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# Chad's Transition: Easing Tensions Online

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**What's new?** Following years of government shutdowns, social media has become both freer and more influential in Chadian politics – particularly since the country entered a political transition with the death of President Idriss Déby in April 2021. While it has democratised political participation, social media has also fuelled socio-political tensions.

**Why does it matter?** Chad's transition has entered a sensitive phase. A government crackdown in October killed dozens of protesters, putting the country on edge. In the run-up to 2024 elections, social media can enhance access to politics by providing a forum for open debate, but it could also drive polarisation and violence.

**What should be done?** The government should keep social media platforms free and open, while social media companies should improve monitoring and content moderation. With donor support, civil society should offer influencers training on refraining from online hate speech, incitement and disinformation, which influencers should apply. Donors should support local, professional, independent media.

## I. Overview

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Chad is at a tumultuous political moment. After transitional President Mahamat Déby raised expectations that he would steer away from the authoritarianism that characterised his father's 30-year rule, he has tightened his grip on power. A brutal crackdown on protesters on 20 October has chilled hopes for democratisation while the country looks toward elections in 2024. As Chad navigates this challenging time, social media is set to play an important role. With restrictions having eased in recent years, online platforms show great potential to help overcome tenacious barriers to citizens' participation in Chadian politics. Yet social media activity also mirrors social and political divisions, and could accelerate grievance and violence. As the transition proceeds, Chadian authorities should keep the internet free and open; donors should support training for influencers to discourage online disinformation, hate speech and incitement; social media companies should monitor and moderate such content; and influencers should follow best practices. Donors should also help Chad foster a professional, independent media.

Following promising early steps, Chad's political transition has taken a worrying turn. After his father was killed in a clash with rebels in April 2021, General Mahamat

Déby seized power as the head of a transitional military council, putting the state on what was supposed to be an eighteen-month path to civilian government. At first, many found reason to hope that the country would find its way toward more democratic and inclusive governance without too much turmoil. Negotiations between the junta and the historical opposition led to several activists and armed group leaders returning to Chad after years of exile. When transitional authorities launched a long-awaited national dialogue on 20 August 2022, however, the main rebel groups, opposition parties and civil society organisations refused to participate, frustrated by, among other things, the military's reluctance to commit to returning power to civilians.

Tensions boiled over when the national dialogue ended in early October. Its conclusions extended the transition (which was supposed to be coming to an end that month) for another two years, and declared junta members, including Déby, eligible to run in the next national elections – now scheduled for 2024. They also called for dissolution of the transitional military council and for Déby to become transitional president. These decisions enraged many Chadians, who see them as a power grab by the former president's son and oppose what they worry could become a dynastic succession. Thousands took to the streets to protest on 20 October, triggering a brutal response. Calling the protest an armed insurrection, the authorities brought it to heel with considerable force – according to government figures killing at least 50 people, wounding roughly 300 and arresting at least 600 – while also shutting down internet access in the political opposition's strongholds in the capital N'Djamena. The resulting fear and distrust are likely to hang over the next phase of the transition.

As Chad's political elites and public navigate what has become an increasingly fraught period, the country's social media voices are likely to play a growing role – for good but also, potentially, for ill. Analysis of social media from February through June shows that it has brought both large benefits and significant risks. Online platforms boost citizens' participation in politics and provide a forum for them to encourage the transfer of political power to civilians through fresh elections. But, as Crisis Group has documented, posts have also led to direct threats, played up ethnic divides and fuelled civil unrest, often through the use of deliberately misleading information – ie, disinformation.

With social media still young in Chad, its most influential users can play a constructive role in shaping the medium. National and international actors should work together to promote a better understanding among the internet's most prominent Chadian voices of best practices for political discourse, and in particular of steps they can take to reduce the risk of spurring further violence. Through training programs, they should encourage those influencers who are willing to listen to use their position to prevent the diffusion of disinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence online. The transitional government should refrain from internet cutoffs while making the institutions responsible for digital security independent and shifting their mandate to focus on promotion of best practices. Social media companies should continue to improve fact checking capacity and algorithms that reduce the visibility of posts containing polarising content.

Finally, while influencers play an important role in shaping the country's political discourse and divides, donors should also focus on supporting the emergence of local, professional, independent journalistic outlets. This goal is perhaps aspirational, given the political climate, but it is still worth pursuing. A vibrant professional press can

act as both a reliable source of information for citizens and a watchdog for the misuse of social media by government as well as influencers.

## **II. Transition and Crackdown**

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After the late president, Idriss Déby Itno, died in battle with rebels in April 2021, many hoped that Chad might prove an exception to the region's tumultuous transitions. Though his son, General Mahamat Déby, took power by extra-constitutional means, his first year at the helm saw an opening of civic space after three decades of authoritarianism. The younger Déby's transitional government launched negotiations with armed groups and political opponents, engaging even those most reluctant to recognise its legitimacy. Several rebel leaders and political activists returned to Chad after years of exile – including blogger Makaila Nguebla and influencer Abel Maïna, who are now advisers to the transitional authorities. Increasingly mobilised Chadian youth became a key political force, especially – as discussed below – through increasingly free and accessible social media. For the first time in decades, Chadians could openly express anger at, and hold the ruling elite responsible for, the country's dire socio-economic situation. Opposition parties such as Les Transformateurs organised large, peaceful gatherings in N'Djamena.

