



Ethical Ideologies and Professional Cultures in Transitional Societies: An Examination of Media Practices within Iraqi Kurdish Journalism

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Abstract: This study investigates professional journalism cultures and ethical ideologies within transitional societies, focusing on media practices in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Grounded in comparative media systems analysis and normative ethical theory, the research examines how journalists navigate the structural tensions between universal ethical principles and local political, economic, and institutional pressures. Using a mixed-method approach, including qualitative interviews, surveys, and content analysis, the study explores how political loyalties, financial dependencies, and social norms shape professional decision-making. The findings reveal that while global ethical standards are rhetorically acknowledged, actual media practices are deeply compromised by partisan ownership, gender inequalities, and severe structural constraints on press freedom. Frequently, the "public's right to know" is leveraged to justify invasive reporting, while political and commercial interests sideline genuine public-interest journalism. To address these systemic challenges and safeguard editorial autonomy, this research draws on international regulatory frameworks, such as the UK's Leveson Inquiry, to advocate for the establishment of a statutorily empowered, independent Public and Media National Council. Ultimately, by integrating cultural, political, and legal dimensions, this study contributes to the global discourse on media ethics in post-conflict environments and proposes a novel "Priority Model" designed to systematically reconcile individual privacy rights with the public's right to information in transitional media landscapes.

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INTRODUCTION

In transitional and post-conflict societies, media practices are profoundly shaped by a multifaceted interaction of political, cultural, and institutional influences. As societies move toward more open governance, the media assume an increasingly vital role as platforms for public dialogue, accountability, and democratic engagement (Aivas, 2025a). Within this transformative environment, the ethical ideologies that underpin journalism cultures both reflect and are shaped by broader societal values, historical legacies, and professional norms. This study focuses on Iraqi

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Kurdish society as a critical context in which to examine these dynamics, given its unique position amid post-conflict reconstruction, political pluralism, and persistent cultural traditions. Iraqi Kurdish journalists operate in a media landscape characterized by intense political factionalism, religious influences, and socio-cultural expectations that collectively inform their understanding of ethical responsibility. Although universal journalistic principles such as truthfulness, impartiality, and accountability are widely recognized, their enactment is frequently moderated by local contexts and institutional constraints.

Theoretically, the democratic role of media in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is highly contested. Hussein (2018) analyzes the media's function in supporting democracy within the KRI, highlighting the persistent tension between media independence and political control. Despite the expectation that media serve as public watchdogs, close ties to political elites often undermine their capacity to hold power accountable. Regarding professional ethics, Aivas (2025b, c) investigates journalists' role orientations in post-conflict contexts, revealing that political partisanship frequently takes precedence over journalistic professionalism. Media outlets often act as extensions of political parties, compromising ethical standards and journalistic impartiality. Financial pressures further exacerbate these ethical compromises. Hanusch, Hanitzsch, and Lauerer (2017) note that economic instability precipitates ethical dilemmas. In the KRI, the scarcity of sustainable funding worsens these issues, as many media organizations depend heavily on political patronage, entrenching conflicts of interest.

Additionally, the Kurdish media sphere is strongly influenced by cultural values and social norms. Aivas (2020) argues that Kurdish journalism ethics are not purely grounded in Western notions of neutrality but are deeply entwined with commitments to communal values and giving voice to marginalized groups. While institutional support from non-governmental organizations like the Kurdish Media Watchdog (CHMK) has aimed to enhance journalistic professionalism through targeted training, a significant gap remains between theoretical ethical standards and on-the-ground media practices.

While existing literature recognizes the high degree of political parallelism and partisan media ownership in the KRI (Hussein, 2018; Aivas, 2025b), there is a critical gap in understanding how Kurdish journalists psychologically and practically negotiate the conflict between universal normative ethics (e.g., objectivity, privacy rights) and localized loyalties (e.g., partisan patronages, communal expectations). Currently, there is no empirical model that explains how these competing ethical ideologies are prioritized during active reporting. This lack of a clear framework prevents the development of effective, culturally sensitive media accountability mechanisms in transitional societies.

Understanding these ethical negotiations is crucial for both local and international media development agencies working in post-conflict zones. By analyzing the ethical ideologies of Kurdish journalists, this study:

1. Fills a theoretical gap by applying comparative media systems analysis to a non-Western, transitional Middle Eastern context.
2. Provides empirical data on how systemic gender inequities and partisan ownership affect ethical decision-making.

3. Offers a practical contribution by proposing a "Priority Model" to reconcile the public's right to information with individual privacy rights, aiding regulatory bodies like CHMK in drafting professional guidelines.

