

When Law Becomes Market Risk: Lawfare, Threat Communication, and Defensive Marketing Adaptation in Stressed Political Economies

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Abstract

This article asks how lawfare—the strategic use of legal and judicial instruments against political opponents—reshapes firm marketing strategy in economies marked by high inflation, weak consumer confidence, and political insecurity. Centering Türkiye and comparing the framework with Hungary, it argues that lawfare matters to markets not only through formal institutional effects but also through threat communication. Indictments, prosecutions, trustee appointments, and judicial-executive narratives recast political conflict as risk, and these signals travel through captured media environments and politicized advertising markets to alter consumer sentiment and firms' reputational calculations. The article does not claim that lawfare causes firms to market uniformly. It claims that lawfare raises perceived political, reputational, and demand risk, and that firms manage this elevated risk through a bundle of adjustments termed defensive adaptation: greater emphasis on price and promotion, reduced issue salience in brand communication, selective localization, safer channel mixes, and more cautious partnerships with public-facing actors. Integrating comparative politics, business-cycle marketing, consumer-polarization scholarship, and consumer neuroscience, the article specifies a mechanism in which threat framing and inflationary price salience jointly shift the attentional and valuation processes underpinning purchase decisions, narrowing the feasible frontier of marketing strategy. Methodologically, it is designed as a multiphase sequential mixed-methods design study combining event-based analysis of public legal texts, mainstream and social-media discourse, brand campaigns, advertising-library data, and, where accessible, merchant-level transaction proxies and agency reports. The manuscript is presented throughout as a research design and analytical protocol: constructs, data sources, group assign-

ments, and estimation strategy are specified in advance, and no empirical findings are reported or implied. The contribution is threefold: it extends lawfare research into market behavior, extends marketing-under-stress research into politically coercive environments, and moves consumer-polarization research beyond consolidated democracies into settings where the operative constraint is state action as well as consumer backlash.

Keywords

Lawfare, Autocratic Legalism, Marketing Strategy, Political Risk, Consumer Neuroscience, Neuromarketing, Media Capture, Inflation, Türkiye, Hungary

1. Introduction

Research on democratic backsliding has established that contemporary authoritarian consolidation proceeds less through coups than through law. Elected leaders use constitutional amendment, ordinary legislation, judicial appointment, and prosecutorial discretion to entrench power while preserving the outward forms of legality (Bermeo, 2016; Scheppele, 2018). A large and maturing literature now documents how this repertoire reconfigures courts, elections, civil society, and subnational government. What that literature has not systematically examined is what happens to markets—and specifically to the firms that must continue selling goods and services to a public living inside the resulting environment.

This omission matters because the mechanisms of autocratic legalism are not confined to institutions. They are communicative. When prosecutors describe opposition figures as heads of criminal organizations, when trustees replace elected mayors, and when aligned media amplify these narratives while independent outlets contest them, the effect is not only to disable rivals. It is to saturate the public sphere with signals of danger, blame, and disorder. Firms operate inside that signal environment. They advertise in it, they choose channels within it, they hire influencers who live in it, and they sell to consumers whose sentiment it shapes.

This article therefore asks: how does lawfare reshape firm marketing strategy in stressed economies? The question is posed for settings where legal coercion coincides with macroeconomic strain—high inflation, weak consumer confidence, and political insecurity—because these conditions interact. Threat narratives land differently on a population already anxious about prices, and firms weigh reputational risk differently when margins are already compressed.

Türkiye is the central case. It combines a well-documented trajectory of competitive authoritarianism and judicial transformation (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Esen, 2025) with an inflationary episode of exceptional severity, annual consumer price inflation averaging above 70% in 2022 and remaining above 50% through 2024 before a policy-driven disinflation (OECD, 2025). It also possesses a peculiarity that makes the argument tractable: the state itself has become the largest single advertiser in the media market, and the allocation of public advertising has been

documented as an instrument of media capture (Yanatma, 2021). In Türkiye, the link between political coercion and the advertising market is not a theoretical inference. It is an observable budget line.

The article's central claim is deliberately bounded. It does not argue that lawfare causes firms to market uniformly, that all businesses respond identically, or that legal coercion mechanically determines commercial conduct. Firms differ in exposure, ownership, audience, and regulatory dependence, and many will not adjust at all. The claim is that lawfare raises perceived political, reputational, and demand risk, and that firms manage elevated risk through a recognizable bundle of adjustments—here termed defensive adaptation—comprising greater emphasis on price and promotional cues, reduced issue salience in brand communication, selective localization, safer channel mixes, and more cautious partnerships with public-facing actors. The analytic task is to specify the contingent pathways through which this occurs and the conditions under which it is strongest.

Three literatures are brought together. Comparative politics supplies the account of how legal instruments become coercive and how their narratives are amplified. Business-cycle marketing supplies robust evidence that firms systematically alter advertising, pricing, and innovation across economic contractions, and that these adjustments have measurable performance consequences (Lamey, Deleersnyder, Dekimpe, & Steenkamp, 2007; Deleersnyder, Dekimpe, Steenkamp, & Leeftang, 2009; Srinivasan, Lilien, & Sridhar, 2011). Consumer-polarization and brand-activism scholarship supplies evidence that political identity now structures brand preference and that public position-taking carries asymmetric, market-share-contingent costs (Bhagwat, Warren, Beck, & Watson, 2020; Hydock, Paharia, & Blair, 2020; Schoenmueller, Netzer, & Stahl, 2023). To these, the article adds a mechanism layer drawn from political neuroscience and consumer neuroscience, specifying how threat framing and price salience jointly reshape the attentional and valuation processes that precede purchase.

