLARRUBIA-GÓMEZ et al., 2024). There is evidence linking climate change and marine plastic pollution to 'global (coral reef) bleaching' (FORD et al., 2022), as well as to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the entire life cycle of plastics (FORD et al., 2022; LINCOLN et al., 2022). Indeed, studies identify plastic as a central element of the 'triple planetary crisis', that is, a material contributing to the worsening of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem pollution (GRID-ARENDAL, 2023).

From a political perspective, the plastics field comprises coalitions of actors that advocate for plastics and others that oppose the plastics industry's interest, marked by ongoing conflict. Across the world, pro-plastic sectors respond to the scientific findings of environmental epistemic communities by developing narratives and forms

[1]An epistemic community is a network of expert professionals who share causal beliefs, normative principles, intersubjective understandings and knowledge, as well as standards of rationality and common discursive practices – in other words, shared methodological, epistemological, and ontological approaches to the production of scientific knowledge. In this sense, they also function as political actors, as they exercise authority grounded in politically relevant knowledge within a given domain or field of expertise (HAAS, 1992).

of resistance to defend their interests, as summarized in the report 'Talking Trash' (2020) by the international think tank Changing Markets Foundation[2]. The case study, conducted in fifteen countries across five continents, identified a consistent set of tactics used to promote the industry's interests. From this perspective, pro-plastic sectors respond to the plastic pollution crisis by weakening legislation and promoting solutions focused on the final stages of the value chain, thereby preserving the linear business model.

Against this backdrop, this study analyzes the political dynamics and strategies of the hegemonic coalition defending the interests of Brazil's plastics value chain. The study maps the public and private actors operating in the field, following Fligstein and McAdam (2012) conceptualization – both those supporting and those opposing plastics – as well as the strategies and tactics used by dominant actors. The study also analyzes the relationship between causal stories (STONE, 2012) linked to the field's interpretive frame) and the narrative tactics created by actors in the pro-plastic coalition. From this central objective, two more specific questions follow: Does the repertoire of strategic actions of the pro-plastic coalition in Brazil align with the global pattern identified in the report 'Talking Trash'? How can this repertoire be characterized in terms of how it operates and the political and social arenas it engages?

This analysis is based on interpretive phenomenology, an approach developed in public policy studies since the early 1990s within post-positivist frameworks (HOWLETT et al., 2015, p. 31), as well as in sociological theory. The article is grounded in the theory of strategic action fields (henceforth TSAF) developed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), as well as in analytical concepts from public policy scholarship, such as epistemic communities (HAAS, 1992), narrative (RADAELLI, 2006), and causal stories (STONE, 2012). According to this framework, sociopolitical context and the interplay between ideas and interests are central to understanding the political dynamics that structure economic hegemonies. In Brazil, few prior studies have provided robust evidence supporting the use of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) TSAF to analyze the strategies of the plastics industry, or examined the role of sociological dimensions in shaping ideational practices as forms of strategic action within a field (CANDIDO, 2016; CARVALHO, 2025; GONÇALVES-DIAS, 2009; PAGOTTO, 2019). This study contributes to this still-developing body of literature in Brazil.

The remainder of the article is organized into three sections. The first presents the theoretical framework and methodology. The second maps the key actors and outlines the interpretive frame underpinning the disputes over plastics in Brazil. The final section concludes.

[2]The Dutch foundation Changing Markets has, for three decades, supported campaigns that address environmental issues – such as plastic waste – by mobilizing civil society organizations (<https://changingmarkets.org/>).

Theoretical frameworks

The theory of strategic action fields developed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) is used to structure the analysis in this article for two reasons. First, as noted above, some studies have already opened up this line of analysis (CANDIDO, 2016; CARVALHO, 2025; GONÇALVES-DIAS, 2009; PAGOTTO, 2019). Second, this analysis engages with Fligstein's proposal (2001) to link structure and action, in contrast to the methodological individualism of rational choice theory. Through the concept of social skill as a "sociological micro-foundation", the author argues that "(...) [skilled] actors have to motivate others to cooperate. The ability to engage others in collective action is a social skill that proves pivotal to the construction and reproduction of local social orders" (FLIGSTEIN, 2001, pp. 105-106). Drawing on a 'symbolic interactionist and strategic view of action', the author develops an analytical framework that seeks to understand how collective identities motivate actors' actions. In this study, the field is understood as the 'territory' defined by the policy – that is, 'the plastic issue' – which encompasses collective actors in nested, interlinked processes, like a 'Russian doll'. Fields are interconnected both horizontally and vertically, and their boundaries are not fixed but shift depending on the issues under dispute. The local social order, as it is continually reproduced, reflects the structure of the plastics market, in which certain groups exercise economic and political hegemony.

Fligstein (2001) examines how skilled social actors, their resources, and the organization of the field are interconnected, formulating propositions that guide theoretical and empirical analysis and help explain the different positions actors occupy within a field. From this perspective, Fligstein and McAdam (2012, pp. 09–12) distinguish categories of shared understandings among actors interacting within the field. First, there is a general shared understanding among actors of what is at stake in the field, 'the general account of the terrain of the field' (BOURDIEU and WACQUANT, 1992). Second, actors in the field are perceived as holding different levels of power. Actors within each group can identify their allies, adversaries, and competitors, as they understand the positions these actors occupy within the field. Power asymmetries are recognized between groups of incumbents – who seek to maintain the 'status quo' of the field – and challengers. In this article, the dominant actors are the pro-plastic coalition (PPC), which is the focus of the analysis, while the challengers are the anti-plastic coalition (APC).

Third, actors share a set of understandings about the nature of the 'rules of the game' in the field. It refers to a culturally defined understanding of which forms of action and organization are considered legitimate and meaningful within the field (FLIGSTEIN and McADAM, 2012). Therefore, actors within the same group share an interpretive frame that gives meaning to and serves as a reference for the positions they occupy in the field. This article advances two propositions to examine the structural conditions that sustain stable rules and shape the distribution of positions within a field's power structure:

Proposition 01. Skilled social actors in incumbent groups in stable fields will use existing rules and resources to reproduce their power. Existing fields give incumbent actors a better chance of reproducing their advantage precisely because they imply an unequal distribution of rules and resources. If skilled strategic actors are attracted to positions of power in incumbent groups, their energy will be put toward playing the 'game' (FLIGSTEIN, 2001, p. 117).