To address this problem, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and classify the dominant ethical ideologies (e.g., situationalism, absolutism, subjectivism, and exceptionalism) among Iraqi Kurdish journalists using a mixed-methods survey and thematic interview analysis.
2. To analyze the extent to which political patronage and partisan media ownership influence editorial decisions regarding privacy rights versus the public interest.
3. To formulate and propose a "Priority Model" for ethical media practice in transitional societies by the conclusion of this study, drawing on comparative international frameworks like the UK's Leveson Inquiry.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do Iraqi Kurdish journalists define and prioritize their professional ethical ideologies when navigating the tension between universal journalistic standards and local political or cultural loyalties?

In what specific ways do partisan media ownership and financial patronage structures dictate editorial decisions concerning the public's right to know versus the right to privacy?

How can international regulatory frameworks (such as the Leveson Inquiry) be adapted to establish an independent, statutorily empowered Public and Media National Council within the unique socio-political context of the KRI?

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, there has been a growing scholarly focus on the evolving nature of journalism culture and its implications for professional ethical standards (Aivas, 2020). Morrison and Svennevig (2007) argue that ethics forms a core component of moral philosophy, encompassing the processes of recommending, organizing, and justifying notions of right and wrong behavior. Within this framework, ethical standards are understood as attempts to interpret morality based on individual perceptions shaped by value systems (Walker, 2000). According to Rokeach (1973), a value is a lasting belief that a particular behavior or desired state of existence is preferable, either socially or personally, to its opposite. Ethics emerge when conflicting elements within a moral system arise. Nonetheless, a key limitation of existing definitions lies in their failure to differentiate between ethics and morality clearly. This research adopts a view of ethical standards as intrinsically linked to professional journalistic conduct. More specifically, journalism ethics is conceptualized as a subfield of media ethics that investigates the nature, origins, and implications of ethical dilemmas within journalistic practice (Patterson & Wilkins, 2008, p. 4). Accordingly, ethical ideologies is one of the three core components of journalism cultures. These ideologies, along with moral values, form the normative foundation for evaluating professional conduct. Given that moral values are inherently shaped by their cultural contexts, they must be interpreted as context-specific elements of journalism culture. While certain values are often regarded as representative of a "universal" code of journalistic ethics, most of these standards have been historically shaped within Western traditions (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 377).

Within the frameworks of moral philosophy (namely virtue ethics, deontology, and consequentialism), it is evident that many non-Western societies prioritize values such as social cohesion and collective unity (Aivas, 2025b). These cultural emphases may limit the applicability or effectiveness of certain ethical norms derived from other contexts. Scholars have increasingly recognized that national cultural settings play a critical role in shaping the ethical decision-making processes of journalists (Hussein et al., 2025). In this sense, Aivas (2025c) argues that the key principles commonly associated with journalism ethics include autonomy, editorial independence, self-respect, protection of privacy and dignity, harm minimization, accountability, objectivity, reliability, fairness, honesty, justice, truthfulness, transparency, clarity, thoroughness, and safeguarding of confidential sources. Rather than focusing exclusively on the normative content of ethical standards in journalism, many researchers are now more interested in exploring how journalists navigate ethical dilemmas in practice (Aivas et al., 2025b; Hanitzsch, 2007; Plaisance & Skewes, 2003; Herrscher, 2002). In this sense, Keeble (2005) identifies four prevailing approaches to journalism ethics. The 'standard professional approach' emphasizes adherence to established codes of ethics and editorial guidelines. However, this model has faced criticism from advocates of the 'liberal professional approach', which challenges the rigidity of such standards.

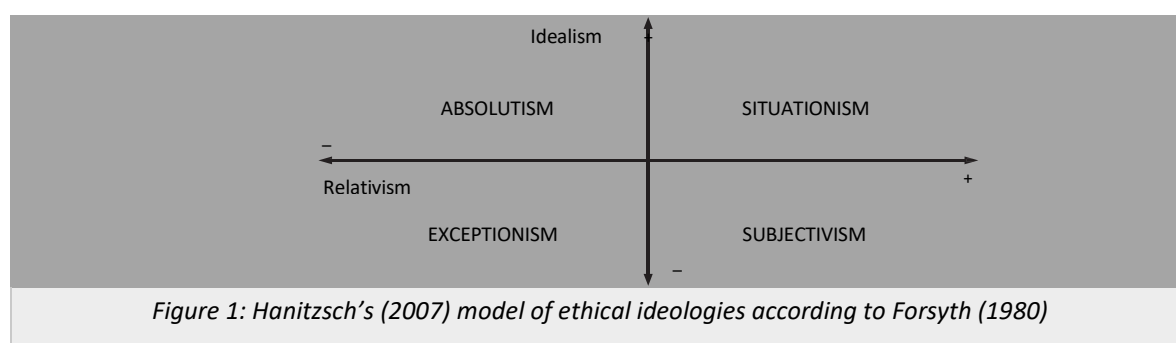
Meanwhile, the 'cynical approach' suggests that ethics have minimal relevance to journalists, and the 'ethical relativist' perspective promotes flexible, situational responses to ethical challenges (Hanitzsch, 2007). For that reason, Forsyth (1980) offers a widely used typology of ethical ideologies comprising four categories: situationists, absolutists, subjectivists, and exceptionists. Building on this framework, Plaisance (2005) introduced two overarching dimensions for analyzing ethical ideologies within journalism: relativism and idealism. Relativism measures the extent to which individuals reject universal moral rules in favor of context-specific judgments. Those with high relativism question the existence of absolute moral standards, while those with low relativism believe in and adhere to fixed ethical principles.