The contribution is twofold. First, it extends lawfare research into market behavior, showing that the consequences of judicial instrumentalization are not exhausted by their institutional effects. Second, it extends marketing-under-stress research into politically coercive environments, where the relevant shock is not only a demand contraction but a change in what it is safe to say. A comparative extension to Hungary tests whether the predicted adjustments are specific to Türkiye or recur where legal pressure and economic stress coincide. To be explicit about the article's epistemic status: it is a theory-and-protocol contribution. The framework, hypotheses, and full identification strategy are developed here; the event-study estimates they call for have not yet been produced, and nothing below should be read as reporting them.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Lawfare, Autocratic Legalism, and Firm Behaviour

Scheppele's (2018) account of autocratic legalism describes leaders who use dem-

ocratic mandates to dismantle by law the constitutional systems they inherit. The distinguishing feature is that repression wears legal clothing: actions are technically lawful, or at least legally colourable, even as they hollow out constitutional substance. Comparative cases in Venezuela and Hungary established the template (Corrales, 2015; Scheppele, 2018). Lawfare names the tactical edge of this repertoire—the case-by-case deployment of criminal and administrative law against specific opponents through prosecutions, detentions, trustee appointments, and disqualifications (Kars Kaynar, 2025). In competitive authoritarian regimes, where multiparty elections persist on a tilted field (Levitsky & Way, 2010), lawfare is valuable precisely because it sidelines rivals while preserving a democratic façade.

Türkiye-specific scholarship traces how this developed. Esen and Gumuscu (2016) chart the slide into competitive authoritarianism. Esen (2025) shows that judicial transformation followed a sequence in which the governing coalition leveraged conflict with the judiciary to justify reforms, then used those reforms to convert courts from constraint into instrument. Sandal and Öztürk (2023) frame the period through securitization anchored in critical junctures. Hintz and Ercan (2024), using an original dataset of repressive events between 2016 and 2022, document that central authorities replaced elected mayors with appointed trustees far more readily in opposition-held and politically stigmatized municipalities than elsewhere.

What this literature has not addressed is the private sector. Adjacent work in political economy establishes that political uncertainty depresses corporate investment: Julio and Yook (2012) document that firms reduce investment expenditure by roughly 4.8% in national election years relative to non-election years, consistent with firms deferring commitments until uncertainty resolves, while Baker, Bloom, and Davis (2016) show that policy uncertainty indices track declines in investment, output, and employment. These findings establish that firms respond to political risk. They do not tell us how firms respond communicatively—how political coercion reshapes what a brand says, to whom, and through which channel. That is the space this article occupies.

2.2. Marketing under Economic Stress

Business-cycle marketing provides the second foundation and is unusually well evidenced. Lamey, Deleersnyder, Dekimpe, and Steenkamp (2007) demonstrate across the United States and Europe that private-label share rises when economies contract and falls when they expand, with a pronounced asymmetry: consumers switch to store brands more extensively during downturns than they switch back during recoveries. Their later work shows that this dynamic is not purely demand-driven but is conditioned by manufacturer and retailer marketing conduct (Lamey, Deleersnyder, Steenkamp, & Dekimpe, 2012). Deleersnyder, Dekimpe, Steenkamp, and Leeftang (2009), examining 37 countries, find that advertising expenditure is considerably more cyclically sensitive than the economy as a whole, and that this

sensitivity varies with national culture—more cyclical where uncertainty avoidance is high.

On whether firms should cut, the evidence favors contingency over prescription. [Srinivasan, Lilien, and Sridhar \(2011\)](#) show that the profit and stock-return effects of changing R&D and advertising spending in recessions depend on market share, financial leverage, and product-market profile, identifying conditions under which firms over—as well as under-spend. [Steenkamp and Fang \(2011\)](#) find that the effectiveness of advertising and R&D is generally higher during economic contractions than expansions. [Lilien and Srinivasan \(2010\)](#) summarize the resulting strategic dilemma. The consistent lesson is that downturns shift the relative productivity of marketing instruments, pushing firms toward price and value communication and away from long-horizon brand investment.

Turkish-language scholarship documents the specific texture of the recent inflationary episode. [Taş and Boyacıoğlu \(2024\)](#), through qualitative interviews with consumers in Tekirdağ, examine shrinkflation—package-size reduction at constant price—and find that consumers largely notice the practice yet frequently continue purchasing, sustained by brand loyalty and habitual behavior. This matters for the present argument because it shows that under severe inflation the locus of competitive action migrates toward pricing architecture and package economics, precisely the terrain on which defensive adaptation operates.

2.3. Political Polarization, Brand Choice, and the Costs of Taking Sides

The third foundation concerns what happens when political identity enters the market. [Schoenmueller, Netzer, and Stahl \(2023\)](#), combining social-media followership data covering more than three million users, survey brand-preference data, and scanner-panel purchases, show that brand-preference polarization intensified in the United States after the 2016 presidential election, with an asymmetric pattern consistent with compensatory consumption—consumers reinforcing a threatened political identity through brand choice. Political identity, in other words, is not merely expressed through consumption; consumption becomes a site where identity threat is managed.

The corporate consequences are increasingly well estimated. [Bhagwat, Warren, Beck, and Watson \(2020\)](#), analyzing 293 sociopolitical activism events across 149 firms and 39 industries, find that such activism on average elicits an adverse investor reaction. [Hydock, Paharia, and Blair \(2020\)](#) provide the finding most directly relevant here: corporate political advocacy is more likely to repel existing customers who oppose it than to attract new customers who support it, and because of this negativity bias the net market-level effect depends on market share—advocacy tends to benefit small-share brands and harm large-share brands. [Garg and Saluja \(2022\)](#) add that consumer response to brand activism differs systematically by political ideology.

This evidence base is drawn overwhelmingly from consolidated democracies,

but the underlying condition it presupposes—an electorate sorted into mutually hostile camps—is well documented in the Turkish setting. [Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerci \(2025\)](#), drawing on a nationwide dataset of 4006 respondents supplemented by a field experiment, document strong out-group hostility, stereotyping, social distance, and intense negative emotions toward rival political camps, arguing that such “othering” erodes the minimal civic friendship on which democratic coexistence depends. Where hostility of this depth is already present, brand communication that carries political valence is received not as opinion but as affiliation.

