



Standards Governing the Coverage of Crime in Algerian Print Journalism

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Abstract:

This article aims to examine how Algerian print journalism covers crime-related issues. The treatment of crime in Algerian print media is governed by a set of legal and professional standards that must be respected when addressing such sensitive topics. The Fundamental Law on Information defines the principles and rules regulating media activity, emphasizing respect for public order, national security, and the moral values of society. Additionally, the Algerian Penal Code stipulates specific penalties for journalistic offenses such as defamation, insult, and disclosure of secrets – for instance, defamation against individuals is punishable by imprisonment ranging from two to six months.

The study is based on the hypothesis that crime coverage in the press, if not conducted according to professional standards, may contribute to spreading fear, justifying violence, or even violating individuals' rights.

The article discusses the theoretical framework of journalistic standards, drawing on both national and international media codes of ethics as well as Algerian laws regulating communication and the press. It also analyzes examples of crime news coverage in selected national daily newspapers, focusing on style, language, information sources, and respect for the privacy of victims and suspects.

Keywords: Algerian journalism, crime, media coverage, professional ethics, print press.

Résumé

Cet article vise à examiner comment le journalisme imprimé algérien couvre les questions liées à la criminalité. Le traitement de la criminalité dans les médias imprimés algériens est régi par un ensemble de normes légales et professionnelles qui doivent être respectées lorsqu'il s'agit de traiter de sujets aussi sensibles. La Loi fondamentale sur l'information définit les principes et règles régissant l'activité des médias, en mettant l'accent sur le respect de l'ordre public, de la sécurité nationale et des valeurs morales de la société. De plus, le Code pénal algérien prévoit des sanctions spécifiques pour les infractions journalistiques telles que la diffamation, l'insulte et la divulgation de secrets – par exemple, la diffamation à l'encontre d'individus est punissable d'une peine de prison allant de deux à six mois. L'étude se base sur l'hypothèse que la couverture de la criminalité dans la presse, si elle n'est pas réalisée selon les normes professionnelles, peut contribuer à répandre la peur, justifier la violence, ou même violer les droits des individus. L'article aborde le cadre théorique des normes journalistiques, s'appuyant à la fois sur les codes de déontologie des médias nationaux et internationaux ainsi que sur les lois algériennes régissant la communication et la presse. Il analyse également des exemples de couverture de l'actualité criminelle dans certains journaux nationaux, en mettant l'accent sur le style, le langage, les sources d'information et le respect de la vie privée des victimes et des suspects.

Mots-clés : journalisme algérien, criminalité, couverture médiatique, éthique professionnelle, presse écrite.



Introduction:

Print journalism faces a major dilemma represented by a dual challenge that is difficult to resolve. On the one hand, journalists demand freedom of expression, the right to publish opinions and news, and the citizen's right to access accurate information. However, this freedom may sometimes lead to selfish or irresponsible ends. On the other hand, governmental censorship may prevent journalists from engaging in harmful practices that threaten society's interests, but it can also obstruct the revelation of truth.

Between these two poles, print journalism bears a **social responsibility** for everything it publishes about crime. In the Arab world in particular, newspapers have increasingly imitated their Western counterparts – preferring sensationalism over substance, triviality over creativity, and rarity over importance. In doing so, they often neglect significant social issues and instead provide news material that provokes emotional reactions among youth while overlooking serious social transformations.

This type of journalism has thus become a **consumable commodity**, subject to the laws of supply and demand, driven by owners' commercial interests and their pursuit of pleasing audiences rather than fulfilling the duty of informing the public. The question arises: is this situation the result of journalists' personal choices, the public's preferences, or the influence of elites and power groups within society?

What is certain is that print journalism exerts a strong influence on readers regarding crime news. Therefore, it

must play a role in **helping the state protect society from crime**, which defines the boundaries of its responsibility and justifies the need for **press legislation**.

To explore this issue in depth, the article first examines the **ethics of journalism** in general and in Algeria in particular – given their direct relevance to the topic of crime coverage in the Algerian press. It then discusses the **controversy surrounding the publication of crime news**, followed by an analysis of the **professional and legal standards** that regulate such coverage.