Idealism, on the other hand, reflects how individuals evaluate the outcomes of ethical decisions. Highly idealistic individuals believe ethical actions should always produce positive outcomes. In contrast, those with lower idealism acknowledge that morally justified actions may sometimes involve harm if they lead to a greater good (Hanitzsch, 2007, 377). Based on Forsyth's and Plaisance's typologies, four distinct ethical ideologies can be further clarified. Situationists are both idealistic and relativistic, as they reject fixed moral rules and instead favor individualized moral reasoning that responds to specific contexts. From this perspective, ethical judgment is seen as situational and developed through real-world experience.

In contrast, absolutists uphold universal moral standards and maintain that desirable outcomes can always be achieved through principled actions. As a result, they typically reject investigative techniques that conflict with these ethical norms. Subjectivists, similar to situationists in their relativistic stance, base their ethical reasoning on personal values rather than universal principles (Aivas et al., 2025b).

However, unlike idealistic situationists, they may be less concerned with always achieving morally ideal outcomes. Exceptionists take a more pragmatic approach by recognizing that undesirable means may sometimes be necessary to achieve beneficial ends. This is particularly

evident in cases where journalists justify intrusive reporting practices in the name of serving the public interest. Given the ambiguity surrounding the concept of "public interest," Morrison and Svennevig (2012) suggest the alternative term "social importance" to provide a more precise ethical benchmark. Fourth, exceptionists adopt a utilitarian perspective, adhering to moral absolutes while maintaining a pragmatic openness to exceptions if such deviations help to avoid undesirable outcomes. In this regard, Forsyth (1980) conceptualized ideology as encompassing a variety of value systems and attitudinal orientations (see Figure 1). Accordingly, absolutism aligns closely with deontological thinking and reflects what is often referred to as the 'standard professional approach' in journalism, whereas the 'cynical approach' shares key characteristics with subjectivism.



When applied to ethically ambiguous or potentially harmful reporting methods (such as persistently pressuring sources or offering information payment), situationist journalists would evaluate the permissibility of such practices based on the specific context of each case. Subjectivists, by contrast, might justify these actions if they believe the outcomes serve the greater good. Absolutist journalists would categorically reject such methods, as they conflict with established ethical norms. Exceptionists, while upholding the value of universal ethical principles, may nonetheless consider such practices acceptable in rare, exceptional circumstances, illustrating their utilitarian orientation (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 379). Based on these conceptual distinctions, it is evident that many of the core principles underpinning journalism ethics have been applied to the evolving landscape of convergent media, including digital news production. As a result, the ethical challenges faced in traditional versus digital journalism are not fundamentally different; however, compliance with ethical standards tends to be more straightforward in print journalism compared to online and alternative media formats.

Furthermore, the ethical and legal complexities surrounding privacy and information intrusion have become increasingly prominent in discussions about media content regulation. In this evolving environment, technological advancements are widely believed to have a direct influence on journalistic practices and access to the profession itself (Fenton, 2012). Given these developments, the subsequent sections of this study will explore in greater depth the issue of journalists' professional accountability to society and their audiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, situated within an interpretivist epistemological paradigm (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). While interpretivism primarily values qualitative, textual, and subjective understandings of social phenomena, this study

integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to investigate the complex, transitional media landscape of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

Relying on a single methodological framework would be insufficient to capture the nuances of Kurdish journalism culture for two key reasons:

1. Qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews are essential to uncover how and why journalists negotiate ethical ideologies, particularly when balancing universal standards against local cultural and political loyalties (Mayring, 2001).
2. A structured survey questionnaire is necessary to identify broader, cross-institutional patterns, demographic variations, and systemic influences (such as partisan ownership and gender inequality) across a wider sample size.

By triangulating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews, this design offsets the limitations of each method, ensuring a more comprehensive, valid, and context-sensitive analysis of media practices and privacy concepts in a post-conflict society.