Therefore, each group interprets the moves of others through its own perspectives, beliefs, and understandings. Dominant or incumbent actors act on the basis of a frame of reference that "encapsulates their view of the field, while dominated or challenger actors will have an 'oppositional' perspective. The reactions of more and less powerful actors to the actions of others thus reflect their social position in the field" (FLIGSTEIN and McADAM, 2012, p. 11). Socially skilled actors adjust their movements in relation to others to enhance or maintain their group's position within the field. Thus, following Fligstein (2001):

Proposition 02. is formulated as follows: "Skilled actors of dominant groups generally defend the *status quo*, even in a crisis", given that:

> [...] skilled strategic actors in dominant groups will begin in a crisis situation by trying to defend the *status quo*. This is for two reasons. First, it is difficult to distinguish a crisis that threatens the legitimacy of the whole field from a "normal" playing out of the "game". Skilled strategic actors respond to the actions of others in the field, either challengers or incumbents, by engaging in actions that have always worked to their advantage. Second, since these actions have always reinforced the position of the dominant groups, skilled actors will continue to use them. Therefore, skilled actors will manipulate the same symbols, identities, and tactics that have always proved successful in the past (FLIGSTEIN, 2001, p. 118)

Drawing on these propositions, it becomes clear that TSAF helps clarify how actors use different strategies at various stages in the formation of the field of structuring social orders (BARBALHO, 2014). Moreover, as the authors emphasize, TSAF highlights the role of political coalitions as the basis of social order in these fields and helps anticipate the actions of dominant actors (FLIGSTEIN and McADAM, 2012).

In light of this, this article examines the nature of the pro-plastic coalition, particularly the sharing of a collective identity, which is expressed in the coalition's capacity to formulate strategies to advance its interests across different arenas. It is assumed that groups sharing identities and interests may act within fields to exercise political control over other groups – that is, as coalitions. From this perspective, such actions are strategic and rely on social skills as defined by the TSAF authors. The strategic actions analyzed in this text refer, empirically, to activities in the legislative and judicial arenas, as well as to efforts carried out through think tanks and other channels, which are examined in Section 04.

In this article, we understand the coalition's interpretive frame as expressed in the narratives (RADAELLI, 2006) mobilized by its constituent actors, structured as causal stories – in the sense proposed by Stone (2012) – that is, as causal relationships mobilized by the actors to construct stories that support their interests. Here, following Radaelli (2006), narratives are understood as arguments produced by actors to influence public policy, not necessarily truthful, in contexts of ambiguity and uncertainty. The causal stories that structure these narratives are argumentative elements linked to the coalitions' interpretive frame; that is, they are part of the repertoire of strategic actions analyzed in this article.

Methodology

To achieve this objective, we draw on secondary data from gray literature produced by civil society organizations engaged with plastics in Brazil, as well as from institutional websites, newspaper and magazine reports, and publicly available online documents produced or published by trade associations in the country's plastics industry. In addition to gray literature, we also consider scientific studies produced by the environmental epistemic community – evidence-based work that highlights the impacts of plastic pollution.

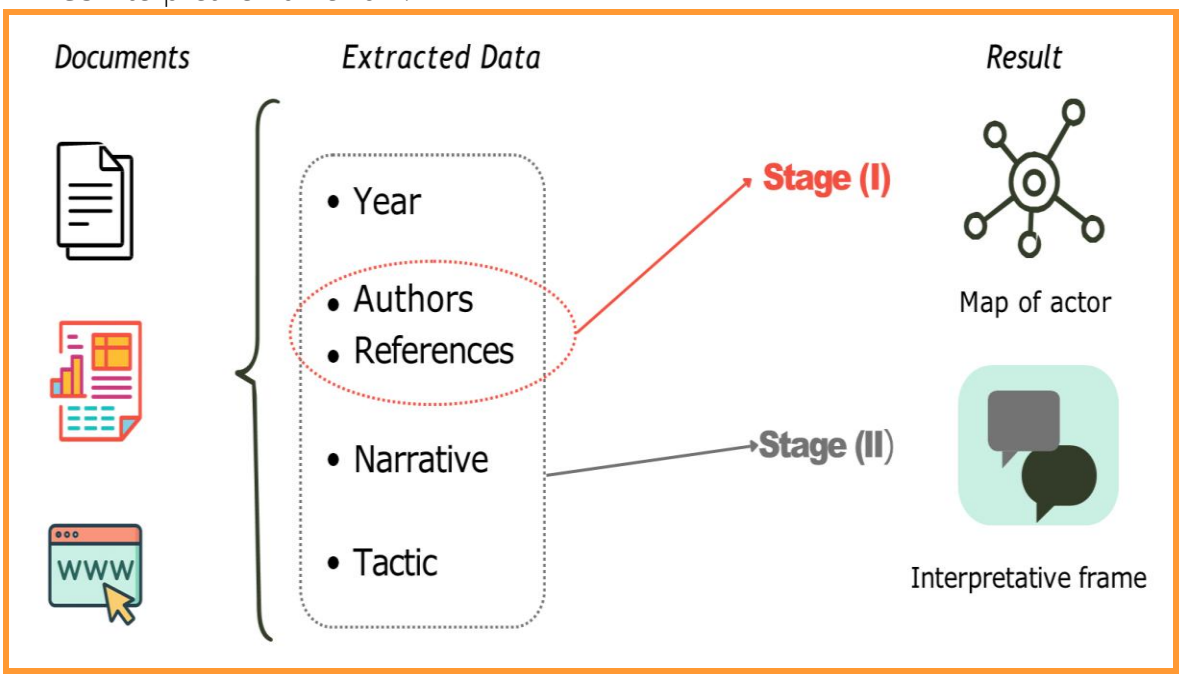
We follow Creswell's (2014) bibliographic and documentary research procedures, selecting documents and extracting data to: 01. map actors (non-exhaustively); and 02. analyze elements that characterize the advocacy coalitions' interpretive frame – namely, the narratives and references that connect actors and involve strategies of political coordination, especially within the pro-plastic coalition (henceforth PPC), as shown in Figure 01.