The junta, however, failed to uphold the commitments it made at the beginning of the transition. After many postponements, the authorities launched a national dialogue on 20 August on terms that led key military and civilian actors to refuse participation.<sup>1</sup> Those who declined to attend included the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) – the organisation responsible for Idriss Déby's death – which rejected a peace agreement signed between the government and 40 rebel groups in Doha, Qatar, in early August.<sup>2</sup> Les Transformateurs and Wakit Tama, a platform of over 30 political parties and civil society groups created in January 2021, also chose to be absent, criticising the talks as too pro-regime and insufficiently representative of the country's political diversity. Most importantly, those who declined to participate had fruitlessly demanded the government guarantee that none of the junta's members would be allowed to run for election at the end of the transition.

The generals did not give that guarantee, and it soon became clear why. When the dialogue ended, on 8 October, its conclusions provided for a two-year extension of the transition and made clear that all Chadians – including junta members – would be eligible to participate in the elections at the end of that period. The military council was dissolved and Mahamat Déby appointed as transitional president. Worried that Déby and the ruling elite were tightening their grip on power, the opposition reacted vigorously, organising street protests in N'Djamena and other population centres in the south on 20 October.

While the authorities' ferocious response to the 20 October protests – which, according to the government, left roughly 50 dead and 300 wounded and resulted in an internet blackout that lasted several days – was dramatically out of step with its

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<sup>1</sup>“Au Tchad, ouverture du ‘dialogue national inclusif’ pour sortir de l’impasse politique”, France 24, 20 August 2022.

<sup>2</sup>“Chad signs peace pact with rebels, but main insurgents stay out”, Reuters, 8 August 2022.

prior conciliatory behaviour, the country had been experiencing surges of violence along social, political and ethnic lines throughout 2022.<sup>3</sup> In January 2022, for instance, a dispute around the nomination of a new traditional chief in Abéché, in the northern Ouaddaï region, left at least thirteen civilians dead after police shot at protesters.<sup>4</sup> In February, in Sandana, a village in the southern Moyen-Chari region, at least thirteen people died in a clash between herders and farmers that revived north-south tensions.<sup>5</sup> Later, in May, Wakit Tama-led protests in N'Djamena against the French military presence in the country morphed into riots. Twelve police officers were reportedly injured, while six opposition leaders were arrested and given one-year suspended sentences and €15,000 fines.<sup>6</sup>

### III. The Growing Use of Social Media in Chad

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As Chad works its way through an increasingly volatile transition, social media has begun to emerge as a forum where the country's political dynamics play out. Unaffordable prices and government restrictions kept Chadian users largely offline until 2015, much longer than other countries in the region. When Chadians started using online platforms as a political tool in 2016, the government initially sought to control the space through long internet shutdowns and arrests. It was only in 2019 that then-President Déby, under international pressure to end the bans, came to see social media's potential as a tool for understanding and influencing Chadian society. Prices for mobile data have since decreased, and the government has lifted previous restrictions, making the internet and social media part of many Chadians' daily lives. While social media remains mainly an urban phenomenon, rural areas are also becoming increasingly connected as residents move to cities and then return.

#### A. Chad's Media Landscape

Chadian authorities have historically sought to keep traditional media under tight control. The non-governmental organisation Reporters Without Borders gives Chad poor marks for freedom of the press.<sup>7</sup> While private media such as the radio station FM Liberté and the newspaper *Abba Garde* have enjoyed a certain margin of freedom, the authorities have nonetheless shut them down several times since 2015.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Human rights organisations have estimated a much higher toll for the government's October crackdown. "Chad: Scores of Protesters Shot Dead, Wounded", Human Rights Watch, 26 October 2022.

<sup>4</sup> "Tchad : Tirs mortels par des forces de sécurité dans l'est du pays", Human Rights Watch, 9 March 2022.

<sup>5</sup> "Tchad : des morts lors de nouveaux affrontements entre éleveurs et agriculteurs dans le Sud", RFI, 11 February 2022.

<sup>6</sup> "Tchad : manifestation hostile à la France à l'appel de la coalition d'opposition Wakit Tama", RFI, 14 May 2022.

<sup>7</sup> See "Press Freedom Index – Global Score", Reporters Without Borders, 2022; for a recent update, see also "Country Fact File – Chad", Reporters Without Borders, 2022. The latter states that the transition has not led to more press freedom, though Chad moved up in the index, from 123rd in 2021 to 104th in 2022.

<sup>8</sup> *Abba Garde* was shut down in 2015, in June 2020 (for a year) and again in July 2021.

International media such as Radio France Internationale and France 24 are also important news providers and have generally not been restricted.