Based on this framework, the study raises the following research questions:

- What are the dominant trends in the coverage of crime by Algerian print journalism?
- To what extent does it adhere to professional and ethical standards in this field?

Accordingly, the article addresses the following key components:

1. Ethics of the journalistic profession
2. Print journalism and the publication of crime news (opinions of thinkers and researchers)
3. Legal and professional regulations governing journalistic practice

1. Ethics of Journalism

Although millions of people work in various fields of communication, **journalists occupy a unique position** because their profession is not only a social function but also a role with a profound influence on ideas and opinions. Due to the nature of their work, journalism represents both a **profession and a mission**, especially since public opinion today relies more than ever on those who provide truthful,



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objective, and unbiased information. As noted by *Sean MacBride et al. (1981, p. 487)*, the collection and dissemination of news is indispensable to the functioning of any democratic system.

Hence, the journalist's responsibility toward society lies in fulfilling the potential social roles of the press and adhering to the principles and behaviors necessary to achieve them.

Within this framework, the media—including print journalism—finds itself caught **between freedom of expression and governmental censorship**, a dilemma that persists to this day. Government control over the press may hinder democratic processes and prevent the representation of diverse social voices, turning newspapers into mere **propaganda tools** incapable of exposing corruption or social problems. Conversely, unrestricted press freedom can result in **irresponsible practices**, prioritizing profit and sensationalism over truth and social progress (*Hassan Emad Mekawi, 1994, pp. 17-18*).

The goal of press freedom, therefore, is to **support democracy—not to spread chaos** through irresponsible reporting. Ethical journalism must thus guide all media practice. This raises essential questions: What duties does journalism owe to its professionals and to society? What standards should guide journalists in their work? What defines good versus bad journalism?

Ethical journalism—*la déontologie professionnelle*—may be defined as *“that branch of philosophy that helps journalists determine what is right to do. It provides the guiding principles, norms, and values that lead the journalist—not compel him—to make ethical decisions.”* These standards enable journalists to judge whether an act is right or wrong, good or bad,

responsible or irresponsible (*John Merrill & Ralph Lowenstein, 1989, p. 305*).

Ethical debates in newsrooms have existed since the early days of journalism. Editors still struggle to define what is “right” and “fair.” As media lawyer *Joseph T. Frank* observes, “The rules of media ethics remain a policy system in search of ethics” (*Shirley Biagi, 1991, p. 259*).

This difficulty arises because no universally binding code of ethics exists to resolve moral disputes. Even the codes adopted by press unions or associations are often ineffective or meaningless. In Western thought, ethics tend to be **highly personal**, depending on each journalist’s perspective. For instance, a journalist with a **human-oriented approach** prioritizes the feelings and experiences of others, while an **event-oriented journalist** focuses solely on facts, regardless of consequences (*Merrill & Lowenstein, 1989, pp. 306–307*).

To enhance freedom of the press and improve journalistic performance, **ethical charters** began emerging about 80 years ago. In the 1960s, **Press Councils** were established as voluntary organizations that promote better media performance and handle public complaints without legal coercion (*Mekkawi, 1994, p. 144*).

While *Everette Dennis* warned that such councils might threaten media independence by acting as instruments of control, *John Merrill* argued that they serve an **advisory role**, improving journalism in service of society by setting informal ethical standards rather than enforcing legal penalties. According to *Mekkawi (1994, p. 158)*, press councils can:

1. Verify the accuracy of news coverage.
2. Reduce defamation cases and resolve audience complaints.



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3. Strengthen media credibility and encourage public feedback.
4. Raise public awareness of the media's social role.
5. Promote press freedom through fairness and accountability.

In recent decades, various organizations have emerged to encourage responsible journalism, such as the **American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE)** and the **Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)**, both of which provide ethical guidelines reminding journalists of their responsibility toward truth and society (*Mekkwawi, 1994, p. 158*).

In Arab societies, despite early attempts by Arab journalists in the first decades of the 20th century to establish unions and professional associations, these efforts largely failed to materialize. No comprehensive legislation regulating the journalistic profession was enacted in any Arab country until the **1940s and 1950s**. As a result, the formation of professional journalist unions lagged behind other professions – mainly due to the **lack of government support or official recognition** of such organizations.