Taken together, these findings imply a clear prior. In a polarized market, public position-taking is a risk-bearing act whose expected cost rises with audience breadth. A mass-market brand has more to lose from alienating a segment than a niche brand has to gain from attracting one. If lawfare intensifies polarization and raises the salience of political conflict, the expected cost of any identity- or issue-laden brand communication rises with it.

2.4. Media Capture and the Politicization of Advertising Markets

A fourth literature supplies the transmission channel and is essential to the argument’s plausibility. [Yanatma \(2021\)](#) documents that in Türkiye the state emerged as the largest advertiser in the media market alongside the rise of competitive authoritarianism, and analyzes how the allocation of public advertising functions as a mechanism of media capture. This has two consequences for firms. First, it means the media environment in which commercial advertising is placed is itself politically structured—outlets are not neutral inventory. Second, it means advertising allocation is a recognized instrument of political reward and punishment, which makes commercial placement decisions legible as political signals whether or not firms intend them that way.

The operation of this mechanism is documented in specific cases. [Reporters without Borders \(2022\)](#) reports that a small set of critical national newspapers received more than 90% of the Press Advertisement Agency’s (BİK) sanctions and were collectively deprived of state advertising for 276 days in 2020, and details the 2022 revision of the agency’s ethics code that conditions access to official advertising on vaguely defined “national and moral values”. Türkiye’s Constitutional Court subsequently issued a pilot judgment finding that the practice of suspending newspapers from receiving public advertisements violated press freedom ([Library of Congress, 2022](#)). For Hungary, peer-reviewed analysis documents the parallel mechanism: [Bátorfy and Urbán \(2020\)](#) show that state advertising has been used systematically as an instrument for transforming the media market in favor of government-aligned outlets. Where advocacy-organization monitoring is cited, it is identified as such and treated as documentation of practice rather than as peer-reviewed measurement; its findings converge with the peer-reviewed analyses and establish that the transmission channel is real and observable.

2.5. The Gap

No existing study connects these literatures. Comparative politics explains how

legal coercion works institutionally but stops at the boundary of the firm. Business-cycle marketing explains how firms adapt to demand shocks but treats the political environment as background. Consumer-polarization research explains why political identity is commercially consequential but is overwhelmingly based on consolidated democracies, principally the United States, where the relevant risk is consumer backlash rather than state coercion. Media-capture research documents the politicization of advertising markets but focuses on news organizations rather than on the commercial advertisers who buy the inventory.

The gap is therefore specific: nobody has yet shown how lawfare, operating as threat communication in a captured media environment, alters the feasible frontier of marketing strategy for firms in a stressed economy. Filling it requires a design that connects legal events, their discursive amplification, and observable firm behavior.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Lawfare as Threat Communication

The framework begins from the premise that lawfare has a communicative dimension irreducible to its institutional one. An indictment does not merely initiate a proceeding; it publishes an authoritative account of who is dangerous. Because the claim arrives clothed in evidentiary catalogues and judicial reasoning, it carries a credibility that raw political accusation lacks. Legality lends threat narratives the appearance of neutral fact.

These narratives are then amplified asymmetrically. Aligned outlets extend the security or criminality frame and personalize blame; independent outlets contest the same events as instances of selective justice and democratic erosion. The result is not a single public message but a sorted informational environment in which two interpretive communities receive incompatible framings of an identical event. For a firm buying attention in that environment, the practical consequence is that any message with political valence will be received differently, and more intensely, by each community.

3.2. Three Channels of Perceived Risk

Lawfare raises firm-perceived risk through three analytically distinct channels.

Political risk concerns the firm's direct exposure to state action: regulatory inspection, tax audit, licensing decisions, procurement exclusion, or—at the extreme—the appointment of administrators. Where the legal system has been demonstrated to act against political targets, the tail risk of adverse discretionary action becomes salient for any firm that might be construed as politically aligned.

Reputational risk concerns the firm's standing with consumers, employees, and partners in a polarized field. Given evidence that political advocacy repels opponents more strongly than it attracts supporters (Hydock et al., 2020), and that investors react adversely to sociopolitical activism (Bhagwat et al., 2020), the expected value of political salience in brand communication is negative for most firms and

becomes more negative as polarization intensifies.

Demand risk concerns the consumer environment: whether households will spend, on what, and with what price sensitivity. Lawfare contributes here indirectly, by adding political insecurity to existing macroeconomic strain and thereby shaping sentiment.

3.3. The Neuropolitical and Neuromarketing Mechanism

The three risk channels operate on firms. The mechanism that makes them consequential operates on consumers, and it is here that neuropolitics and consumer neuroscience converge to specify what happens between exposure and purchase.

Political neuroscience establishes that the effects of threatening political content are produced by the linguistic content of messages rather than by fixed dispositions. Pre-registered replication work finds no consistent physiological asymmetry between ideological groups in response to threatening stimuli (Bakker, Schumacher, Gothreau, & Arceneaux, 2020), and the threat-politics association depends on the type of threat, the political domain, and the country (Brandt et al., 2021). Threat is therefore best understood as a state that communication constructs and activates, not a trait that pre-sorts populations. Leong, Chen, Willer, and Zaki (2020) demonstrate the consequence directly: partisans watching identical political content show divergent group-level neural responses in regions associated with narrative interpretation, and this divergence intensifies with language conveying risk, emotion, and morality. Van der Plas and colleagues (2026) show experimentally that threat and blame frames increase negative arousal and produce greater cross-participant desynchronization of neural responses, alongside shifts in political behavior. Securitized legal narratives supply exactly this register.