The arrival of the internet in Chadians' lives is quite recent, but its use has grown massively in the past few years. Until 2015, the media landscape was dominated by radio. Most Chadians, even in urban areas, had no access to television. When mobile phones with access to internet data became available in Chad in 2009, the penetration rate was very low (0.05 per cent of the population) and connectivity was mainly an urban phenomenon. From 2015 onward, however, Chad recorded higher levels of internet access, passing from 3.5 per cent to 19 per cent in 2022.<sup>9</sup>

Social media followed a similar trajectory, with its use skyrocketing between 2020 and 2022. The number of users increased by 42.4 per cent from 2020 to 2021, and by 21.8 per cent the following year.<sup>10</sup> The most frequently used social media platform in Chad is Facebook, with around 529,100 users (90.1 per cent of social media users).<sup>11</sup> By comparison, Instagram (62,500 users), Twitter (19,100 thousand users), LinkedIn and, more recently, TikTok have marginal numbers of users.<sup>12</sup> While WhatsApp messenger is also widely used for private exchanges, these are confidential and difficult to view for research purposes.<sup>13</sup>

### *B. 2015-2016: From Cyber-activism to Government Bans*

In 2015-2016, two videos recorded on mobile phones and widely circulated on Facebook highlighted social media's potential to catalyse Chadian political activism. The first, posted on Facebook in March 2015, allegedly by a policeman, showed young men being tortured in a police station in N'Djamena. The video went viral, and the resulting pressure on police led to the arrest of the perpetrators, who were sentenced

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<sup>9</sup> Up-to-date figures are hard to come by. Crisis Group research relied on figures from the International Telecom Union database and analytics from the organisations Hootsuite and We Are Social. According to the latter's yearly reports, in 2019, 5 per cent of Chadians were internet users and 0.8 per cent were social media users (for a population of 15 million). "Digital 2019 – Chad", We Are Social/Hootsuite, 2019. In 2022, internet access went up to 19 per cent of Chadians, with 3.3 per cent also using social media (for a population of 17 million). "Digital 2022 – Chad", We are Social/Hootsuite, 2022. Figures obtained via Tchad Info (a government-controlled news agency) show instead that Chad has 3 million Facebook users. Crisis Group interview, Tchad Info journalist, 27 May 2022.

<sup>10</sup> "Digital 2022 – Chad", op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group's research for this briefing focused on social media messages in French or translated from Arabic into French through social media platforms' automated services.

<sup>12</sup> "Digital 2022 – Chad", op. cit. Crisis Group receives financial support from Meta, Facebook's parent company. Separately, Crisis Group has occasionally been in contact with Facebook regarding misinformation on the platform that could provoke deadly violence.

<sup>13</sup> Studies show that the vast majority of Chadian internet users are young men. According to Hootsuite, the gender ratio in 2019 was 85 per cent men to 15 per cent women; by 2021, the gap had narrowed slightly to 79 per cent men to 21 per cent women. See "Digital 2019 – Chad"; and "Digital 2022 – Chad", both op. cit. The majority of Chadian Facebook users are between 13 and 40 years old. Another survey on internet and social media use conducted by the Centre de Recherches en Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines in Chad in November 2015 showed that 75 per cent of internet users were men and 25 per cent women, the majority of them between 10 and 35 years old. See "Internet connectivity in Chad", in Mirjam de Bruijn, "Croquemort: A Biographical Journey in the Context of Chad", *Bridging Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2017). A May 2022 Crisis Group survey showed similar results.

to six months in prison.<sup>14</sup> The second such video, which was posted in February 2016, concerned a sixteen-year-old girl named Zouhouira, who was raped in N'Djamena by seven young men, some of them sons of Chadian army generals. Shocked Chadians launched a campaign on Facebook – heavily supported by the diaspora in France – that sparked protests in the capital. As in the previous case, this mobilisation pushed the government to arrest those responsible for the abuse.<sup>15</sup>

Despite authorities' attempts to control the new medium during this period, Chadians increasingly relied on online platforms for political mobilisation. Growing use of this newfound tool coincided with the rise of citizen movements in West and Central Africa inspired by the 2011 Arab uprisings, which also spurred Chad's youth to be more politically active and created pressure on the regime.<sup>16</sup> "Fear switched sides", a professor at Toukra University in N'Djamena recalled.

When tensions rose in the run-up to the April 2016 presidential poll, many socio-political movements called for a transparent election and freedom of expression, both online and in the streets.<sup>17</sup> The government repressed protests, arrested several civil society leaders and shut down the internet for 235 days.<sup>18</sup> While these measures slowed down opposition campaigns, young protesters started connecting to social media through virtual private networks and used mobile phone text messages to exchange information, allowing them to document cases of alleged electoral fraud.<sup>19</sup>

### C. 2019-2021: A Turning Point

Freedom of expression and internet access increased from 2019 onward in Chad. Starting in 2019, Internet Without Borders, an international organisation dedicated to defending internet freedom, launched an online campaign entitled #Maalla\_Gatetou – Chadian Arabic for "Why pull the plug?". The campaign increased international pressure on President Idriss Déby to lift the internet bans then in effect and loosen restrictions on social media.<sup>20</sup> Under this pressure, Déby changed his views. In July 2020, having come to see social media's potential as a tool for influencing Chadian society, the president announced his goal of providing Chad with the cheapest inter-

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<sup>14</sup> "Chad shutdown over deadly helmet protests", BBC, 10 March 2015; "Tchad : 8 policiers condamnés à six mois de prison pour torture des étudiants", Xinhua, 21 May 2015.