The actors identified through the authorship and references of the analyzed documents were entered into the software Gephi to generate a descriptive map of the field and delineate the composition of the advocacy coalitions. Actors were categorized according to their positions in the field – PPC, APC, or unaffiliated. Although network analysis is a useful methodological tool for mapping and monitoring fields and for revealing the 'social ties' among actors, Fligstein and McAdam (2012) highlight its limitations, as it does not provide sufficient grounds for understanding the dynamics that structure the field. Therefore, relationships among actors were not quantified in this study. Nevertheless, to facilitate their visualization, the layout algorithm Fruchterman–Reingold was applied in the software (PASSOS, 2013).

In the second part of the study, the accounts, events, and narratives identified in the documents were organized in a spreadsheet. These data were grouped into analytical categories presented in the report 'Talking Trash' (CHANGING MARKETS FOUNDATION, 2020), which defines them as strategies to delay, derail, and distract attention from plastic pollution (see the supplementary material for further details). Descriptive Charts 02 and 03 present examples of strategies and tactics identified in

the report 'Talking Trash', now applied to Brazil. Chart 04 highlights three causal stories that structure PPC's narratives and underpin the field's interpretive frame.

Figure 01. Methodological framework used to delineate coalitions in the field and the PPC's interpretive framework.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

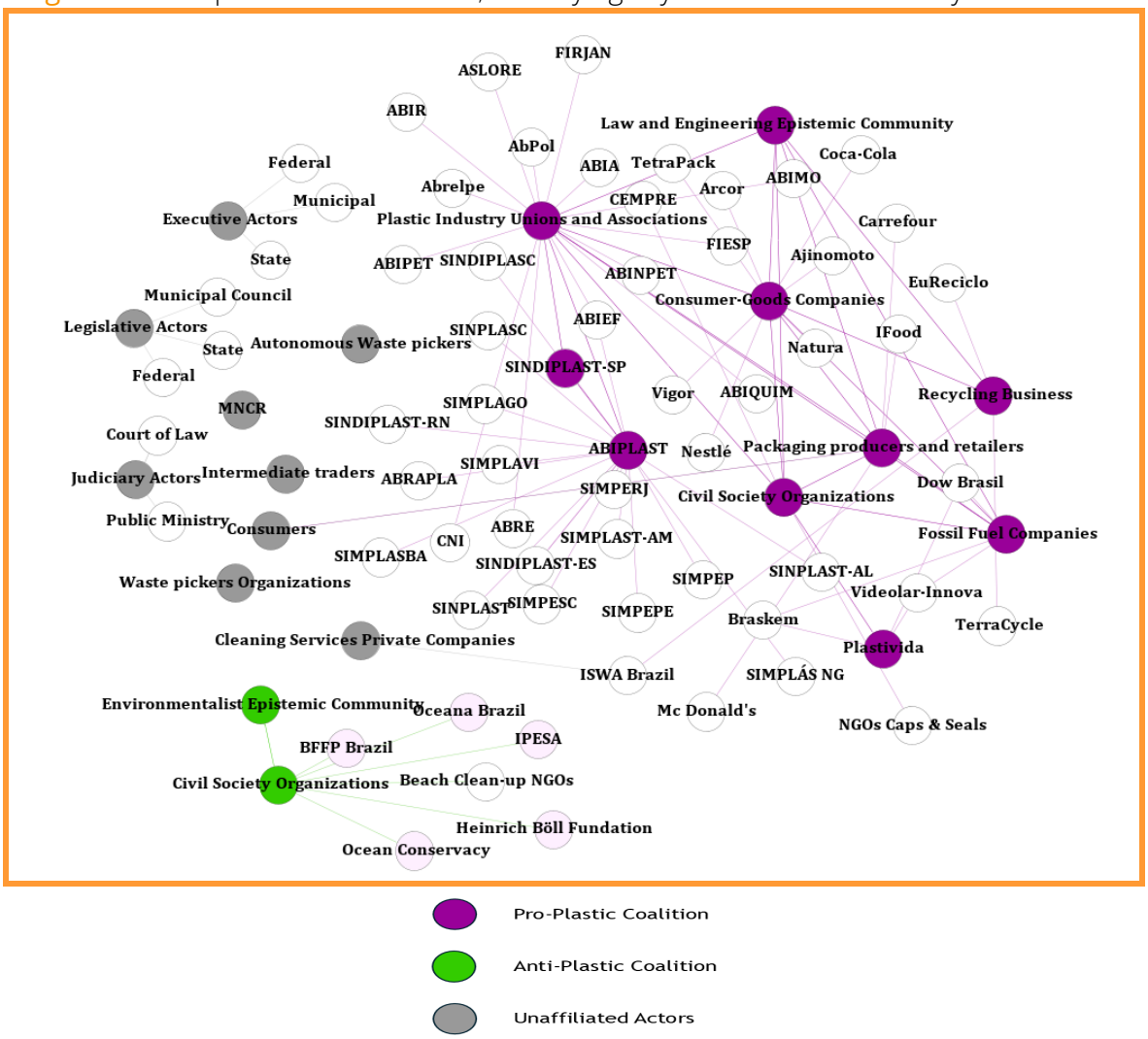
Delineating advocacy coalitions and their strategies in Brazil

In Brazil, in 2023, the plastics processing and recycling industry comprised 12,429 companies, generating 363,368 jobs, producing 7.49 million tons of thermoplastic resins, and recording revenues of R$123 billion (ABIPLAST, 2023), corresponding to 1.1% of the country's GDP in the same year (IBGE, 2024).

The actors that make up the PPC in Brazil are diverse, densely connected, and present across the entire plastics value chain. They include companies involved in resin extraction and production, in packaging manufacturing, in the use of plastic packaging in products, and in the plastic recycling chain. Think tanks, trade unions, associations, civil society organizations, and media outlets are also part of this group, which defends the 'status quo' of single-use plastics, in line with Proposition 01. Figure 02 presents the key actors in the field, consisting of the dominant coalition (PPC, in purple) and the challenger coalition (in green), which opposes the interests of the plastics industry (APC). This figure provides a recent empirical snapshot of the plastics field in Brazil, corroborating Proposition 01 of Fligstein (2001), according to which skilled actors 'play the game' by coordinating within the field through coalitions.