Quantitative Data Collection

A significant methodological challenge in the KRI is the absence of an accurate, up-to-date, or centralized official registry of active journalists. The ongoing transition from authoritarian rule to a semi-pluralistic media environment has blurred the lines of the profession, with many individuals in broader communication or partisan public relations roles self-identifying as journalists (Aivas, 2022). To address this, a two-phase non-probability sampling method was employed:

1. Institutional Selection Phase: 29 diverse print, broadcast, and online media organizations were selected across the three primary provinces of the KRI: Sulaimani (Slêmanî), Erbil (Hewlêr), and Duhok (Duhok).
2. Participant Selection Phase: To capture diverse perspectives, journalists were sampled purposively across various hierarchical levels, including senior editorial managers, junior editors, and general reporting staff.

A total of 160 standardized surveys were distributed, resulting in 142 completed and valid responses (including two freelance journalists). The survey focused on mapping dimensions of journalistic culture, political alignments, and evolving conceptualizations of privacy. Participants spanned multiple platforms, including traditional print, radio, television, and convergent "web journalism", defined here as multi-platform, networked digital journalism characterized by multimedia reporting practices (Deuze, 2004; Jenkins, 2014; Meikle & Young, 2017).

Qualitative Data Collection

To explore the cultural, political, and legal complexities of privacy and ethical ideologies in depth, the study utilises qualitative semi-structured interviews. In terms of participant selection, Table 1 shows that using purposive sampling, 15 qualitative interviews were conducted with a highly diverse group of stakeholders. This sample extends beyond active media practitioners to capture a 360-degree view of the socio-political context, categorized into three distinct participant groups:

1. Journalists and Commentators (n=9): Selected to discuss day-to-day editorial pressures, partisan influences, and professional ethical standards on the ground.
2. Academics, Experts, and Activists (n=4): Selected to provide objective, structural critiques of the KRI's legal, political, and media systems.
3. Victims of Privacy Violations (n=2): Selected to provide critical firsthand accounts of the real-world consequences of ethical lapses in Kurdish media practices.

Table 1. *Names of interviewee groups Sampling Size*

Names of interviewee groups	Sampling size
Journalists and commentators	09
Academics, experts, and activists	04
Victims of privacy invasion	02
Total	15

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, examining the critical intersections between institutional roles, ethical ideologies, and claims of privacy invasion among Iraqi Kurdish journalists. In alignment with the study's primary objectives, these quantitative analyses reveal how professional cultures operate within a transitional society under intense political and structural pressures.

The Interplay between Institutional Roles and Privacy Violations

To understand how the professional roles of Iraqi Kurdish journalists influence media practices on the ground, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. This test mapped core institutional roles against the three most common claims of privacy invasion. As detailed in Table 2, the analysis reveals no statistically significant correlation between traditional, globally recognised journalism roles and most forms of privacy violations. The principal professional functions of Kurdish journalists, such as informing citizens for political decision-making ($p = 0.593$), acting as a government watchdog ($p = 0.154$), and setting the political agenda ($p = 0.985$), do not statistically correlate with the unauthorised commercial appropriation of an individual's name or likeness. The public disclosure of embarrassing private facts. Placing individuals in a "false light" through fabricated or manipulated content. Author's Critical Interpretation. This lack of statistical significance leads to an important institutional conclusion: in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), traditional democratic role orientations (like being a public watchdog) do not dictate or prevent ethical violations in practice. However, a critical exception emerges: a statistically significant association was found between the institutional role of "conveying a positive image of political and business leadership" and intrusion upon a person's seclusion or solitude ($p = 0.043$, Table 2). This finding is highly revealing. It indicates that journalists who prioritise promoting political and business elites are significantly more likely to engage in invasive physical or digital boundary crossings (such as unauthorised recording or covert surveillance). This empirically demonstrates that privacy violations in Kurdish media are not random acts of sensationalist journalism; rather, they are structurally driven by the partisan and clientelist duties of journalists to their political patrons.

Table 2: Association between the institutional roles of journalism cultures and the common claims of privacy invasion