<sup>15</sup> "Africanews: Chad court convicts alleged rapists", video, YouTube, 2 July 2016; "Tchad : Dix ans de prison pour les violeurs de Zouhouira", *Le Monde*, 1 July 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interviews, freelance journalist, N'Djamena, 26 and 27 May 2022. Chadian youth were encouraged by the protest movements that arose in several West and Central African countries (Senegal in 2012, Burkina Faso in 2014-2015 and the Democratic Republic of Congo at several moments) after the Arab uprisings began in Tunisia in 2011.

<sup>17</sup> The most important and influential youth movement was Iyina ("We are tired", in Chadian Arabic). Crisis Group interview, freelance journalist, N'Djamena, 26 May 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Until 2020, the authorities restricted access to Facebook and WhatsApp. The longest shutdown started on 28 March 2018 and lasted sixteen months. The government justified these restrictions as measures to prevent terrorism, a regular threat due to Boko Haram's presence in the Lake Chad region. Alternatively, it blamed the lack of access on technological shortcomings.

<sup>19</sup> "Presidential elections in Chad: confusion", Counter Voices, 30 April 2016.

<sup>20</sup> "Tchad : le président Déby dans la dynamique de faciliter l'accès de la connexion à l'internet", *Tic Guinée*, 14 July 2019.

net on the continent.<sup>21</sup> In the following months, mobile operators Airtel and Tigo, then and still active in the country, lowered their prices.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, Déby loosened restrictions on online speech, elevating its importance for political organising and debate. The political opposition and civil society exercised this newfound freedom in the run-up to the April 2021 elections, which nevertheless returned Déby to power. The opposition party Les Transformateurs, led by 39-year-old Succès Masra and his mostly under-40 team, organised a number of successful social media campaigns, focusing on governance matters.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Wakit Tama coalition called for mobilisation and protests on social media platforms.<sup>24</sup> Idriss Déby's official account on Facebook also became increasingly active in early 2021. Déby's ruling Mouvement patriotique du salut party, however, was not a relevant actor on social media, while the most prominent Chadian rebel groups used their Facebook pages almost exclusively to share their communiqués.

Much as social media boosted political engagement among Chadians, it also facilitated the spread of misinformation and disinformation.<sup>25</sup> For instance, in April 2021, when FACT rebels clashed with government forces in the country's north before launching an offensive on N'Djamena, misinformation and disinformation were rampant on Facebook. Several posts suggested that the rebels, who were hundreds of kilometres away, were closing in on the capital.<sup>26</sup> Some disseminated inaccurate information knowingly. One influencer told Crisis Group he used videos purportedly showing the offensive, knowing they had been recorded in other countries.<sup>27</sup> Disinformation surrounding the rebels' approach stoked fear among Chadians that N'Djamena would be placed under siege, as happened in 2008.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Tchad-NTIC : une nouvelle trajectoire de développement du numérique à l'horizon 2030", Tachad, 15 July 2020.

<sup>22</sup> According to Crisis Group's figures: from 2014 to 2017, 1 gigabyte (Gb) of connection, valid for a month, cost 10,000 CFA francs (\$18), rising to 12,000 CFA francs (\$22) in 2017 and 2018. The following year, 1Gb/day cost 1,500 CFA francs (\$2.70), dropping to 1,200 CFA francs (\$2.10) in 2020 and 550 CFA francs (\$1), or 500 CFA francs (\$0.90) with Airtel, in 2022. Subscribing with Airtel Money gives a 50 per cent bonus on daily usage rates – for example, with 11,500 CFA francs (\$21), the consumer gets 30Gb instead of 20Gb. The Chadian start-up Wenaklabs' 2022 report, "Etat des lieux d'internet au Tchad", confirms these figures.

<sup>23</sup> Les Transformateurs has several Facebook pages. Its main page has some 94,000 followers. It posts mostly during political campaigns, and also reposts about its leader Masra. The "Les Transformateurs d'Abéché" page, managed by one of the group's regional offices, has 1,100 members.

<sup>24</sup> The Facebook public group "Wakit Tama Media" reposts and allows others to post. Wakit Tama has Facebook pages of its own as well, such as "Plateforme Wakit Ma Tama", and some members also have personal accounts.

<sup>25</sup> This briefing defines misinformation as unconsciously wrong information; disinformation as deliberately wrong information; biased information as marked by a tendency in favour of a particular point of view; and hate speech as targeting a person with the intent to do harm.

<sup>26</sup> On 18 April, FACT fighter Khadafi Lelbo announced in a video that FACT forces were approaching N'Djamena. The video garnered 18,000 views. See "Le FACT est déjà à la porte de N'Djamena", video, Facebook, 18 April 2021. On 20 April 2021, a DF Web Media Facebook post with 3,000 views showed a video of FACT forces engaging in combat, allegedly near the capital. See "Avancée des troupes du FACT sur N'Djamena", video, Facebook, 20 April 2021. A 22 April Facebook post questioned the video's authenticity.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview, influencer, N'Djamena, 31 May 2022.