The Brazilian company Braskem acts as a skilled actor in the PPC by proposing initiatives such as the 'I'm Green' label – presented as a more 'sustainable' plastic alternative (BRASKEM, 2024) – and by developing technological solutions in partnership with the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) through the 'Plasticultura' program (FAPESP 2021). In this sense, it stands out as an organization that formulates responses to plastic pollution from an industry perspective.

Figure 02. The plastics field in Brazil, identifying key actors in the advocacy coalitions



Source: Elaborated by the authors using the software Gephi.

This coalition also includes consumer goods companies that use plastic in their product packaging. In Brazil, companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, and Natura often use various communication channels to publicize their targets and commitments established with private recycling companies (such as TerraCycle and the Eu Reciclo [I Recycle] label). These companies seek to signal a commitment to shifting paradigms in plastic use; however, Coca-Cola and Nestlé remain among the world's largest plastic polluters (BREAK FREE FROM PLASTIC, 2022).

Supermarkets, bars, restaurants, and food delivery apps – that is, the sector involved in the production and distribution of packaging – are also key actors of the PPC, as they are strongly affected by legislation banning or restricting single-use plastics, such as bags and straws. They are typically the actors mobilized to solve the problem of single-use plastic pollution, particularly when such bans are enacted.

Other key actors in the PPC include trade unions and business associations linked to the plastics value chain. They are collective actors engaged across the production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of these materials, organizing in a coordinated way primarily to advance their economic interests. Overall, they propose solutions that do little to effectively address the socio-environmental impacts of plastic. Chart 01 lists the twenty-one associations and trade unions representing Brazil's plastic industry identified in this study.

The collective actors listed in Chart 01 (also shown in Figure 01) play a significant role in the sector and strongly influence the strategic orientation of the plastics industry in Brazil. It was through these organizations that the Sectoral Agreement on Packaging in General (MMA, 2015) was established. The Agreement's signatories include manufacturers, importers, distributors, and retailers of packaging operating nationwide. Of the twenty signatory associations, thirteen are part of the 'Packaging Coalition', whose stated commitment is "to implement reverse logistics in Brazil and comply with the PNRS [National Solid Waste Policy] through the sectoral agreement" (COALIZÃO EMBALAGENS, 2024). The Reverse Logistics Association for Packaging (ASLORE) is also part of this coalition, although it is not listed among the Agreement's signatory associations (GONÇALVES-DIAS et al., 2015; MMA, 2015)

In Brazil, some civil society organizations also function as think tanks, promoting targeted measures based on environmental education for recycling. These include Instituto Socioambiental Plásticos (Socio-Environmental Institute of Plastics - Plastivida), Compromisso Empresarial para Reciclagem (Business Commitment to Recycling - CEMPRE) – an association dedicated to promoting recycling that, together with other actors, signed the Sectoral Agreement – and the epistemic community based at the 'Plasticultura' Research Center, which focuses on developing technological solutions to the problems posed by plastic (FAPESP, 2021).

In Brazil, the APC – representing the challengers in the field – consists of two groups: the environmentalist epistemic community and civil society organizations. The environmentalist epistemic community consists of academics, researchers, and research institutes that share environmentalist, collectivist, and anti-capitalist values and engage in scientific research, education, consultancy, and advocacy against plastic pollution. In Brazil, this group is represented by public and private universities across fields such as public health, oceanography, and environmental sciences.

Chart 01. Trade unions and associations representing Brazil's plastic industry.

01	ABAD (**)	Associação Brasileira de Atacadistas e Distribuidores de Produtos Industrializados (Brazilian Association of Wholesalers and Distributors of Industrialized Products)
02	ABIA (**)	Associação Brasileira das Indústrias da Alimentação (Brazilian Food Industry Association
03	ABIEF	Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Embalagens Plásticas Flexíveis (Brazilian Flexible Plastic Packaging Industry Association)
04	ABIHPEC	Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Higiene Pessoal, Perfumaria e Cosméticos (Brazilian Association of the Personal Care, Perfumery, and Cosmetics Industry)
05	ABIMO	Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Artigos e Equipamentos Médicos e Odontológicos (Brazilian Association of the Medical and Dental Equipment and Supplies Industry)
06	ABINPET (**)	Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Produtos para Animais de Estimação (Brazilian Association of the Pet Products Industry)
07	ABIPET (**)	Associação Brasileira da Indústria do PET (Brazilian PET Industry Association)
08	ABIPLA	Associação Brasileira das Indústrias de Produtos de Limpeza e Afins (Brazilian Association of Cleaning and Related Products Industries)
09	ABIPLAST (*) (**)	Associação Brasileira das Indústrias de Plástico (Brazilian Plastic Industry Association)
10	ABIQUIM	Associação Brasileira da Indústria Química (Brazilian Chemical Industry Association)
11	ABIR (**)	Associação Brasileira das Indústrias de Refrigerantes e de Bebidas Não Alcoólicas (Brazilian Soft Drink and Non-Alcoholic Beverage Industries Association)
12	AbPOL	Associação Brasileira de Polímeros (Brazilian Polymer Association)
13	ABRAS	Associação Brasileira de Supermercados (Brazilian Supermarket Association)
14	ABRABE (**)	Associação Brasileira de Bebidas (Brazilian Beverage Association)
15	ABRE	Associação Brasileira de Embalagem (Brazilian Packaging Association)
16	Abrelpe	Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Limpeza Pública e Resíduos Especiais (Brazilian Association of Public Cleaning and Special Waste Companies)
17	ASLORE (**)	Associação de Logística Reversa de Embalagens (Reverse Logistics Association for Packaging)
18	CNI	Confederação Nacional da Indústria (National Confederation of Industry)
19	FIESP	Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (Industrial Federation of the State of São Paulo)
20	FIRJAN	Federação das Indústrias do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Industrial Federation of the State of Rio de Janeiro)
21	SINDIPLAST (*)	Sindicato Indústria Material Plástico Estado São Paulo (Union of the Plastic Materials Industry of the State of São Paulo)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.
Notes: (*) association and trade union with a significant role in the plastic sector; (**) participant in the Packaging Coalition.