Consumer neuroscience supplies the second half. Knutson, Rick, Wimmer, Prelec, and Loewenstein (2007) established that distinct neural signals precede purchase decisions: product preference engages the nucleus accumbens, whereas excessive prices engage the insula and deactivate medial prefrontal cortex, with each signal predicting subsequent purchase beyond self-report. This provides a precise account of what severe inflation does to consumer decision-making. When prices are volatile and rising, the price-related aversive signal becomes chronically salient, shifting the balance of the purchase decision away from preference-driven and toward cost-driven processing. Plassmann, Venkatraman, Huettel, and Yoon (2015) set out how such measures can be applied to marketing questions while identifying the methodological constraints that apply.

The two mechanisms compound. Threat framing occupies attention and heightens negative arousal; inflationary price salience biases valuation toward cost avoidance. Behavioral evidence corroborates the joint effect: Durante and Laran (2016) show that consumers under stress allocate resources strategically, increasing saving in general while directing spending specifically toward goods perceived as necessities that restore a sense of control. The predicted consumer profile in a lawfare-

saturated, high-inflation environment is therefore one of elevated threat salience, elevated price sensitivity, heightened identity-based sorting, and a contracted appetite for discretionary, aspirational, or politically resonant appeals.

For firms, this profile narrows the feasible frontier of marketing strategy. Appeals that rely on aspiration, identity, or issue engagement lose traction and carry heightened downside risk, while appeals organized around price, value, reliability, and continuity gain relative effectiveness. Defensive adaptation is the rational response to that shift.

3.4. Defensive Adaptation: Five Strategic Margins

Defensive adaptation is defined as a coordinated shift along five margins, summarized in **Table 1**. It is a syndrome rather than a single act, and firms may move on some margins and not others.

Table 1. The five margins of defensive adaptation.

Margin	Direction of adjustment	Observable indicator
Pricing and promotion	Toward price/value cues, discounting, package-size and entry-price architecture	Share of creatives containing price or promotional claims; promotion depth and frequency
Issue salience	Away from identity-, cause-, or issue-laden messaging toward neutral, functional, or apolitical content	Share of creatives with sociopolitical or identity content; brand-tone classification
Localization	Selective emphasis on national or local belonging framed in consensual rather than partisan terms	Frequency of national/local symbolism; consensual vs. contested framing
Channel mix	Toward owned and lower-exposure channels; away from politically legible placements	Distribution of spend across owned, paid, and influencer channels; outlet-type allocation
Partnerships	Toward lower-risk, non-political endorsers; shortened or clause-protected agreements	Endorser political exposure; frequency of partnership termination or non-renewal

3.5. Contingency: Who Adapts, and How Fast

Uniform response is neither predicted nor plausible. Three firm characteristics should govern the speed and extent of adaptation. Firms with state-regulated exposure or public procurement dependence face the highest political risk and should depoliticize fastest, because for them the tail risk of adverse discretionary action is most consequential. Firms with broad mass-market audiences face the highest reputational risk, since the negativity bias in response to political advocacy scales with audience breadth (Hydock et al., 2020). Conversely, niche brands with ideologically homogeneous customer bases and export-oriented firms whose principal demand lies outside the domestic political field should adapt least, and may in some cases find political positioning commercially advantageous. **Figure 1** presents the full framework.

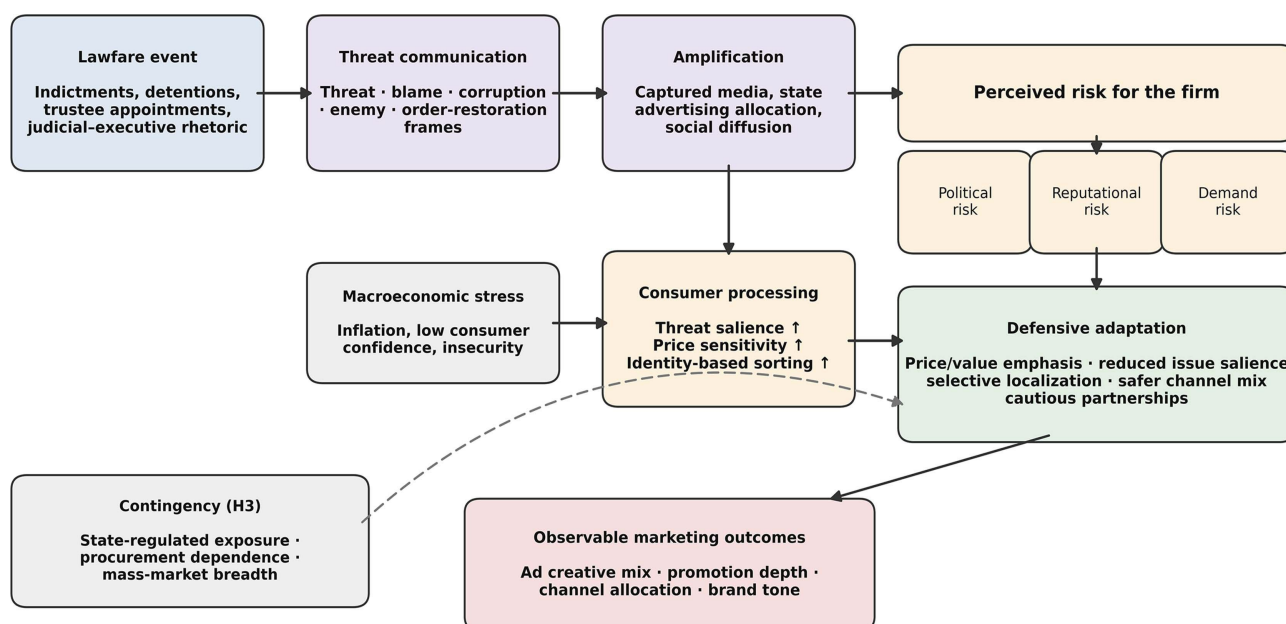


Figure 1. Lawfare as threat communication and the pathway to defensive marketing adaptation.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1. How do high-salience lawfare episodes alter the threat, order, corruption, and enemy frames that surround market communication in Türkiye?