<sup>28</sup> In February 2008, a rebel coalition entered N'Djamena to oust President Idriss Déby. The ensuing "battle of N'Djamena" resulted in a stream of refugees fleeing to Cameroon and hundreds of deaths.

## IV. Social Media's Role in the Transition

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As Chad's transition struggles, social media is poised to play both positive and negative roles. Online platforms help Chadians stay informed about political developments while allowing them to communicate in a relatively democratic space and interact directly with the government. But social media also reflects and amplifies socio-political tensions already exacerbated by the transition. Provocative information circulates quickly online, which can create a vicious wave of posts. If misused or instrumentalised, this process can result in direct threats, dangerous levels of ethnic polarisation and civil unrest.

### A. Key Players on Social Media

As Mahamat Déby has himself acknowledged, social media has come to play a major role in Chadian society during the transition.<sup>29</sup> An early April 2022 analysis of eighteen prominent Chadian influencers' Facebook pages shows that they gained 150 per cent more followers and 200 per cent more likes and comments between 2020 and 2022 (see Appendix A).<sup>30</sup> Government officials, influencers and ordinary users all participate in open online debates in which polarised narratives are developed, promoted and criticised. The well-known influencer Croquemort reflected these dynamics when he posted on Facebook: "If you do not recognise the fact that social media are crucial to validate this [national] dialogue, then you are disabled (I do not say mentally or physically)".<sup>31</sup>

#### 1. Government

Following the trend that started in 2019 under Idriss Déby – as described above – the transitional authorities have become an active player in the social media landscape. Instead of banning the use of certain platforms, the junta has emphasised their relevance to the country's economic development.<sup>32</sup> Some ministers and other officials have personal accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Junta spokesperson and National Reconciliation Minister Abderamane Koulamallah, for example, has some 38,000 followers on Facebook. Mahamat Déby's Facebook page, which was created

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The rebels retreated after French forces entered the battle. See "La bataille de N'Djamena", *Jeune Afrique*, 11 February 2008. Facebook influencer and National Reconciliation Minister Abderamane Koulamallah was then the rebels' spokesperson.

<sup>29</sup> "Chez nous les réseaux sociaux jouent un rôle très négatif: le PCMT", *Le Pays – Tchad*, 22 February 2022.

<sup>30</sup> For purposes of this briefing, "influencer" refers to someone who is able to generate interest in a product or a narrative by posting about it on social media. In April and May 2022, Crisis Group conducted a survey in N'Djamena with eighteen people (of which three are women) of various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. The interviewees identified 34 people, 31 men and three women as key influencers. In the same period, Crisis Group conducted nine in-depth interviews with influencers and social media users from N'Djamena and the diaspora, as well as ten interviews with government representatives, religious leaders and the media. The research also included direct observation of influencers' online activities as far back as 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Facebook post by Croquemort, 11 June 2022, subsequently removed.

<sup>32</sup> Crisis Group interviews, translator and active social media user, N'Djamena, 29 May 2022; minister of dialogue and national reconciliation, N'Djamena, 31 May 2022.

on 17 May 2021, less than a month after his father's death, had more than 220,000 followers at the time of writing, almost half of the Facebook users in Chad.

During the first phase of the transition – ie, between April 2021 and the end of the national dialogue in October 2022 – the government worked hard to integrate social media into its communications strategy. In the words of a young social media user interviewed by Crisis Group: “[It] has joined the dance”.<sup>33</sup> The transitional authorities have used Facebook to directly influence public opinion about government reforms, share positive assessments of how the transition is proceeding and contest claims with which they disagree. Sometimes, officials rely on others to deliver their message. In June 2022, for instance, several Facebook posts questioned the authenticity of Youth and Sports Minister Mahmoud Ali Seid's diplomas. Rather than reacting on his Facebook page, Seid asked influencer Abel Maïna, a former dissident turned government adviser, to disseminate a more sympathetic narrative.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Influencers

Chadian influencers range from political opposition leaders to former government officials, journalists, activists and ordinary citizens, both living in Chad and from the diaspora. A Crisis Group survey conducted in April and May 2022 identified 34 Chadians – 31 men and three women – widely viewed as key influencers.

Among the most popular are opposition figures and activists. They include Les Transformateurs leader Succès Masra, whose posts sometimes reach 100,000-150,000 views, and Didier Lalaye, alias Croquemort, a 40-year-old physician and slam artist living in Mali. Active online since 2013, Croquemort reached 46,000 followers during the transition, and his posts get an average of 40,000 views. Abel Maïna, the 38-year-old activist who moved back to N'Djamena in December 2021 after seventeen years of exile in France, has more than 80,000 followers on his two Facebook pages. As discussed below, Maïna joined the transitional government in an advisory capacity, though he suspended his participation in the national dialogue because of Déby's authoritarian slide.<sup>35</sup>

Some senior government officials have also become influencers after leaving government, and others act as influencers while still in their posts. Djiddi Ali Sougoudi, a physician who was formerly secretary of state for health, uses his Facebook page, created in 2021, to engage with other politicians and post health-related information. Abderamane Koulamallah, the 68-year-old national reconciliation minister and former military junta spokesperson, is also very active on Facebook, where he discusses government initiatives.