Civil society organizations work to raise public awareness of the problems associated with single-use plastics and their improper disposal, using consultancy, training courses, events, lectures, and other outreach activities. Notable examples include Instituto de Projetos e Pesquisa Socioambientais (Institute for Socio-Environmental Projects and Research - IPESA), Instituto Pólis, EcoSurf, Ocean Cleanup Brasil, and Oceana Brasil. In addition, several international organizations operate in the country, such as Break Free From Plastic, Heinrich Böll Foundation, and Ocean Conservancy. This coalition is important to the plastics field today, but it is not the focus of this analysis. There are also state and non-state actors that influence the balance of power in the field but do not maintain a lasting relationship with the coalitions (represented in gray in Figure 01). Notable among these are consumers, private urban cleaning companies, intermediaries in the plastic recycling chain (such as scrap dealers and waste pickers' intermediaries), and organizations of waste pickers, along with their representative bodies and social movements.

Interpretive frame: narratives and actions of the PPC

The analysis in this study shows that many of the strategies and tactics identified globally in the report 'Talking Trash' (CHANGING MARKETS FOUNDATION, 2020) are also present in Brazil (see supplementary material). The report's analytical categories reveal three strategic orientations – delay, derail, and distraction – which are reflected in the specific tactics used by the actors that make up Brazil's PPC. Across the plastics value chain, PPC actors use a range of strategies to resist change and maintain their business practices, shifting responsibility for the negative externalities of production and distribution of plastics onto other sectors and thereby preserving their dominant position in the field.

The charts in this section show how different tactics are organized within each strategy, shaping the field's interpretive frame and supporting Proposition 02 of this study. The most prevalent PPC strategies in Brazil are 'delay and derail'. Delay tactics aim to extend timelines to preserve profits for longer and create additional opportunities to weaken measures under development. Derail tactics, in turn, aim to create opportunities to block the adoption of more stringent or industry-unfavorable legislation, as well as to weaken existing regulations (CHANGING MARKETS FOUNDATION, 2020). Therefore, the industry – collectively organized through representatives, associations, institutes, and consultancies – engages in lobbying to delay or block the implementation of stricter legislation and to weaken or roll back existing or proposed legislation, even during environmental, economic, or public health crises.

Chart 02. Examples of delaying and derailing strategies in plastic pollution regulation, along with the tactics used by the pro-plastic coalition in Brazil

Delaying strategy	Tactic (Changing Markets Foundation, 2020)	Empirical Evidence
Postponing legislative deadlines	When they cannot block legislation, lobbyists try to delay its implementation. Even after being passed, laws may still be delayed.	"The Municipal Law of the city of São Paulo (N° 15,374/2011) provides for the prohibition of the free distribution or sale of plastic bags to consumers in all commercial establishments in the city. 'Although passed in 2011, it was only regulated in 2015 since a Direct Action of Unconstitutionality was filed in June 2011 by SINDIPLAST-SP '(...). The municipal government appealed to suspend the injunction, but the São Paulo 'Court of Appeals' upheld the decision in 2013, and only in 2014 did the Special Body of the Court of Appeals dismiss the union's action, overturning the injunction. Following confirmation of the law's constitutionality, the municipal government became responsible for regulating it. 'A solution involving the adoption of standard reusable bags was negotiated with the relevant sectors' to ensure that, in addition to environmental protection, consumers would not be left without packaging to transport their purchases and that jobs in the plastics industry would be preserved" (emphasis added). Source: Prefeitura de São Paulo (2025).
Adding conditionality to ongoing actions	Actors fighting against mandatory measures will try to delay the process by attaching conditionality to the introduction of the legislation to buy them more time.	'In order to be approved, the PNRS (National Solid Waste Policy) spent more than twenty years in legislative proceedings', in the form of various bills addressing the issue. During this period, two special committees were created, but they were unable to overcome the conflicts that arose among the various actors defending their particular interests (...)" (MARINHO, 2015, p. 05). "(...) the industrial sector did not accept the obligation imposed on it" (MARINHO, 2015, p. 53). "The impasse was only overcome with the drafting of (...) a consensus text among representatives of the various sectors of society" (MARINHO, 2015, p. 05). "(...)[which] deepens the issue of responsibility for the product life cycle, or post-consumption, 'from the perspective of shared responsibilities. This idea meant that, in addition to the industrial sector, public authorities and society would also be responsible for actions in the realm of solid waste management'. In discussions on this issue, the industrial sector, as expected, did not raise obstacles to its acceptance" (MARINHO, 2015, p. 56) (emphasis added).
Derailing Strategy	Tactic (Changing Markets Foundation, 2020)	Empirical Evidence

Delaying strategy	Tactic (Changing Markets Foundation, 2020)	Empirical Evidence
Legal challenges	When they cannot block legislation, companies turn to legal action to hinder its implementation. A law banning packaging, for example, may be challenged by interested associations to suspend its regulation, which may later be reinstated.	'SINDIPLAST succeeded in overturning the municipal law (N° 17,261/2020) that prohibited the provision of disposable plastic cups, cutlery, plates, and other utensils'. The union argued for 'the importance of these materials at this moment in the pandemic (...). The São Paulo Court of Appeals (TJ-SP) granted the injunction in the Direct Action of Unconstitutionality'. ABIPLAST and SINDIPLAST thank everyone for their efforts in achieving this important victory, which we consider a shared achievement. We reiterate our support for the submission of actions, initiatives, and ideas from members and partners at this time" (emphasis added). Source: SINDIPLAST (2020).
Co-opting a crisis	The plastics industry uses moments of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to roll back regulations that harm its production, often by spreading distorted information.	'Plastivida expresses solidarity in response to the pandemic and is coordinating an initiative to donate plastic cutlery, packaging, cups, and other utensils' to the Bom Prato restaurant network, as well as EPS packaging, known by the brand name Isopor®, to the Vivaleite program for transport and preservation. (...) 'It is a time for unity, solidarity, and awareness. (...) If, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned to wash our hands properly, I believe we are fully capable of adopting habits that support recycling through proper product disposal, thinking preventively about our health and the health of the planet, without giving up the safety these items provide'. Source: PLASTIVIDA (2020).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In Brazil, the PPC employs delaying and derailing strategies in national legislation, showing its ability to mobilize resources to preserve the 'status quo' and maintain the stability of the field. On the websites of associations representing PPC actors, lobbying is explicitly presented as a service to their members: "[...] ABIPLAST monitors key legislative matters that may affect companies involved in plastic processing. Member companies may consult on or propose legislative changes, and ABIPLAST develops the strategy for action in parliament" (ABIPLAST, 2020).