Institutional Roles of Journalism Cultures	Common Claims of Privacy Invasion		Total N (%)	P values
	Yes N (%)	No N (%)		
	Type of Intrusion Upon a Person's Seclusion or Solitude			
To convey a positive image of political and business leadership				
Extremely important	5 (71.4)	2 (28.6)	7 (100.0)	0.043
Very important	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	9 (100.0)	
Somewhat important	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	30 (100.0)	
Little important	13 (40.6)	19 (59.4)	32 (100.0)	
Not important at all	28 (43.8)	36 (56.2)	64 (100.0)	
Type of Appropriation of an individual's name or likeness				
To provide citizens with the information they need to make political decisions				
Extremely important	13 (18.6)	57 (81.4)	70 (100.0)	0.593
Very important	6 (14.3)	36 (85.7)	42 (100.0)	
Somewhat important	6 (30.0)	14 (70.0)	20 (100.0)	
Little important	1 (14.3)	6 (85.7)	7 (100.0)	
Not important at all	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	2 (100.0)	
Type of Public disclosure of embarrassing private facts				
To act as watchdog of the government				
Extremely important	31 (51.7)	29 (48.3)	60 (100.0)	0.154
Very important	14 (31.1)	31 (68.9)	45 (100.0)	
Somewhat important	11 (39.3)	17 (60.7)	28 (100.0)	
Little important	4 (57.1)	3 (42.9)	7 (100.0)	
Not important at all	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	2 (100.0)	
Type of Publicity that places a person in a fails light				
To set the political agenda				
Extremely important	8 (47.1)	9 (52.9)	17 (100.0)	0.985
Very important	9 (47.4)	10 (52.6)	19 (100.0)	
Somewhat important	20 (42.6)	27 (57.4)	47 (100.0)	
Little important	11 (47.8)	12 (52.2)	23 (100.0)	
Not important at all	17 (48.6)	18 (51.4)	35 (100.0)	

Ethical Ideologies and Their Association with Privacy Claims

In contrast to institutional roles, the internal ethical ideologies of Kurdish journalists show a much stronger statistical relationship with privacy practices. As shown in Table 3, significant associations exist between specific ethical stances and key privacy violations.

Table 3: Association between the ethical ideologies of journalism cultures and the common claims of privacy invasion

Invasion				
Ethical Ideologies of Journalism Cultures	Common Claims of Privacy Invasion		Total N (%)	P values
	Yes N (%)	No N (%)		
	Claim of Appropriation of an individual's name or likeness			

Journalists should avoid questionable methods of reporting in any case, even if this means not getting the story.				
Strongly agree				0.048
Somewhat agree	15 (17.9)	69 (82.1)	84 (100.0)	
Neither agree nor disagree	4 (12.5)	28 (87.5)	32 (100.0)	
Somewhat disagree	2 (15.4)	11 (84.6)	13 (100.0)	
Strongly Disagree	2 (25.0)	6 (75.0)	8 (100.0)	
	3 (75.0)	1 (25.0)	4 (100.0)	
What is ethical in journalism varies from one situation to another.				
Strongly agree	10 (22.2)	35 (77.8)	45 (100.0)	0.036
Somewhat agree	5 (10.2)	44 (89.8)	49 (100.0)	
Neither agree nor disagree	8 (29.6)	19 (70.4)	27 (100.0)	
Somewhat disagree	0 (0.0)	8 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	
Strongly Disagree	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)	6 (100.0)	
Claim of Publicity that places a person in a fails light.				
There are ethical principles which are so important that they should be followed by all journalists, regardless of situation and context.				
Strongly agree	53 (53.0)	47 (47.0)	100 (100.0)	0.041
Somewhat agree	8 (28.6)	20 (71.4)	28 (100.0)	
Neither agree nor disagree	4 (50.0)	4 (50.0)	8 (100.0)	
Somewhat disagree	0 (0.0)	4 (100.0)	4 (100.0)	
Strongly Disagree	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	

Avoidance of Questionable Methods vs. Appropriation ($\$p = 0.048\$$): Journalists who strongly believed that questionable reporting methods must be avoided at all costs had significantly lower rates of name/likeness appropriation. Situationalism vs. Appropriation ($\$p = 0.036\$$): The pragmatic, situation-dependent perspective ("what is ethical varies") significantly correlated with instances of appropriation, suggesting that situational ethics are frequently leveraged to justify opportunistic behavior. Universalism vs. False Light ($\$p = 0.041\$$): Believing in universally binding principles significantly associated with the "false light" claim. Intriguingly, journalists who strongly agreed with universal principles still reported high rates of false light exposure, indicating a profound gap between theoretical ideals and practical, market-driven editorial actions.

Interventionist Roles, Editorial Autonomy, and Experience

Cross-national literature suggests that political constraints often drive journalists to adopt "interventionist" roles, such as advocating for social change or shaping public opinion (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, & Lauerer, 2017). This study tested whether editorial autonomy and professional experience influenced this inclination among Kurdish journalists. The statistical results, however, show no significant relationship between interventionist roles and editorial autonomy (e.g., control over work, $\$p = 0.231\$$; participating in work decisions, $\$p = 0.330\$$; Table 4). Professional Experience: (years working in the field, $\$p = 0.105\$$ to $\$p = 0.500\$$; Table 5).