Though the majority of Chadian influencers active on Facebook are men, Crisis Group also identified three prominent women influencers. Epiphanie, in her twenties, works in local radio; Netoua Ernestine is a businesswoman in her mid-30s who joined the ministry of women, family and children's protection; and Amina Priscille Longoh, a 40-year-old, works in the same ministry. All three of them post about their political opinions and women's rights.

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<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interview, translator and active social media user, N'Djamena, 29 May 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abel Maïna, N'Djamena, 31 May 2022.

<sup>35</sup> “Urgent : Abel Maina suspend sa participation au DNIS”, Tchad Info, 9 September 2022.

With social media having become Chadians' leading source of information about political developments, especially in urban areas, news-related accounts also garner many followers.<sup>36</sup> Some traditional media outlets, such as *Le Pays*, *Tchad Info* and *Tchad Actu*, have moved online and are now mainly followed on their official Facebook pages. Some journalists have personal pages. These include Moïse Dabesne, who fled Chad for his safety and is currently based in the Central African Republic. Also popular are personal Facebook pages that emulate official media in their design, such as *Réseau des Citoyens*, a page run by Tchadaoubaye Migo Natolban, alias Miro. Based in Montreal, Canada, he broadcasts live and posts updates on political developments in Chad.

### 3. Users

The number of social media users has steadily risen since 2019, with most of them joining Facebook. The number of Chadians on the platform went from 115,402 in 2019 to 529,100 in 2022.<sup>37</sup> Some Chadians say Facebook has contributed to enhancing freedom of expression and youth mobilisation.<sup>38</sup> Others see it mainly as a platform for venting their frustrations.<sup>39</sup> Overall, Chadians use Facebook as a space to complain about daily problems such as unemployment, corruption and power cuts.<sup>40</sup> Facebook users Crisis Group interviewed say they are usually able to recognise the most obvious disinformation, but they have a harder time detecting the political biases behind the posts they read, which may also feed polarised narratives beyond the intentions of their original authors when reposted and commented on.<sup>41</sup>

## V. Risks and Responses

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According to Crisis Group interviews with Chadian internet users, the number of polarising Facebook posts has risen since the beginning of the transition.<sup>42</sup> Amid growing political tensions, communication on social media is often driven by anger and frustration.<sup>43</sup> Facebook's algorithm can feed this negative dynamic, promoting posts on a user's newsfeed according to their clicks and likes, which in turn reinforces an echo-chamber effect in which the posts a user sees are likely to come from like-

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<sup>36</sup> Group interviews, representatives of religious, government and media, N'Djamena, February-April 2022; and Crisis Group observations, N'Djamena, February-April 2022.

<sup>37</sup> See "Digital 2022 – Chad", *op. cit.* This briefing's analysis focuses on Facebook, as it is the most widely used social media platform in Chad (and West and Central Africa in general).

<sup>38</sup> Crisis Group interviews, religious, government and media representatives, N'Djamena, February-April 2022. All refer to this "democratisation" effect.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalist and director of *Le Pays – Tchad*, N'Djamena, 28 May 2022; translator and active social media user, 29 May 2022; freelance journalist, N'Djamena, May 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interviews, translator and active social media user, 26 May 2022; freelance journalist, N'Djamena, 27 May 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalist and director of *Le Pays – Tchad*, N'Djamena, 28 May 2022; and Crisis Group survey, N'Djamena, April-May 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interviews, influencers and social media users, N'Djamena, February-May 2022; Crisis Group survey, April May-2022.

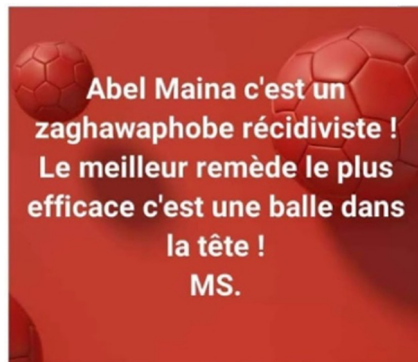
<sup>43</sup> S. Gray and J. Guay, "The Weaponization of Social Media: How Social Media Can Spark Violence and What Can Be Done about It", Mercy Corps, 2019.

mindful people, and the most inflammatory posts get top billing.<sup>44</sup> Some Chadian influencers appear to rely on these algorithms to raise their profile and increase their number of followers. The use of words that are sensitive among Chadians, such as ethnic or religious references, can help them do these things. Adding to the level of online polarisation, users tend to use similar language in their reposts and comments as an expression of their anger at the elite (see Appendix B).

### A. *Offline Implications of Online Discourse: Three Case Studies*

The following case studies offer a window into the real-world implications of Chadian social media discourse. Online platforms have swiftly incorporated unfortunate practices such as threats against influencers. Though already common outside the country, these online behaviours are both new and noteworthy in Chad. They have the potential to deeply influence the country's political sphere and cause unrest.

#### 1. Direct threats



When he returned to Chad in December 2021 after seventeen years of exile in France, influencer Abel Maïna was on the receiving end of thousands of life-threatening online messages, such as the one shown here.<sup>45</sup> The posts questioned his motives for participating in the transition as an adviser to the prime minister – and later his role in the national dialogue – after having led vocal campaigns against Idriss Déby's regime and the political leadership of

his ethnic group, the Zaghawa.<sup>46</sup> Maïna initially tried to defuse the anger at him, notably through a 22 January 2022 video posted to the state-controlled media agency Tchad Info's Facebook account that showed him asking the Zaghawa people for forgiveness.<sup>47</sup> The threats were so serious, however, that Maïna eventually asked for and obtained protection from the transitional government.