A notable example of the PPC's influence is the main law regulating the plastics field in Brazil: the National Solid Waste Policy (PNRS – Law N° 12,305/2010). It took twenty years for the law to be regulated due to conflicts among the actors involved. One key factor was the industrial sector's rejection of the concept of post-consumer responsibility (ALMEIDA and GOMES, 2018; ARAÚJO, 2013; MARINHO, 2015), which led to the introduction of conditions governing the bill's submission to Congress. The law was only approved after negotiated compromises among the relevant parties were reached. In the case of reverse logistics, consensus was achieved through the principle of shared responsibility, under which all actors in the value chain are responsible for the final destination of waste. This is what distinguishes it from extended producer responsibility, in which responsibility for the post-consumer stage of the product life cycle lies solely with the manufacturer (OECD, 2001).

Although it represents an advance, the sectoral agreement defining reverse logistics in Brazil stipulates that costs be shared among the actors in the Packaging Coalition, reducing the burden on each member and diffusing responsibility, which hinders implementation (DEMAJOROVIC and MASSOTE, 2017). The principle of shared responsibility thus advances the PPC's economic interests, while formalizing the Packaging Coalition as a collective further reinforces its dominant position. Brouillat and Oltra (2012) argue that, more substantial structural changes in reverse logistics. Can only be achieved by defining specific targets and responsibilities for each actor within the Packaging Coalition.

The PPC also operates at subnational levels. The São Paulo Municipal Law N° 15,374/2011, which prohibits the distribution of plastic bags, had its implementation delayed by four years due to a lawsuit filed by SINDIPLAST (Chart 02). In addition, the sale of reusable bags was negotiated as a substitute for plastic bags. SINDIPLAST also secured the postponement of another São Paulo Municipal Law (Law N° 17,261/2020) by arguing that the ban on plastic items was unconstitutional (Chart 02). The lawsuit was successful not only because it raised a legal challenge, but also because it 'co-opted a crisis' by mobilizing a narrative based on a causal story (STONE, 2012) linking plastic to public health during the COVID-19 pandemic (GONÇALVES-DIAS et al., 2022). This tactic has been observed in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Italy, among others (PRATA et al., 2020).

It is evident that by linking plastic to hygiene and safety, SINDIPLAST's strategy of promoting a positive image of the material helps rally public opinion in its favor. Actions by other actors within the PPC reinforce and validate this narrative, as illustrated by the discourse of Plastivida (Chart 02), which invokes value-laden themes such as 'unity, solidarity, and awareness'. Notably, while the narrative mobilizes collectivist ideals, it also emphasizes awareness – presented as sufficient to 'create new consumption and disposal habits' – thereby ultimately individualizing the solution by shifting responsibility onto the consumer. Moreover, the donation of plastic products to a public restaurant suggests an effort to construct a symbolism of solidarity that also serves the specific interest of reinforcing the acceptance and use of these materials.

The strategy of distraction reinforces tactics of delay and derail, as the PPC constructs a public narrative that obscures responsibility for the plastic crisis, thereby fostering social acceptance of its proposals. The tactics associated with this strategy involve actions that create the illusion of meaningful change, while underlying production structures remain unaltered, sustaining the large-scale production of disposable plastics (CHANGING MARKETS FOUNDATION, 2020).

Companies often employ distraction tactics through voluntary commitments that signal their initiatives as part of the solution to the plastic problem. This allows them to preempt potentially more restrictive legislation, in what Hommel (2006) terms the anticipatory management of contestation. Hommel's central argument (2006) is that a firm's continued presence in the market depends on its social legitimacy, which is constantly contested by a range of actors. 'Anticipatory management of contestation' is not a one-off response to exceptional situations; rather, it is an integral part of a firm's day-to-day operations. In Brazil, distraction strategies are also evident in regulatory processes, as shown in Chart 03.

Chart 03. Examples of distraction strategies in plastic pollution regulation, along with the tactics used by the pro-plastic coalition in Brazil

Distraction strategy	Tactic (Changing Markets Foundation, 2020)	Empirical Evidence
Blaming the consumer	The plastics industry blames consumers for the waste problem as a way of deflecting its own responsibility.	"We do not need a change in raw materials, but rather a change in behavior, and only through technical information and environmental education can society learn to consume consciously and to properly dispose of products after their useful life. This is the real problem. Plastic is not the villain". Source: PLASTIVIDA (2020).
Promoting recycling as publicity	Many companies set targets to make their products recyclable; however, in many cases this recyclability is largely theoretical, as there are no established markets or significant recycling rates for these materials.	"Nestlé Chocolates and TerraCycle have joined forces to RE-think the recycling of their flexible packaging. Through the program, you send the packages and packaging to us, and we ensure their proper destination by directing them to recycling. Biscuit and chocolate packaging is made from a metallized plastic known as BOPP (biaxially oriented polypropylene). Due to its characteristics and composition, this material is typically not recycled, as the cost of recycling BOPP exceeds the value at which the recycled material can be sold at the end of the chain. For this reason, Nestlé, in partnership with TerraCycle, launched this reverse logistics initiative, which will not only enable the recycling of biscuit and chocolate packaging from any brand but will also accept metallized flexible packaging from snacks, cereal bars, pasta, and Easter eggs". Source: NESTLÉ (2021).
Study war	Many companies commission their own research, based on questionable methodologies, to discredit independent studies and bolster the credibility of their own claims.	In March 2019, Plastivida challenged data released by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on plastic waste production in Brazil. According to WWF, Brazil ranked fourth among the world's largest plastic polluters, behind only the United States, China, and India, and also had one of the lowest recycling rates. However, according to Miguel Bahiense Neto, president of Plastivida, the NGO's study "demonstrates serious inconsistencies by incorrectly analyzing and disseminating data related to plastic production, selective collection, and recycling in Brazil, causing alarmism and a disservice to the public." Plastivida considers data provided by the Associação Brasileira da Indústria Química (Brazilian Chemical Industry Association) and the Associação