Table 4: Association between the interventionist roles of the Kurdish journalists and the editorial autonomy

		Editorial Autonomy					
		I have a lot of control over the work that I do.					
Interventionist roles of Kurdish journalists		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	P values
To set the political agenda							
Extremely important		8(50.0)	6(37.5)	2(12.5)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0.231
Very important		8(44.4)	3(16.7)	5(27.8)	0(0.0)	2(11.1)	
Somewhat important		19(40.4)	13(27.7)	4(8.5)	6(12.8)	5(10.6)	
Little important		7(35.0)	8(40.0)	2(10.0)	1(5.0)	2(10.0)	
Not important at all		15(44.1)	15(44.1)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	2(5.9)	
Total N (%)		57(42.2)	45(33.3)	14(10.4)	8(5.9)	11(8.1)	
To influence public opinion							
Extremely important		19(40.4)	15(31.9)	6(12.8)	2(4.3)	5(10.6)	0.965
Very important		24(41.4)	21(36.2)	5(8.6)	3(5.2)	5(8.6)	
Somewhat important		12(54.5)	5(22.7)	2(9.1)	2(9.1)	1(4.5)	
Little important		1(33.3)	2(66.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Not important at all		2(33.3)	2(33.3)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	0(0.0)	
Total N (%)		58(42.6)	45(33.1)	14(10.3)	8(5.9)	11(8.1)	
To advocate for social change							
Extremely important		15(53.6)	8(28.6)	2(7.1)	1(3.6)	2(7.1)	0.347
Very important		24(46.2)	19(36.5)	4(7.7)	1(1.9)	4(7.7)	
Somewhat important		11(36.7)	10(33.3)	6(20.0)	1(3.3)	2(6.7)	
Little important		4(33.3)	4(33.3)	0(0.0)	3(25.0)	1(8.3)	
Not important at all		3(33.3)	3(33.3)	1(11.1)	1(11.1)	1(11.1)	
Total N (%)		57(43.5)	44(33.6)	13(9.9)	7(5.3)	10(7.6)	
I am allowed to take part in decisions that affect my work							
To set the political agenda							
Extremely important		7(41.2)	4(23.5)	2(11.8)	2(11.8)	2(11.8)	0.330
Very important		13(68.4)	3(15.8)	2(10.5)	0(0.0)	1(5.3)	
Somewhat important		18(40.9)	16(36.4)	6(13.6)	3(6.8)	1(2.3)	
Little important		6(31.6)	9(47.4)	2(10.5)	2(10.5)	0(0.0)	
Not important at all		21(60.0)	11(31.4)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	1(2.9)	
Total N (%)		65(48.5)	43(32.1)	13(9.7)	8(6.0)	5(3.7)	
To influence public opinion							
Extremely important		24(53.3)	12(26.7)	3(6.7)	2(4.4)	4(8.9)	0.494
Very important		29(49.2)	21(35.6)	5(8.5)	4(6.8)	0(0.0)	
Somewhat important		9(39.1)	7(30.4)	5(21.7)	1(4.3)	1(4.3)	
Little important		1(33.3)	2(66.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Not important at all		2(40.0)	2(40.0)	0(0.0)	1(20.0)	0(0.0)	
Total N (%)		65(48.1)	44(32.6)	13(9.6)	8(5.9)	5(3.7)	
To advocate for social change							
Extremely important							0.354
Very important		19(67.9)	4(14.3)	2(7.1)	1(3.6)	2(7.1)	
Somewhat important		22(42.3)	21(40.4)	7(13.5)	1(1.9)	1(1.9)	
Little important		13(44.8)	11(37.9)	2(6.9)	3(10.3)	0(0.0)	
Not important at all		4(33.3)	4(33.3)	2(16.7)	1(8.3)	1(8.3)	

Total N (%)	4(44.4)	4(44.4)	0(0.0)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)
	62(47.7)	44(33.8)	13(10.0)	7(5.4)	4(3.1)

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Somewhat Agree, N = Neither, D = Somewhat Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The absence of statistically significant relationships between these variables indicates that interventionist journalists constitute a smaller proportion compared to more detached journalists within Kurdish journalism cultures. This environment is characterized by media ownership and personnel predominantly aligned with the ideologies of political parties or elite politicians. Drawing on Gramscian theory, the influence of journalists is largely derived from the hegemonic control exerted by their media proprietors. For example, the Rûdaw Media Company, whose broadcasting outlets hold substantial sway over Kurdish society, is owned by the vice president of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In contrast, greater editorial autonomy and varying levels of professional experience among Kurdish journalists do not appear to correlate with an increased propensity to adopt interventionist roles. This may be attributable to practical constraints such as limited access to information sources and a scarcity of investigative journalism (Aivas, 2017).