The achievements of journalist associations vary from one Arab country to another, reflecting the long struggle of journalists to secure their professional rights and gain recognition as influential actors within national communication systems. The history of Arab journalism demonstrates that **these rights were never granted freely** – they were earned through **persistent struggle and advocacy** (*Hassan Emad Mekkwawi, 1994, pp. 149–150*).

Regarding **Arab media codes of ethics**, they exist only in countries with relatively advanced experience in organizing media professions. Over the past three decades, several

important developments have taken place in this area. The **Charter of the General Union of Arab Journalists**, adopted at the Union's founding conference in 1964, outlined the **professional and ethical responsibilities of Arab journalists toward their societies**, and its provisions are binding through the national unions that compose the Union.

Similarly, the **Arab Media Code of Honor**, approved by the **League of Arab States in 1978**, sought to establish a constructive Arab media policy at both the national and human levels, following recommendations from the **Permanent Committee for Arab Media** to draft a unified ethical framework (*Mekkawi, 1994, pp. 150-152*).

General Objectives of Arab Media Ethical Charters

These codes aim to **improve journalistic performance** by strengthening journalists' awareness of their social and professional responsibilities, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Service to Society:** Newspapers must serve the welfare of society. Their contribution to public interest imposes a great responsibility on all employees. A journalist who uses his influence for personal gain forfeits public trust and credibility (*Gharib Mohamed Sayed Ahmed, 1996, p. 237*).
- **Right to Information:** Freedom of expression and publication is meaningless without the right to access information. To obtain the information the public needs, journalists must approach government officials and institutions, request access to records, and ensure transparency. Democratic societies recognize the **press's right to access official sources**, provided that the information serves public interest. However, such



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freedom entails obligations of **objectivity, balance, and responsibility** (*Mekkawi, 1994, pp. 176-177*).

- **Protection of Sources:** The **confidentiality of journalistic sources** (editorial secrecy) is one of the fundamental guarantees of media freedom and a tool for exposing corruption. Journalists fought hard for this right, which must be exercised with honesty, objectivity, and dedication to the public good.
- **Avoidance of Defamation:** When journalists make unfounded accusations, they commit defamation. Even when they claim the “right of fair comment” on public figures, such defense fails if their remarks stray into personal attacks or demonstrate intent to harm. Journalists must ensure **accuracy and fairness** in all reporting, and if an error occurs, they must promptly issue corrections or apologies (*Sulaiman Jazea Al-Shammari, 1993, p. 121*).
- **Right to Privacy:** Many media laws emphasize protecting the **right to privacy**, a sacred human right. Everyone has a private life that must remain free from unwarranted publicity or defamation. Using someone’s name or image in a commercial context without consent is considered a violation. Even when the published information is true and legally permissible, **ethical journalism may still forbid its publication** if it intrudes on personal privacy (*Mekkawi, 1994, p. 274*).
- **Crime Reporting:** Although publishing crime and trial news is a legitimate journalistic practice, excessive coverage may **compromise the defendant’s right to a fair trial**. Laws prohibit newspapers from

interfering in judicial proceedings, issuing premature judgments, or publishing restricted materials. This aspect will be discussed in more detail under *Press Regulations Governing Crime Coverage*.

- **Copyright and Attribution:** The protection of journalistic copyright and proper citation remains a debated issue. Ethical journalism requires acknowledgment of sources when quoting or using others' work (*Mekawwi, 1994, p. 323*).
- **Public Morality:** Publishing obscene or indecent material violates public morality by promoting immorality and corruption. This issue is not only legal but deeply **ethical**, emphasizing the journalist's duty to uphold public decency and social values.

From the above, it becomes clear that **no journalism is immune from error**, yet acknowledging mistakes reflects professional virtue. True journalistic integrity lies not only in laws and regulations but in the **consistent observance of ethical principles** in media practice.

When discussing **media legislation in Algeria**, it is essential to remember that Algeria is a **relatively young independent state**, and the short time since independence has not allowed for a fully coherent and stable body of media laws. The country's media environment continues to evolve, making legislation a complex and ongoing process – especially compared to advanced nations with long legislative traditions.