Facebook posts on Maïna elicited three kinds of reactions from users. A first group criticised his previous activism concerning Idriss Déby's regime and made direct threats against him. The second group also threatened him, claiming he had betrayed his political beliefs by joining the transitional government. The third group defended

<sup>44</sup> Kjerstin Thorson et al., "Algorithmic Inference, Political Interest, and Exposure to News and Politics on Facebook", *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 24, no. 2 (25 January 2021), pp. 183-200; Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Facebook post, 8 May 2022. The pictured post reads: "Abel Maila c'est un Zaghawaphobe récidiviste ! Le meilleur remède le plus efficace c'est une balle dans la tête ! MS". In English, it translates as: "Abel Maina is a recidivist Zaghawaphobe! The best, most effective remedy is a bullet in the head! MS".

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group asked Maïna to estimate the number of posts he had received by 19 July 2022. A freelance journalist Crisis Group interviewed in August corroborated his estimate.

<sup>47</sup> "Mon devoir en tant qu'humain pour l'apaisement et le dialogue", video, Facebook, 10 December 2021.

Maina and his decisions. Most of Maina's supporters belong, like him, to the Banana ethnic group, from Chad's south, while the majority of his critics are from northern ethnic groups, such as the Zaghawa.

Maina's case is not isolated. For example, Moïse Dabesne, the aforementioned journalist from Chad's south who fled to the Central African Republic, did so because of concerns for his safety after receiving direct threats on Facebook in August.<sup>48</sup> While he had received criticism for his reporting, including from the government, when he worked as an investigative journalist for Tchad Info, the situation became untenable during the transitional period. Also in August, activist Ahmat Larry was hospitalised after criticism levelled at him online apparently led to his being physically assaulted.<sup>49</sup> Ahmat was very active online in denouncing governance problems in N'Djamena, such as the flooding that has affected almost 400,000 people in the capital since August.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. Ethnic polarisation



Online activity can also feed into tensions between communities from Chad's north and south, which have an ethnic dimension. One such case occurred in February 2022 in the city of Sandana, in the southern Moyen-Chari region. The death of a young herdsman in a car accident triggered a violent reaction from local herders, which, as noted above, left thirteen villagers dead. The incident and the government's muted response – none of the perpetrators were held accountable – stirred longstanding grievances between southern farmers and northern herders, with the former accusing national authorities of protecting the latter at their expense. Some posts defined the northern ethnic groups that ruled the country for the past decades (Zaghawa, Gorane and Arabs) as terrorists and “a small group of people who enslaved a part of the population”.<sup>51</sup> Southern outrage also fuelled countrywide pro-

<sup>48</sup> See Facebook post, 6 August 2022.

<sup>49</sup> See “Ali Haroun doit démissionner ou arrêter pour ses crimes et non-assistance aux personnes en danger”, video, Facebook, 11 August 2022.

<sup>50</sup> “À N'Djamena, les inondations plongent les habitants dans la détresse”, *Le Monde*, 20 October 2022.

<sup>51</sup> The first line of the first pictured post reads: “Les opprimés doivent se défendre par tous les moyens ?” The full post translates as follows: “#Massacre\_Sandana MUST THE OPPRESSED DEFEND THEMSELVES BY ANY MEANS? Will the #Sandana massacre make people a little more

tests, in which women played a significant role, notably parading naked to denounce the killing of their sons and daughters and show their discontent with the government.<sup>52</sup>

Online activity helped drive the unrest. The posts pictured above, which were published by southerners, invite southern Chadians to use all necessary means to defend themselves and chase away northerners, who are labelled as terrorists.<sup>53</sup> These were followed by street protests and direct threats of violence against northerners. Influencers later introduced the hashtag #JeSuisSandana, and victims created a dedicated page, Les victimes de Sandana, with 208 members – a significant number for a rural area. Several influencers originally from the south also accused Chad's elite of allowing northerners to take too much power in the southern regions.<sup>54</sup> A visit by some senior government officials to Sandana in February did not ease the online debate, instead provoking more complaints.

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aware? It's hard to say yes, as cowardice has become the hallmark of millions of victims. But faced with terrorism at this level, we have no choice but to take our destiny into our hands, to borrow Saleh Kebzabo's [who was one of the main opposition leaders for the past 30 years and is currently prime minister] expression: 'Yes, we must defend ourselves from the criminal hegemony of a small group of men who allow themselves to believe that they have enslaved a part of the population''. Facebook post, 12 February 2022.

<sup>52</sup> "Tchad : une mission gouvernementale à Sandana après le massacre", RFI, 13 February 2022.