Table 4: Association between the interventionist roles of the Kurdish journalists and the professional experiences

Interventionist roles of Kurdish journalists	Professional Experiences					P values
	Less than 1 year N (%)	1- 3 years N (%)	4 – 6 years N (%)	7 – 10 years N (%)	More than 10 years (N %)	
To set the political agenda						
Extremely important	0(0.0)	1(5.9)	2(11.8)	4(23.5)	10(58.8)	0.105
Very important	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3(15.8)	8(42.1)	8(42.1)	
Somewhat important	1(2.2)	9(19.6)	3(6.5)	11(23.9)	22(47.8)	
Little important	0(0.0)	2(8.7)	0(0.0)	8(34.8)	13(56.5)	
Not important at all	0(0.0)	1(2.9)	9(25.7)	10(28.6)	15(42.9)	
Total N (%)	1(0.7)	13(9.3)	17(12.1)	41(29.3)	68(48.6)	
To influence public opinion						
Extremely important	0(0.0)	3(6.1)	6(12.2)	11(22.4)	29(59.2)	0.604
Very important	0(0.0)	7(11.9)	8(13.6)	21(35.6)	23(39.0)	
Somewhat important	1(4.2)	3(12.5)	2(8.3)	7(29.2)	11(45.8)	
Little important	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	2(66.7)	1(33.3)	
Not important at all	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	4(66.7)	
Total N (%)	1(0.7)	13(9.2)	17(12.1)	42(29.8)	68(48.2)	
To advocate for social change						
Extremely important	0(0.0)	1(3.3)	2(6.7)	8(26.7)	19(63.3)	0.500
Very important	0(0.0)	6(11.3)	10(18.9)	16(30.2)	21(39.6)	
Somewhat important	1(3.2)	3(9.7)	2(6.5)	9(29.0)	16(51.6)	
Little important	0(0.0)	3(23.1)	1(7.7)	4(30.8)	5(38.5)	
Not important at all	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(11.1)	4(44.4)	4(44.4)	
Total N (%)	1(0.7)	13(9.6)	16(11.8)	41(30.1)	65(47.8)	

Based on these empirical relationships, I draw three fundamental conclusions regarding the state of journalism ethics and professional cultures in the transitional society of Iraqi Kurdistan:

- 1. Partisan Hegemony Overrides Individual Autonomy:** The absence of any statistical correlation between a journalist's sense of editorial autonomy and their interventionist role conceptions indicates that Kurdish media professionals do not operate as fully independent agents. Applying Gramscian hegemony theory, we can conclude that the

ideological goals of Kurdish media are structurally dictated by political ownership. For instance, top leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Kurdistan Patriotic Union, and the Kurdistan Regional Government own major outlets like the Rûdaw Media Company, AVA Media Group, and Kurdistan24 Channel 8, Kudsat Broadcast Corporation. Consequently, "autonomy" is merely nominal; editorial and ethical choices remain bound to partisan interests.

2. **Privacy Violations as Political Tools:** The significant relationship between a desire to convey positive images of political leaders and intrusion upon personal seclusion (Table 2) suggests that privacy violations in the KRI are frequently weaponized. In a highly factionalized and transitioning democracy, exposing private details or carrying out unauthorized surveillance serves to suppress dissenting academic or political voices, rather than serve the public's right to know.
3. **Institutional Deficiencies and the Transition Gap:** Professionalism and privacy protections remain deeply weak within Kurdish public discourse. This vulnerability is directly linked to the KRI's messy transition from authoritarianism. Because media outlets function as ideological extensions of political parties, legal protections are scarce, and code-of-ethics enforcement by oversight bodies is largely bypassed.

True professional development in this transitional landscape will require decoupling media ownership from active political entities and constructing a statutorily protected, independent regulatory system.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a clear relationship between the dominant ethical ideologies in journalism cultures of Iraqi Kurdish journalists and recurring privacy violations. However, no significant link was found between such practices and journalists' institutional roles. Privacy intrusions are more frequently directed at public figures and celebrities than ordinary citizens, often justified under the "public's right to know," yet more strongly influenced by political and financial allegiances to media proprietors. The status of the individuals involved shapes decisions on privacy disclosure, the public nature of the information, and its perceived societal benefit or urgency, underscoring the central role of ethical reasoning within cultural and religious contexts. The findings reveal that professional activities (such as reporting, editorial work, and management) are closely tied to personal motivations, including public service, anti-corruption advocacy, political aims, professional qualifications, audience reach, and financial incentives. However, professional experience and editorial independence do not predict interventionist reporting tendencies. A majority (66.9%) identify personal conscience as their primary guide in privacy-related decisions. In this study, the right to privacy is predominantly framed in relation to personal life, particularly sexual orientation, reflecting the influence of Islamic Sharia law and cultural norms that regard extramarital relations as taboo. Collectivist traditions blur boundaries between individual and family privacy, normalizing information sharing and reducing perceptions of privacy breaches as ethical or legal violations. Structural limitations (weak legal protections, political priorities, ambiguous statutes, and the integration of Sharia with cultural norms)

compound gender inequality, restricting women's participation in journalism and exposing those in public roles to targeted privacy violations (see Aivas, 2020).