After independence, **Algerian print journalism** operated under a **single-party system**, where media were aligned with the **state's socialist ideology**. The **1976 Constitution**, the **Fourth Congress of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1979**, and later the **1982 Information Law** all defined the



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media sector as a **strategic domain of the state** (*Zouheir Ihaddaden, 1991, p. 116*). Consequently, no entity outside the state or the ruling party was allowed to own or manage a media outlet.

With the emergence of the independent press following the **social and political upheaval of October 5, 1988**, new horizons began to open toward political pluralism and democratic participation—domains that had long been monopolized by a single-party ideology. This shift marked the beginnings of **democratic practices in media**, solidifying the **principle of freedom of expression**, as enshrined in the **1989 amended Constitution**.

From that point onward, tensions between the authorities and press institutions—particularly through publishers—intensified, revolving mainly around issues of press freedom, political pressure, and recurrent threats of suspension or censorship (*El-Khabar Weekly, April 28, 1999*).

Although the **Algerian print press** made significant strides toward freedom of expression and opened wide spaces for dissenting opinions, **government pressure persisted**. The **1990 Information Law** did not, as many hoped, end thirty years of state dominance over the press. Rather, it served to **legalize this dependency**, turning what was meant to guarantee freedom into a tool of control. Hence, revising this law remains an **urgent necessity**—alongside the adoption of a **Code of Media Ethics**, which should be a prerequisite for enabling Algerian journalists to perform their duties **without fear of imprisonment or pretrial detention** (*El-Khabar Weekly, April 28, 1999*).

According to **Youssef Aqqoun**, the current state of Algerian journalism still requires **ethical reform**. He notes

that the fundamental question today is whether journalism can advance ethically **in parallel with journalists' poor socioeconomic conditions**. Any genuine progress in professional ethics, he argues, demands time, as it is tied to journalists' **salaries, housing, and general welfare**.

The **Algerian Minister of Culture and Communication** similarly stated that the **current media law no longer corresponds to the country's democratic stage**, containing several inconsistencies and injustices considering the sacrifices journalists have made and their contribution to democratic development. He added that the government would soon open **consultations with journalists** to prepare a new **Law on Professional Ethics**, after which the existing **Information Law** would be rendered obsolete—since Algeria has far surpassed the framework of its outdated legislation (*El-Khabar Weekly*, April 28, 1999).

Algerian journalists themselves have made several **attempts to establish ethical and professional standards**. A notable example is the proposal by the **National Union of Algerian Journalists** to create a **"Council of the Order" (Le Conseil de l'Ordre)**, a body designed to oversee the **self-regulation (auto-réglementation)** of professional conduct and ethical practices.

This council aimed to establish a **Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct**, a set of principles drafted by journalists and media experts—**without legislative force**, but carrying **moral authority** within the profession. The code defined three main axes of ethical concern:

1. **Professional Secrecy,**
2. **Right of Access to Information Sources,**
3. **Defamation, Insult, and the "Conscience Clause" (La Clause de Conscience).**



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(M. Iwanougan, *National Union of Algerian Journalists*, 1996)

This initiative was among several efforts seeking to **institutionalize press freedom, organize journalistic practice, and protect the integrity of media work** in Algeria.

2. Print Journalism and Crime Reporting (Views of Thinkers and Researchers)

Scholars and researchers have long **differed in their assessment** of whether print journalism serves as a **civilizing and moralizing influence**, helping individuals draw lessons from events, or whether it acts as a **factor of moral decay, stimulating antisocial tendencies** through its reporting on crime (*Ghazi Abdel-Baqi Al-Ahmadi, 1974, p. 91*).

This disagreement persists due to the **absence of conclusive scientific evidence** that could decisively support one view over the other. Despite numerous studies on the subject, the debate remains open—particularly given the **rapid evolution of modern media** and its **penetration of all societies and social groups** in new and unprecedented forms (*Fetouh Abdullah Al-Shazly, 1993, p. 29*).