H1. After major lawfare events, firms in exposed categories will shift toward lower-risk messaging, with more price and value cues and fewer identity- or issue-laden cues.

H2. In high-inflation, low-confidence periods, the association between lawfare intensity and defensive marketing adaptation will be stronger than in relatively stable periods.

H3. Brands with higher dependence on state-regulated sectors, public procurement, or broad mass-market audiences will show more rapid depoliticization than niche or export-oriented brands.

RQ2. Are observed strategic adjustments specific to Türkiye, or do similar patterns appear in other lawfare-prone, economically stressed settings?

5. Methodology

5.1. Design

The study is presented as a research protocol: the design is fully specified, but the analyses it defines have not yet been executed. It is a multiphase sequential mixed-methods design. A first, qualitative-interpretive phase constructs a lawfare-event timeline and analyzes how legal and media texts frame political conflict. A second, quantitative phase links those event dates to observable firm-facing outcomes and estimates whether marketing communication shifts in the predicted direction. A third, comparative phase applies a reduced version of the protocol to a second stressed political economy.

5.2. Event Selection

Lawfare events are selected by a transparent salience rule. An episode qualifies if it satisfies at least two of three conditions: direct legal or administrative action against a nationally or locally elected opposition actor or party institution; sustained national coverage across both government-aligned and opposition outlets; and measurable online public discussion within a fixed post-event window. The study period spans roughly 2013 to 2026, capturing a mature phase of institutional consolidation and the full inflationary episode.

Focal episodes include the prosecution of civil-society figures connected to the 2013 Gezi protests; terrorism-related prosecutions of elected opposition politicians and public figures, several of which have drawn adverse rulings from the European Court of Human Rights; the municipal trustee appointments replacing elected opposition mayors; and the case concerning the Istanbul Mayor, who was detained in March 2025 and whose mass trial, involving more than 400 co-defendants and over 140 charges on an indictment approaching 4000 pages, opened in March 2026 ([Human Rights Watch, 2026](#)). These provide variation in threat modality—subversion, terrorism, administrative disorder, and corruption or organized crime—permitting the analysis to distinguish modalities rather than treating threat as monolithic, consistent with the domain-specificity established by [Brandt et al. \(2021\)](#).

5.3. Corpus and Data Sources

Three text corpora and three firm-outcome data streams are assembled, all from public or semi-public sources, with named outlets, platforms, and fixed sampling windows so that corpus construction can be replicated.

Legal corpus: Indictments, reasoned rulings, prosecutorial statements, and on-record speeches by judicial and executive actors, from the Official Gazette (*Resmî Gazete*), publicly released court documents, Constitutional Court decisions, rulings in the European Court of Human Rights HUDOC database, and verbatim press transcripts.

Media corpus: Coverage from a balanced twelve-outlet panel—six government-aligned (*Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak*, *A Haber*, *TRT Haber*, *Anadolu Agency*, *Hürriyet*) and six opposition or independent (*Cumhuriyet*, *Sözcü*, *BirGün*, *Halk TV*, *T24*, *Gazete Duvar*)—with alignment classifications following the documented structure of the Turkish media market ([Yanatma, 2021](#)). Coverage is sampled from the day of each event through 14 days after, with historical content retrieved from outlet archives and Internet Archive Wayback Machine captures.

Social-media corpus: Public posts referencing each event on X (formerly Twitter) and *Ekşi Sözlük* within the same 14-day windows, collected via case-specific hashtags and keywords under platform terms of service.

Brand communication: Creative-level records from the Meta Ad Library and the Google Ads Transparency Center—with the TikTok Commercial Content Library, whose statutory coverage is strongest in the European Economic Area,

Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, used comparatively rather than as a complete Türkiye archive—together with brand-owned website and social-channel content (public Instagram and Facebook brand pages) captured through dated Wayback Machine snapshots. The brand panel is observed continuously from eight weeks before to eight weeks after each event, matching the estimation windows defined below.

Market and macro context: consumer confidence and information-and-communication-technology adoption series from the Turkish Statistical Institute; price and payment-system data from the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye; and published sector or agency reports on retail, e-commerce, and media spend.

Transaction proxies: where obtainable, aggregated merchant- or category-level sales indicators. These are treated as desirable but not necessary; the design's core claims rest on communication outcomes, which are fully observable from public sources.

5.4. Measures

Two measurement families are constructed. On the discourse side, documents are scored for threat-language density, blame personalization, corruption and criminality framing, and order-restoration framing. On the firm side, brand creatives are scored for price/value cue presence, issue or identity salience, localization framing, channel type, and endorser political exposure. Assignment to exposed and comparison groups is rule-based, pre-registered, and fixed at a pre-event baseline so that group membership cannot respond to the events under study. Four observable criteria govern assignment. Regulated-sector exposure is coded from the firm's primary NACE Rev. 2 activity classification: banking and financial services, telecommunications, energy, pharmaceuticals, broadcasting, gambling, and tobacco and alcohol are classified as high-exposure because entry, pricing, or licensing in these sectors depends on ongoing state authorization. Procurement dependence is measured as the share of firm or group revenue attributable to public tenders, coded from award records on Türkiye's Electronic Public Procurement Platform (EKAP) and from procurement disclosures in annual reports; firms above the sample median are classified as procurement-dependent. Audience breadth distinguishes mass-market from niche brands using three convergent indicators: national television advertising presence in the pre-event year, brand social-media audience size relative to the category median, and category household penetration where market-research data are available. Export orientation is measured as the export share of revenue from annual reports and exporter-association listings, with firms above 50% classified as export-oriented. Each criterion is coded independently from at least two public sources, disagreements are resolved by documented rules, and robustness checks re-estimate all models using continuous versions of the procurement, breadth, and export measures in place of binary classifications.

The codebook is bilingual (Turkish-English) so that threat vocabulary and com-

mercial framing are judged against category definitions in the original language rather than through translation.