Distraction strategy	Tactic (Changing Markets Foundation, 2020)	Empirical Evidence
		Brasileira da Indústria do Plástico (Brazilian Plastics Industry Association). Source: EMBALAGEM MARCA (2019)
Environmental groups funded by the plastics industry	Companies also fund or create environmental organizations to distract consumers and shift responsibility for recycling and waste management onto them. These organizations are made up of largely the same companies.	"Plastivida, in partnership with the Instituto Brasileiro do PVC, launched the Environmental Education and Plastics Recycling Project, which has been implemented since 2016 in the Unified Educational Centers of the São Paulo municipal government. With the aim of improving society's relationship with plastics by disseminating their applications and awareness-raising initiatives focused on responsible consumption, proper disposal, and recycling". Source: INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DO PVC (2019).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

With the expansion of industry after the Industrial Revolution – alongside the rise of advertising and planned obsolescence – consumerism became a key element of capitalism. Recycling emerged in this context as "a symbolic antidote to 'excessive consumption' and the throwaway society" (SCHEINBERG et al. 2011, p. 189). However, it both allows consumption to continue – since consumers believe their waste will be recycled – and provides industry with a convenient justification to maintain production (CHANGING MARKETS FOUNDATION, 2020). In the case of plastics, recycling has been a strategy imposed by the industry itself, as noted in a report by the Center for Climate Integrity. According to the report, although companies were aware of the ineffectiveness of plastic recycling, they continued to invest in campaigns, studies, and narratives suggesting the opposite (ALLEN et al., 2024).

In Brazil, the National Solid Waste Policy (PNRS), in Article 09 (BRASIL, PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA, 2010), establishes a hierarchy for solid waste management. Although the PNRS establishes waste prevention as the top priority in the hierarchy, it addresses it in broad and abstract terms and conditions its implementation on additional regulatory acts (GONÇALVES-DIAS et al., 2015). This weakens the operationalization of waste prevention, creating gaps that allow the PPC to prioritize reverse logistics and recycling instead.

As in other countries, companies in Brazil promote recycling as a strategic approach. Nestlé, in partnership with TerraCycle, developed a program focused on recycling BOPP packaging (Chart 03). Rather than adopting more recyclable packaging alternatives, companies develop recycling initiatives for materials whose value chains are not well established. As Demajorovic and Massote (2017) note, plastic manufacturers in Brazil view the expansion of more recyclable materials as contingent on the adoption of tax incentives. Despite the PPC's investments in recycling in Brazil, the country still records low recycling rates. The Heinrich Böll Foundation (2020) reports that only 1.28% (145,000 tons) of plastics are effectively recycled in Brazil. Meanwhile, ABIPLAST (2020) reports that in 2019 approximately 838.5 thousand tons of plastic were recycled, representing about 11.8% of total plastic production that year. Despite the discrepancy between the reported figures, even the most optimistic estimate points to a low recycling rate.

The PPC also employs the tactics of shifting responsibility for waste onto consumers. In defending the use of disposable plastics, Plastivida reiterates that 'society can learn to 'consume consciously' and to 'dispose of products properly' after their useful life. 'This is the real problem'. 'Plastic is not the villain' (Chart 03). This perspective reflects a rationalized, individualizing view that places sole responsibility on consumers for the consumption of plastic products, their disposal, and the problems that arise from them. At the same time, Plastivida defines its purpose as "to articulate and activate a network of cooperation that integrates production, consumption, and post-consumption across the value chains in which plastics are embedded" (PLASTIVIDA - Juntos somos mais sustentáveis, [2020). According to Fligstein and McAdam (2012),

dominant actors in a field adopt interpretive frames that work to their advantage, including as a means to maintain the stability of their dominant position, as outlined in theoretical proposition 02.

The distraction strategy also involves funding environmental organizations to disseminate the benefits of plastic and promote recycling as an effective solution. They are mobilized by the idea that "only through 'technical information and environmental education' can society learn to 'consume consciously'" (PLASTIVIDA - Juntos somos mais sustentáveis, (2020). Plastivida and similar organizations develop "awareness-raising initiatives focused on responsible consumption, proper disposal, and recycling" (PLASTIVIDA - Juntos somos mais sustentáveis, (2020)). In addition to constructing a narrative that assigns responsibility to consumers, the PPC has the resources to spread and reinforce it – for example, through partnerships with the public education system, which reinforces the symbolism of recycling among teachers and students (Chart 03).

Representative associations of the PPC in Brazil invest in public communication by publishing booklets, statements, position papers, and news on their websites, articulating their positions and helping to build a positive image of plastic. In other words, maintaining the PPC 'status quo' requires not only legislative and legal measures but also the ongoing reinforcement of a positive image of plastic in society, what Campbell (1998) calls 'favorable public sentiment'.

The PPC in Brazil also adopts the study-war tactics, mobilizing research that aligns with its objectives to challenge findings that run counter to its interests. Organizations such as Plastivida operate as think tanks, producing and disseminating positive causal stories about plastic. The study war between the APC and the PPC is a central arena in the struggle to shape plastic-related public policy in Brazil.

In sum, the analysis of the PPC's interpretive frame in Brazil identifies three main causal stories that shift responsibility away from companies, producing individualizing and supposedly rational narratives. Chart 04 show how these narrative tactics are linked to causal stories (STONE, 2012) to bolster their empirical plausibility.