Then, the dual pressures of social norms and political agendas position journalists between serving the public interest and being used as instruments in partisan power struggles. Lack of trust between journalists and politicians perpetuates accusations of unprofessionalism and widens the gap between media practice and professional standards. By adapting insights from the Leveson Inquiry, the study calls for establishing an independent Public and Press Council with statutory powers, free from political and media control, to enforce ethical standards and impose meaningful sanctions. Given the partisan dominance of Kurdish media, such reform is critical for strengthening journalistic professionalism, investigative capacity, and awareness of privacy rights. Echoing Cohen-Almagor's (2022) argument that media operate as commercial enterprises, the study emphasizes that press freedom must be balanced with accountability, ensuring that the "public's right to know" is not misused to justify unethical conduct. The proposed Priority Model offers a practical framework for balancing individual privacy rights with public interest imperatives, fostering responsible journalism in Iraq's evolving democratic context.

The primary objective of this study was to examine how the professional cultures, ethical ideologies, and institutional roles of Iraqi Kurdish journalists interact with claims of privacy invasion. Through a rigorous quantitative analysis, this research addressed a persistent problem in transitional democracies: the gap between nominal democratic journalistic standards and the actual, partisan media practices on the ground. Our empirical findings demonstrate a clear, statistically significant relationship between the dominant ethical ideologies of Kurdish journalists and recurring privacy violations. Interestingly, traditional institutional roles (such as serving as a government watchdog) do not statistically correlate with or prevent these violations. Instead, privacy intrusions—often justified under the guise of the "public's right to know"—are primarily directed at public figures and are heavily influenced by the journalists' political and financial allegiances to media proprietors. While a majority of Kurdish journalists (66.9%) identify personal conscience as their primary guide, their decision-making is deeply bound to a collectivist cultural framework and Islamic Sharia law, which blur the lines between individual and familial privacy. Consequently, the right to privacy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is predominantly framed around personal life and cultural taboos, leaving women in public roles highly vulnerable to targeted, gender-based privacy violations. Ultimately, these dual pressures leave journalists caught between serving the public interest and acting as instruments in partisan power struggles. To bridge this gap between media practice and professional standards, we propose adapting insights from the Leveson Inquiry to establish an independent Public and Press Council with statutory powers. Alongside our proposed Priority Model, this framework offers a realistic path to balance individual privacy rights with public interest imperatives, ensuring that the "public's right to know" is never weaponized to justify unethical, politically motivated violations.

In terms of limitations of the current research, while this study provides valuable empirical insights into the journalism culture of the KRI, several limitations must be acknowledged to frame the scope of our findings:

1. This study was conducted exclusively within the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Due to distinct legal frameworks, safety dynamics, and political ownership structures, the findings may not fully generalize to federal Iraq or other transitioning media landscapes in the Middle East.
2. The quantitative data relied heavily on self-reported survey responses from journalists. In highly politicized environments, respondents may exhibit social desirability bias, underreporting their active role in privacy violations or overstating their degree of personal editorial autonomy.
3. While the study captures traditional and foundational digital privacy violations (such as intrusion and appropriation), the rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and advanced spyware presents shifting digital threats that are difficult to quantify within a static survey timeline fully.
4. Because of the structural limitations and cultural barriers detailed in our analysis, female journalists are under-represented in the KRI media workforce. Consequently, gathering a larger, more representative female sample to statistically model gender-specific privacy violations remains a persistent methodological challenge.

Building on these results and to expand upon the findings of this study and address the evolving media landscape in transitional societies, future research should focus on the following directions. Primarily, a comparative study between Kurdish journalists and Arabic journalists in federal Iraq would help isolate the specific impacts of regional laws (such as the KRI's unique Press Law) versus broader national and cultural trends. In addition, future inquiries should utilize deep-dive qualitative interviews and newsroom ethnographies. Observing editorial decision-making in real-time would provide a more nuanced understanding of how journalists navigate the pressure of partisan owners when privacy boundaries are crossed. Then, researchers should investigate how algorithmic curation, social media live-streaming, and AI-driven content generation are shifting the boundaries of "intrusion upon seclusion" in Kurdish society. Ultimately, if independent regulatory bodies or the proposed Priority Model is adopted, longitudinal studies will be vital to assess whether these interventions successfully reduce privacy violations over time and increase public trust in the press.

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