5.5. Reliability and Validation

Because the study is conducted by a single analyst, reliability is established through intra-coder and human-machine validation rather than inter-coder agreement. The analyst first codes a stratified gold-standard subsample and, after a washout interval of several weeks, re-codes the same subsample blind to the original labels; intra-coder stability is reported as Krippendorff's α , with a target of at least 0.80, demonstrating that the codebook is applied consistently over time (Krippendorff, 2019). This adjudicated gold standard then trains and validates automated annotators—a supervised classifier and one or more large-language-model annotators—applied to the full corpus, an approach now well established for political and social text (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013; Barberá, Boydston, Linn, McMahon, & Nagler, 2021; Gilardi, Alizadeh, & Kubli, 2023; Ziems et al., 2024). Reliability of the scaled measurement is reported as classifier performance against a held-out portion of the gold set, as human-model agreement, and, where multiple models are used, as inter-model agreement and run-to-run stability. To guard against single-coder bias, the codebook, decision rules, and coded examples are pre-registered before analysis.

5.6. Estimation Strategy

The unit of analysis is the brand-week. The panel comprises brand-week observations over the study period, with each communication outcome (price/value-cue share, issue/identity-cue share, localization framing, channel allocation, endorser exposure) aggregated from creative-level records to the brand-week. Event windows span eight weeks before to eight weeks after each qualifying lawfare event; brand-month aggregation and four- and twelve-week windows are estimated as robustness checks, and creative-level models nested within brand-weeks are used for outcomes observed at the level of the individual advertisement. The core specification is a difference-in-differences design with brand and calendar-week fixed effects, estimating whether the composition of brand communication shifts in event windows relative to matched non-event windows. Exposed categories—those with regulated-sector, procurement, or mass-market characteristics—are compared against less-exposed categories, with export-oriented and niche brands serving as a comparison group with weak theoretical exposure (H1, H3). Interaction with contemporaneous inflation and consumer-confidence readings tests whether macroeconomic stress amplifies the association (H2). Because advertising is independently cyclical (Deleersnyder et al., 2009), models control for category-level seasonality and the business-cycle component of ad spending, so that estimated event effects do not simply reflect demand cycles.

Nationwide shocks that reach exposed and comparison brands simultaneously—monthly inflation releases, monetary-policy decisions, election periods, Ramadan

and other major holidays, and sector-wide promotional seasons such as November discount campaigns—are handled in three ways. First, calendar-week fixed effects absorb any shock common to all brands in a given week, so identification comes only from the within-week contrast between exposed and comparison categories. Second, windows overlapping national election campaigns (four weeks either side of polling day) and major holiday periods are flagged and the models re-estimated excluding them, with category-specific month indicators capturing recurring promotional seasonality. Third, any residual concern that a shock coincides exactly with a lawfare event is addressed by the placebo-window design, which estimates the same specifications at randomly assigned pseudo-event dates. Robustness checks additionally include leave-one-event-out estimation, alternative window lengths, alternative dictionaries and classifier specifications, and separate estimates by threat modality. The identifying assumption—parallel pre-event trends between exposed and comparison categories—is examined directly through event-study plots of pre-period coefficients and reported transparently, including where it fails.

Because inflation independently pushes advertising toward price and value content, the design specifies in advance which estimated patterns would support the political-risk mechanism rather than a pure inflation account. Inflation predicts a gradual, economy-wide rise in price cues that tracks the price level and applies equally to exposed and comparison categories; it makes no prediction about identity- or issue-cue withdrawal, outlet reallocation, or partnership caution. The political-risk mechanism is therefore specifically supported by four patterns: a discontinuous post-event reduction in issue and identity cues concentrated in exposed categories, with no contemporaneous change in comparison categories observed in the same weeks; effect magnitudes that increase with regulated-sector exposure and procurement dependence (H3); post-event reallocation of placements away from politically marked outlets holding total spend constant; and onset-and-decay timing aligned to event dates rather than to inflation announcements. Conversely, a uniform rise in price cues across exposed and comparison categories that tracks CPI releases, with no differential movement in issue salience or placement, would indicate that inflation rather than lawfare is doing the work—an informative result that the design commits to reporting as such.

5.7. Comparative Extension

Hungary serves as the comparative case for RQ2, for three reasons. It is a foundational case in the autocratic-legalism literature (Scheppele, 2018). It experienced a severe inflationary episode, with annual consumer price inflation of roughly 14.6% in 2022 and approximately 17% in 2023, the highest in a quarter-century, accompanied by persistently negative consumer confidence. And it exhibits the same transmission channel: peer-reviewed analysis documents state advertising as an instrument of media-market transformation in favor of government-aligned outlets (Bátorfy & Urbán, 2020). Hungary thus offers a most-similar comparison

on mechanism with variation in institutional context—notably European Union membership and the associated legal and funding constraints—allowing assessment of whether defensive adaptation is a general response to the lawfare-plus-stress configuration or an artefact of Turkish particularities. **Table 4** sets out the comparative structure.

5.8. Ethics, Transparency, and Scope Conditions

The study analyzes public legal texts, published media, public brand communication, and public social-media content. Social-media material is aggregated and individual non-public figures are not identified. No firm is characterized as having acted unlawfully; the analysis concerns communication strategy, not legal culpability. Given the political sensitivity of the subject, named-firm findings are reported at category level unless the communication analyzed was itself public and attributable.

Two scope conditions bound the claims. First, the design identifies association between event timing and communication composition; it cannot observe managerial intent, and firms may adjust for commercial reasons coincident with political events. Interviews with marketing practitioners, where obtainable under confidentiality, would strengthen the interpretation and are flagged as a valuable extension. Second, the neuropolitical and neuromarketing mechanism is specified from an established experimental literature but is not measured in this design. It is directly testable, and the most tractable test is a framing experiment in which consumers are randomly assigned to view identical product advertising embedded in neutral-procedural versus threat-framed news contexts, with purchase intention, price sensitivity, and brand evaluation as outcomes; psychophysiological or electroencephalographic measurement would index the arousal and valuation pathways more directly.