From the perspective of Fligstein and McAdam (2012), the hegemony of the plastics value chain is not limited to objective aspects of its economic power but is also built through subjective and political dimensions, including the production of ideas, images, and representations grounded in technical expertise, networks, sectoral traditions, and capacities for persuasion and leadership. For the TSAF, the asymmetric distribution of resources across coalitions favors dominant actors in advancing their interests within the field (FLIGSTEIN and McADAM, 2012), as stated in Proposition 01. Therefore, the PPC in Brazil concentrates power resources and uses narrative tactics to shape the field's rules and laws in line with the dominant interpretive frame (Proposition 02)

Chart 04. Interpretive frame configurations based on the PPC causal stories and narratives in Brazil

Causal story	Narrative tactic
01. Plastic is important to society and therefore legislation that could affect plastics manufacturing companies should be monitored and blocked.	"(...) ensuring that, in addition to preserving the environment, consumer citizens would not be left without packaging to carry their purchases and that jobs in the plastics industry would be maintained" Source: Prefeitura de São Paulo (2015)
	"The union (SINDIPLAST) argued for the importance of these materials at this moment in the pandemic (...)" Source: SINDIPLAST (2020).
02. consumers are the ones responsible for using and disposing of plastics properly; therefore, the focus should be on raising awareness rather than banning plastic use;	" (...) In addition to the industrial sector, public authorities and society would also be responsible for actions within the scope of solid waste management." Source: MARINHO (2015)
	" (...) through technical information and environmental education society can learn to consume consciously and to properly dispose of products after their useful life". Source: PLASTIVIDA (2020)
03. investment in recycling is necessary, as it is the solution to plastic pollution.	"Nestlé Chocolats and TerraCycle have joined forces to RE-think the recycling of their flexible packaging. Through the program, you send the packages and packaging to us, and we ensure their proper destination by directing them to recycling". Source: NESTLÉ (2021).
	"(...) Demonstrates serious inconsistencies in incorrectly analyzing and disseminating data related to plastic production, selective collection, and recycling in Brazil, causing alarmism and a disservice to the public". Source: EMBALAGEM MARCA (2019)
	"(...) we are fully capable of adopting habits that support recycling through proper product disposal, thinking preventively about our health and the health of the planet (...) " Source: PLASTIVIDA (2020)
	"(...) Improving society's relationship with plastics through the dissemination of their applications and awareness-raising initiatives focused on responsible consumption, proper disposal, and recycling" Source: INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DO PVC (2019)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data presented addresses the first question raised in the introduction: Does the pro-plastic coalition's repertoire of strategic actions in Brazil align with the pattern identified internationally in the report 'Talking Trash'? In Brazil, the logic of the international political dynamics that shape the plastics field is reproduced. The PPC reproduces the international pattern of strategies, tactics, and narratives oriented toward industry-friendly solutions, aligned with its interests and identities, which leads to the field's dominant interpretive frame. The data point to two coalitions: the challenger (APC) and the dominant (PPC). These coalitions are asymmetric and heterogeneous, with different political and economic resources for shaping the sectoral policy agenda.

The challenger coalition (APC) mobilizes environmentalist, collectivist, and anti-capitalist values, and produces scientific research, educational activities, consultancy, and complaints to campaign against plastic pollution. This coalition will be further analyzed in future research. The dominant coalition (PPC), in turn, brings together a dense and diverse set of actors, reinforced by the economic weight of the plastics value chain in national economies, particularly in Brazil.

In analyzing strategic actions, we address the second question: How is the repertoire of action defined by its logic and the political and social arenas it engages? The analysis shows that coalition members act directly in decision-making arenas through lobbying and other forms of pressure, both vertically – across municipal, state, and federal levels – and horizontally – across the legislative, executive, and judicial branches at the same administrative level. They also fund organizations that produce information to ensure a favorable public sentiment by maintaining a positive image of plastics, such as think tanks and corporate-funded research centers. Accordingly, they focus their political efforts on solutions centered on recycling and proper disposal, reinforcing the causal story that consumer behavior is the main source of environmental problems related to plastics.

The PPC thus avoids responsibility for making structural and operational changes across the value chain. These actions are directly reflected in the country's regulatory and legislative framework on plastic. In the case of the PNRS, the PPC acted to keep responsibility diffuse and dispersed, shifting attention away from the negative externalities of high levels of virgin plastic production. Recent plastic pollution laws in Brazil largely focus on regulating individual consumption, highlighting the industry's strong influence over regulatory design in government decision-making arenas.

From the TSAF perspective, we clearly see that the position of actors in the plastics field depends on their ability to gather resources. Various resources – economic, cultural, social, and political, among others – enable actors to occupy particular positions in the field and to consolidate or strengthen them. Therefore, the structure

of the plastics field is shaped not only by interactions among actors but also by the resources they accumulate and mobilize over time.

This study also shows that in Brazil, as in the international context, plastic regulation is fragmented. And tends to sustain the industry's dominant position in the field. Over several decades, the plastics field has maintained itself through interactions, conflicts, and struggles among state and non-state actors from related fields aligned with the sector's narrative. The PPC's strategies and tactics, including control of discourse, aim to prevent openings for change that the challenger coalition (APC) could exploit. One example is banning items that cannot be recycled or that pose specific environmental risks – measures that not only address these problems but also promote greater circularity in the industry and higher recycling rates.

At the international level, negotiations on a global treaty to combat plastic pollution are ongoing and involve the participation of the petrochemical and plastics industries. Despite progress in proposing regulatory measures for the upstream stages of the plastics value chain – such as redesign, reuse, and repair systems, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) – major disagreements remain among countries over limits on virgin plastic production, largely linked to "delaying tactics" (LO, 2024). The dynamics of the plastics field in Brazil mirror those observed at the international level.

Finally, this article suggests directions for future research, especially the need to examine political disputes between hegemonic coalitions during negotiations of the Global Plastics Treaty to better understand the PPC's interpretive frame and its political strategies in shaping this global policy. The analysis can also be extended by examining how industry actors, including the packaging sector and urban service providers, operate within decision-making arenas. Studying the challenger coalition's interpretive frame and political strategies is also important for future research, as it helps illuminate forms of resistance to the hegemony of plastic, both globally and in Brazil.

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