In general, three main **approaches** can be identified regarding the **publication of crime news in newspapers**:

2.1. The First Approach:

This school of thought holds that **publishing crime news is an improper practice**, as it may contribute to the **spread of crime, damage the reputation of individuals or institutions, or obstruct judicial procedures** related to ongoing criminal cases (*Gharib Mohammed Sayed Ahmed, 1986, p. 112*).

Supporters of this view argue that the **increasing amount of crime coverage** and the **expanding space devoted to it** in newspapers are among the **factors leading to higher crime rates**, since newspapers pursue **commercial objectives** aimed at attracting readership (*Mohammed Sobhi Najm, 1991, p. 78*).

By publishing **details of crime methods**, especially new ones, newspapers unintentionally **teach potential offenders** how to commit crimes. Over time, this may lead to "**criminal contagion**", particularly among **youths inclined to imitation**, whose **weak self-control** makes them susceptible to the lure of crime (*Mohammed Abu al-Ala Aqidah, 1996, p. 233*).

According to *Ramsis Behnam (1996, pp. 138–139)*, the press can generate **self-suggestion of crime** in three ways:

1. Through **moral distortion**, by portraying the criminal as a victim of injustice, thereby normalizing the act;
2. Through **emotional fascination with fame**;
3. Through **intellectual stimulation**, by explaining the mechanics of how a crime was carried out.

Some newspapers habitually publish **detailed and sensational accounts** of crimes, often glorifying those who excel in committing them while depicting police and judicial institutions as **ineffective or powerless**. Such portrayals may **inspire impressionable individuals** to commit crimes with greater determination and sophistication (*Gharib Mohammed Sayed Ahmed, 1986, p. 112*).

Furthermore, the press may sometimes **foster sympathy for criminals** by emphasizing their **tragic personal circumstances**, while simultaneously **depicting justice and law enforcement harshly**, which can lead readers to **resent**



or distrust legal institutions (*Samia Hassan Al-Sa'ati, 1983, p. 113*).

To attract readers, newspapers also tend to use **sensational headlines** and **exaggerated descriptions**, which may inadvertently **teach criminal techniques**—for example, describing how a burglar silently entered a house by breaking a window. Such reports provide **models for imitation**, especially for young readers. Some offenders, as studies show, **commit shocking crimes merely for the sake of fame and media attention** (*Mohammed Zaki Abu Amer, 1995, p. 226*).

By **overpublishing stories about crimes and trials**, newspapers may also **sway public opinion** and influence the attitudes of **police officers and judges**. *Cesare Lombroso* himself warned of the **harmful impact of crime reporting** on public perception and justice—a view shared by many criminologists (*Fetouh Abdullah Al-Shazly, 1993, p. 298*).

Journalists, driven by the **imperative of immediacy and exclusivity**, often seek to publish every sensational detail without delay, in contrast to law enforcement officers who prefer withholding information until it serves a **clear investigative or preventive purpose**. This **conflict of professional philosophies** between journalists and the police frequently leads to **tension and even obstruction of justice** (*Abdel Karim Darwish, 1986, p. 346*).

Often, **reporters rely on unofficial sources**, such as local witnesses, and exaggerate details to make stories more appealing. This can **confuse witnesses** and **complicate investigations**, as they may no longer distinguish between what they saw and what they read. Even investigators and judges can be affected.

Another concern is that **biased or one-sided reporting** can **shape public opinion** prematurely, influencing perceptions of guilt or innocence and potentially **jeopardizing fair trials** (*Abdel Karim Darwish, 1986, p. 365*).

In summary, the **main ways in which print journalism may influence crime and criminal behavior** include:

- Teaching the **techniques of crime** to the public;
- Presenting crime as **glamorous or exciting**, particularly to youth;
- Portraying crime as a **common and normal occurrence** in society;
- Suggesting that crime offers **easy rewards of wealth and pleasure**;
- Depicting criminals as **figures of admiration**;
- Appealing to **base instincts and sensational emotions**;
- Undermining respect for **law and justice** by showing criminals escaping punishment;
- Failing to report **sentences and penalties**, which prevents punishment from serving as a deterrent;
- **Ridiculing the judicial system**, either explicitly or implicitly;
- **Criticizing modern penal reforms**, in ways that may actually increase crime rates (*Mohammed Zaki Abu Amer, 1995, p. 266*).