6. The Turkish Setting: Documented Structural Conditions

Türkiye's recent macroeconomic trajectory supplies unusually strong conditions for testing the argument. Annual consumer price inflation averaged approximately 72% in 2022, peaking above 85% in October of that year, then remained at roughly 54% in 2023 and 59% in 2024 before a policy-driven disinflation. The **OECD (2025)** reports that growth slowed from 5.1% in 2023 to 3.2% in 2024 as the economy rebalanced away from consumption toward net exports, and projects inflation falling from approximately 31% in 2025 to below 19% in 2026. Consumer confidence, measured jointly by the Turkish Statistical Institute and the Central Bank, remained well below the neutral threshold of 100 throughout, indicating sustained pessimism; readings in 2026 in the high 80 s represented multi-year highs while still signaling net negative sentiment. **Table 2** summarizes these indicators.

This configuration matters theoretically. Inflation of this magnitude makes price the dominant consumer concern and, through the valuation mechanism de-

scribed above, shifts purchase decisions toward cost-driven processing. Persistently sub-neutral confidence indicates that the shift is not transient. These are precisely the conditions under which H2 predicts the lawfare-adaptation association to be strongest.

Table 2. Macroeconomic stress indicators, Türkiye, 2022-2026.

Indicator	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Annual CPI inflation (%, period average)	≈72	≈54	≈59	≈31 (OECD projection)	<19 (OECD projection)
Peak monthly inflation	85.4 (October)	—	—	—	—
GDP growth (%)	—	5.1	3.2	—	—
Consumer confidence (index, 100 = neutral)	Below 100 throughout	91.1 (May, period high)	Below 100	Below 100	85.8 (May); 89.8 (July)

Note. Inflation and growth figures from [OECD \(2025\)](#) and national statistical series; consumer confidence from the joint Turkish Statistical Institute-Central Bank consumer tendency survey. Values are rounded and indicative; exact series are reproduced in the replication materials.

6.1. The Politicization of the Advertising Market

The second structural condition is that Türkiye's advertising market is itself politically structured. [Yanatma \(2021\)](#) documents that the state emerged as the largest advertiser in the media market alongside the consolidation of competitive authoritarianism, and analyzes public advertising allocation as an instrument of media capture. Specific applications are documented: the concentration of official-advertising sanctions on a handful of critical newspapers, amounting to 276 days of withheld state advertising in 2020, and the 2022 tightening of the eligibility code governing access to official advertising ([Reporters without Borders, 2022](#)); and the Constitutional Court's pilot judgment concerning newspapers suspended from receiving public advertisements ([Library of Congress, 2022](#)).

The implication for commercial advertisers is direct. Where the state is the largest advertiser and where allocation is understood to carry political meaning, the placement of commercial advertising becomes legible as a political act regardless of intent. Buying inventory in an outlet marked as oppositional, or withdrawing from one marked as aligned, is a decision made in view of that legibility. This is the concrete channel through which lawfare reaches the marketing function, and it is what makes the Turkish case analytically tractable rather than merely illustrative.

6.2. The Lawfare Environment

The third condition is a documented, dated sequence of high-salience legal actions against opposition actors spanning more than a decade, culminating in proceedings against the mayor of the country's largest city and commercial centre. The scale of the most recent case—an indictment approaching 4000 pages, more than

400 co-defendants, over 140 charges (Human Rights Watch, 2026)—and its location in Istanbul, which concentrates national media, advertising, and retail activity, make it a plausible high-intensity treatment for the purposes of event-based analysis.

7. Analytical Expectations and Reporting Structure

Consistent with the article's status as a protocol, this section states the direction predicted by theory and the structure in which results will be reported once the analyses are executed. No estimates are pre-empted, no findings are claimed, and no figures are supplied in place of analysis.

As part of the descriptive stage, reporting will comprise corpus size by source family and event; distribution of threat, blame, corruption, and order-restoration framing by outlet type; and the composition of brand creatives by price-cue presence, issue salience, and channel across event and non-event windows. The predicted descriptive pattern is that framing intensity is higher in official and government-aligned sources than in opposition- or defence-oriented texts, and that the share of price-oriented creatives is elevated in post-event windows.

Event-study plots will display pre- and post-event coefficients for each communication outcome, with pre-period coefficients reported explicitly as a test of parallel trends. The predicted pattern under H1 is a post-event increase in price and value cues and a post-event decrease in issue and identity salience, concentrated in the first weeks and attenuating thereafter.

Being a part of the moderation stage, interaction estimates will test whether the association strengthens with contemporaneous inflation and weakens as confidence recovers (H2), and whether regulated-sector, procurement-dependent, and mass-market brands adjust faster than niche and export-oriented brands (H3). **Table 3** sets out the correspondence between hypotheses, operationalizations, and tests.

Table 3. Hypotheses, operationalizations, and planned tests.

Hypothesis	Operationalization	Planned test	Predicted direction
H1	Share of creatives with price/value cues; share with issue/identity content	Difference-in-differences, brand and time fixed effects	Price cues ↑, issue salience ↓ post-event
H2	Interaction of event intensity with CPI and consumer-confidence readings	Interaction terms; split-sample by stress regime	Association stronger under high inflation and low confidence
H3	Regulated exposure, procurement dependence, audience breadth, export orientation	Triple interaction; subgroup event studies	Faster depoliticization among exposed and mass-market brands
RQ2	Replication of core specification on Hungarian corpus	Parallel estimation; cross-case comparison	Directionally similar, magnitude conditioned by institutional context

The design commits in advance to reporting null results and contrary patterns. Three outcomes would count as disconfirming: no post-event shift in communication composition once cyclical advertising controls are applied; a shift concentrated in unexposed rather than exposed categories; or pre-event trends indicating that the association reflects ongoing drift rather than event response. Because advertising is independently cyclical and inflation independently drives price messaging, the possibility that observed shifts reflect macroeconomic conditions alone is a live alternative explanation, and the comparison of exposed against unexposed categories within the same macroeconomic period is the primary means of adjudicating it.

8. Comparative Extension: Türkiye and Hungary

The comparative logic is most similar on mechanism, different on institutional context. **Table 4** sets out the structure.

Two comparative expectations follow. First, if defensive adaptation is a general response to the lawfare-plus-stress configuration, directionally similar shifts should appear in Hungary despite its milder inflation and different coercive repertoire. Second, magnitude should be conditioned by institutional constraint: where supranational legal and funding mechanisms raise the cost of overt coercion, the political-risk channel should be weaker, and adaptation should be driven relatively more by reputational and demand risk. A finding that Hungarian firms show reputational but not political-risk adaptation would support the framework's channel decomposition, whereas an absence of adaptation in Hungary would suggest that the Turkish pattern depends on inflation severity rather than on legal coercion—an informative negative result that would materially narrow the theory's scope.

Table 4. Comparative case structure.

Dimension	Türkiye	Hungary
Legal-coercion repertoire	Prosecutions, detentions, municipal trustee appointments	Constitutional and legislative reconfiguration; regulatory and ownership pressure
Position in backsliding literature	Competitive authoritarianism (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016 ; Esen, 2025)	Foundational autocratic-legalism case (Scheppelle, 2018)
Inflationary episode	≈72% (2022), ≈54% (2023), ≈59% (2024)	≈14.6% (2022), ≈17% (2023), a 25-year high
Consumer sentiment	Sub-neutral throughout the period	Persistently negative
Advertising-market channel	State documented as largest advertiser; allocation as capture instrument (Yanatma, 2021)	State advertising documented as an instrument of media-market transformation toward aligned outlets (Bátorfy & Urbán, 2020)
Institutional constraint	Council of Europe and ECtHR jurisdiction	European Union membership, with associated legal and funding conditionality

9. Discussion

9.1. Contributions

If the predicted patterns obtain, the study makes three contributions. To comparative politics, it shows that the consequences of autocratic legalism extend into commercial behavior: legal coercion restructures not only what political actors can do but what commercial actors find it prudent to say. This is a form of private-sector self-censorship that operates without any direct order being issued, and it is invisible to institutional measures of democratic quality. To marketing scholarship, it extends business-cycle research into environments where the relevant shock is political as well as economic, and shows that the standard downturn playbook—price emphasis, promotional depth, reduced brand investment—acquires an additional political rationale when issue salience carries coercive risk. To the study of polarization and brands, it moves the evidence base beyond consolidated democracies, where the operative constraint is consumer backlash, into settings where it is also state action.

The framework also clarifies why the observable outcome may be homogeneity of brand communication. If diverse firms facing diverse commercial circumstances converge on price-led, issue-avoidant, consensually localized messaging, that convergence is not evidence of coordination. It is what a shared risk environment produces when many independent actors each optimize against the same tail risk. Blandness, in this account, is an equilibrium.

9.2. Implications

For managers, the analysis identifies a measurable cost to defensive adaptation. Prolonged price-led communication erodes brand equity, accelerates the shift toward private label documented by [Lamey et al. \(2007\)](#), and forfeits the elevated returns to marketing investment that obtain during contractions ([Steenkamp & Fang, 2011](#); [Srinivasan et al., 2011](#)). Firms that depoliticize for sound short-run reasons may nonetheless be trading long-run differentiation for short-run safety, and the framework makes that trade-off explicit rather than tacit.

For policy, the analysis reframes advertising-market governance as a competition and free-expression issue simultaneously. Where the state is the largest advertiser and allocation functions as reward and punishment, commercial advertising decisions are drawn into the political field. Transparency requirements for public advertising allocation, and independent oversight of broadcast regulation, are therefore not only media-freedom measures; they are measures that restore neutrality to a market in which firms currently must price political risk into ordinary media buying.

9.3. Limitations

Four limitations bound the study. Observational event-based designs cannot establish managerial intent, and the association between event timing and commu-

nication change admits alternative explanations that the design mitigates but cannot eliminate. Public advertising libraries provide incomplete coverage, with variable historical depth and platform-specific gaps, so the brand-communication corpus will be a non-random sample of total marketing activity. The neuropolitical and neuromarketing mechanism is theorized from established experimental findings but not measured here, and the framing experiment described above is required to test it directly. Finally, a two-case comparison supports analytic rather than statistical generalization; extension to additional stressed political economies would be required before claiming that defensive adaptation is a general phenomenon.

10. Conclusion

This article has argued that lawfare reaches markets through communication. Prosecutions, detentions, trustee appointments, and judicial-executive rhetoric do not merely constrain political opponents; they recast political conflict as risk, and that recasting travels through captured media environments and politicized advertising markets to reach the firms that must keep selling. Under the compounding pressure of severe inflation and depressed consumer confidence, the result is a narrowing of the feasible frontier of marketing strategy: price and value displace aspiration, issue salience is withdrawn, localization is framed consensually, channels are chosen for low exposure, and partnerships become cautious.

The claim is bounded and contingent. Firms are not uniform, and the framework specifies which characteristics—regulated exposure, procurement dependence, audience breadth—should drive the fastest adaptation and which should insulate. The mechanism is grounded in established findings on how threat framing reshapes political cognition and how price salience reshapes consumer valuation, and it is stated in a form that survey-experimental and psychophysiological work can test directly.

The broader implication is that democratic erosion has a commercial signature. When firms in a stressed political economy quietly converge on saying less, the change is visible in advertising libraries long before it appears in any institutional index. Reading that signature is one way to observe how coercion propagates through a society—not only through the courts and the press, but through the ordinary business of selling.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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