Consequently, many criminologists believe that the press, by deviating from its original purpose, has become a **contributing factor to criminal behavior**. However, as *Ghazi Abdel-Baqi Al-Ahmadi (1974, p. 91)* points out, **no statistical evidence** conclusively demonstrates the number of crimes directly influenced by newspaper reports.



2.2. The Third Approach

Some moderate scholars maintain that it is meaningless for the press to completely refrain from publishing crime news, since such events form an integral part of its content. However, they argue that crime coverage should be **concise, non-sensational, placed in small sections of the newspaper, and accompanied by the judicial verdict**, particularly when the sentence is **severe and deterrent**.

If a newspaper seeks to **raise public awareness or alert the authorities** to a rising crime rate during a specific period, this should be done through **a series of scientific articles supported by statistical data** (*Ghazi Abdel-Baqi Al-Ahmadi, 1974, p. 93*).

According to this perspective, the issue is **not whether crime news should be published or not**, since newspapers have the **right to publish** and the **public has the right to be informed**. The written word has always been—and remains—one of the most powerful tools of **socialization and social control**.

The journalist, faced with such diverse opinions and schools of thought, is **obliged to adopt a stance**; remaining neutral or indifferent is not an option, for such a position would **alienate the audience**. Readers are naturally drawn to journalists who **express opinions and attempt to persuade others** with sound reasoning.

3. Journalistic Regulations and Legal Frameworks

From the foregoing, it appears that the **danger lies not in the mere publication of crime news**, but rather in the

transformation of newspapers into secret informants or self-appointed judges.

In covering crimes, **print journalism** in Algeria faces a number of **obstacles** at various levels:

- The **political and social context** in which it operates, reflecting the general structural conditions of society;
- The **media practice itself**, including editorial policies, professional competence of journalists, and reliability of sources;
- The **audience level**, which shapes how crime news is received and interpreted (*Abdel Fattah Abdel Nabi, 1992, p. 33*).

Despite these challenges, there exist **a set of rules and ethical standards** that journalists must adhere to when reporting or analyzing crimes. These regulations appear both in **codes of journalistic ethics** and in **media laws**, such as those found in the **Algerian Media Law of 1990**.

It should be noted that the **1990 Algerian Media Law**, in its section on the practice of journalism, **does not include specific provisions governing the publication of crime news**. Instead, it contains **general articles** applicable to all types of reporting. Moreover, there are **no explicit ethical charters** in Algeria dealing specifically with crime reporting. However, some provisions of the 1990 law—and similar laws in other Arab countries—implicitly touch upon this issue.

According to **Article 28** of the Algerian Media Law (1990), a **professional journalist** is defined as:

“Any person who devotes himself to the search for, collection, selection, use, and presentation of news within the framework of journalistic activity, which constitutes his



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regular profession and main source of income.” (*Official Gazette, 1990, p. 462*).

Thus, only **professional journalists**—those holding an official press card—are bound by these legal and ethical rules.

Professional journalists have the **right to access news sources**, including information related to crimes, **within the limits of the law**. This right is recognized by most international legislations. Article 36 of the Algerian Media Law (1990) states:

“Professional journalists have the right to access information. This right particularly allows them to consult public administration documents related to the objectives of their mission, provided such documents are not classified by law.” (*Official Gazette, 1990, p. 462*).

Therefore, while the government **has no constitutional right to impose prior censorship**, journalists and their institutions may still face **legal prosecution** if they **violate any law** in the course of their work (*Suleiman Jazi' Al-Shammari, 1993, pp. 168–169*).

When a journalist is assigned to cover a crime, it is possible that **he will not be allowed access to the courtroom**, as certain hearings may be **closed to the press** in order to **protect the defendant's right to a fair trial** (*Suleiman Jazi' Al-Shammari, 1993, pp. 168–169*). In such cases, journalists often rely on **observing witnesses entering or leaving the police station** or courtroom, and attempt to interview them when circumstances permit. However, **prosecutors, defense attorneys, or witnesses themselves** ultimately decide whether to speak to the media (*John Hohenberg, 1990, pp. 454–455*).

Articles 36 and 37 of the **Algerian Media Law (1990)** also **limit journalists' protection** concerning the confidentiality of their sources in specific circumstances:

- **Article 36** prohibits the publication of information that could **harm judicial investigations or proceedings**.
- **Article 37** stipulates that **professional secrecy** is a journalist's right and duty, but this cannot be invoked **against the competent judicial authority** in matters involving ongoing investigations (*Official Gazette, 1990, p. 463*).

Similar restrictions exist in other Arab media laws:

- **Article 8** of the **Egyptian Press Law No. 148 (1980)** prohibits the press from publishing material that may **affect investigations or trials or influence the standing of the persons involved** (*Hassan Imad Makkawi, 1994, p. 218*).
- **Article 78** of the **UAE Press and Publications Law** forbids publishing information about **ongoing criminal investigations** if the **judge or public prosecutor** has ordered secrecy (*Hassan Imad Makkawi, 1994, p. 218*).
- In **Kuwait's Draft Press and Publications Law (1980)**, **Article 37** prescribes up to **three months' imprisonment or a fine** for publishing details of cases for which the competent authority has ordered a **publication ban** (*Suleiman Jazi' Al-Shammari, 1993, pp. 182-183*).

From these examples, it is clear that journalists **cannot violate courtroom confidentiality** or **defy judicial decisions**. Penalties may include **imprisonment, fines, or both**, typically under **contempt of court**. Nonetheless,



journalists retain the right to **formally protest** when **public hearings are unjustly closed**, provided their institutions approve (*Suleiman Jazi' Al-Shammari, 1993, p. 168*).

Court news is of great public interest because most citizens **cannot attend trials**. The press therefore plays a crucial role in **informing the public** about the application of laws and the integrity of the judiciary. Reporting on trials **helps raise awareness** of social problems and ensures **public confidence in justice**, showing that **law and order prevail** (*Abdel Latif Hamza, n.d., p. 472; Hassan Imad Makkawi, 1994, p. 301*).

However, while the publication of crime and court news is a **legitimate journalistic right**, it sometimes results in **unethical practices**, such as **prejudicial reporting** that undermines the defendant's right to a fair trial. All **media laws and ethical charters** forbid such conduct.

For example, **Article 39** of the **Syrian Press Law** states:

"All publications are prohibited from publishing documents of accusation or materials related to criminal investigations before they are read in open court." (*Suleiman Jazi' Al-Shammari, 1993, p. 198*).

To **preserve the dignity and reputation of the accused**, newspapers should **avoid defamation or moral harm**. Courts often level serious charges, and sometimes judges treat defendants harshly during proceedings. If these accusations are **broadcast publicly**, they may **humiliate innocent individuals** who are later proven blameless.

Hence, newspapers must report court verdicts **accurately and responsibly**, especially when the verdict is **acquittal**, so as not to wrongfully stigmatize individuals. The fundamental legal principle remains: "The accused is

innocent until proven guilty.” (*Abdel Latif Hamza, n.d., pp. 473–474*).

Conclusion

The coverage of crime by Algerian print media remains **caught between the hammer of legal obligations and the anvil of social responsibility**. Media institutions need to **reconsider their roles** to move beyond traditional news reporting toward **developmental investigative journalism**, while maintaining a **balance between freedom of expression and respect for the law**. The greatest challenge lies in transforming the press from a **passive conveyor of news** into an **active agent in crime prevention and public awareness-building**.

Adhering to **professional and ethical standards** does not restrict press freedom; rather, it **enhances credibility** and positions the media as a **key partner in promoting public safety and legal awareness**. Therefore, this study **recommends**:

1. The introduction of **specialized training for journalists** in judicial and criminal reporting.
2. The implementation of **self-regulatory mechanisms** within media institutions.
3. The establishment of a **national charter** governing the media’s handling of crime, which balances the **public’s right to information** with the **duty to respect human dignity**.

This approach ensures that crime reporting serves **both the public interest and the ethical imperatives** of



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journalism, fostering a media environment that contributes positively to **societal security and legal consciousness**.

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