<sup>53</sup> "Le MPS a passé le relai aux transformateurs", Facebook post, 15 May 2022. The second post reads: "Nous demandons le démantèlement des zones des Ferricks et l'arrestation des terroristes impliqués dans le carnage de la population de Sandana." In English, it translates as: "We demand the dismantling of the Ferricks area and the arrest of the terrorists involved in the massacre of the people of Sandana". Facebook post, 12 February 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interviews, social media users, N'Djamena, February 2022. Crisis Group also reviewed numerous social media posts.

### 3. Civil unrest



Since the beginning of the transition, the opposition has used online platforms to organise offline actions. On 14 May 2022, for example, the opposition coalition Wakit Tama held a march in N'Djamena to protest the French military presence in Chad. The organisers used WhatsApp groups, Facebook and other platforms to mobilise participants.<sup>55</sup> Images of anti-French protests in West and Central Africa circulating online made the already tense environment yet more so. Emulating crowds in the Central African Republic and Mali, protesters burned French symbols and raised Russian flags.<sup>56</sup> Users posted videos of the violent mobs online in real time, with some posts using disinformation to exaggerate the magnitude of the protests.<sup>57</sup> Posts also called for the crowd to go even further and loot fuel stations belonging to the French

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, Wakit Tama leader, N'Djamena, 27 May 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, translator and active social media user, 14 September 2022. "Manifestation hostile à la France à l'appel de la coalition d'opposition Wakit Tama", RFI, 14 May 2022. See also the second picture, which reads: "Tchad : Marche du 14 Mai 2022 : Des manifestants surexcités ont hissé le drapeau de la Russie à N'Djamena au centre-ville. La patrie ou la mort, nous vaincrons ! Tchad forum". In English, it translates as: "Chad: 14 May 2022 march: Some overexcited protesters have raised a Russian flag in N'Djamena city centre. Homeland or death, we will win! Chad Forum". Facebook image, 14 May 2022.

<sup>57</sup> The first post reads: "Urgent : Des dizaines de milliers de #Tchadiens sont actuellement dans les rues de la Capitale pour réclamer le départ définitif de la #France. Pour dire non à la politique #française et l'installation des bases militaires françaises au Tchad estimées aujourd'hui contraire aux intérêts du pays". In English, it translates as: "Urgent: tens of thousands of #Chadians are currently in the streets of the capital to demand #France's permanent withdrawal. To say no to French politics and to the establishment of French military bases in Chad that today are deemed as going against the country's interests". Facebook post, 14 May 2022.

company TotalEnergies. When the government arrested six Wakit Tama leaders on charges of public disorder, many influencers expressed support for the rioters and solidarity for those arrested.<sup>58</sup>

The government, too, has used online manoeuvres to counter opposition activities. A few days after its leaders' arrest in May, discussed above, Wakit Tama circulated online calls for a new protest to be held on 28 May.<sup>59</sup> But they were pre-empted in this effort. On 25 May, the transitional authorities published an online communiqué saying they had identified three "terrorists" in the capital and announcing enhanced security measures. After a second government communiqué posted two days later stated that Wakit Tama's demonstration could not be held due to the new security threat, the coalition cancelled the demonstration. Despite the army's deployment in the streets of N'Djamena, however, the authorities never found or arrested the alleged terrorists, leading online commentators to express doubt about their existence.<sup>60</sup>

### *B. Formal Regulation and Informal Initiatives*

The systems in place in Chad to regulate social media and prevent its misuse have had little impact on the dynamics described above. The government created the National Agency for Digital Security and Electronic Certification (ANSICE) in December 2014.<sup>61</sup> Reporting directly to the presidency, ANSICE's main goals concerning the use of social media are identifying disinformation, interpersonal attacks and any other form of violence. It is also responsible for "taking the necessary measures" to fight misuse of social media – a broad and amorphous mandate.<sup>62</sup> According to Chadians interviewed by Crisis Group, few know of the agency's existence.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to its unclear mandate, ANSICE is underfunded and lacks qualified personnel, making it largely ineffective.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, were it empowered in its current form, it could have a chilling effect on online discourse, as people would consider it as state-funded internet watchdog. It would no doubt be deeply concerning to civil society, particularly after the 20 October crackdown. On the other hand, the agency might perform a useful function if it enjoyed independence from political control, a better-defined mandate and closer cooperation with civil society in supporting media literacy and discouraging online disinformation, hate speech and incitement.

In the meantime, non-state actors have stepped in, launching their own, often foreign-funded, digital literacy initiatives. Several organisations have invested in raising awareness of online disinformation. The UN Children's Fund has launched the U-Report project, which aims to educate young people about digital literacy.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Tchad : Six leaders de Wakit Tama condamnés à 12 mois avec sursis", AA, 6 June 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group interviews, social media users, N'Djamena, May 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interviews, social media users, N'Djamena, May 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Law N° 006/PR/2015 of 10 February 2015 establishing ANSICE.

<sup>62</sup> See also the special decrees and laws published on the ANSICE website.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group interviews, government representatives, religious leaders, political opposition and media institutions, N'Djamena, 17 March-4 April 2022; union leader, by telephone and correspondence, 21 March 2022. Crisis Group correspondence, religious leader, 3 April 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, religious leaders, media and civil society organisations, N'Djamena, 17 March-4 April 2022; Tchad Info director, by telephone and correspondence, N'Djamena, 25 March 2022.

<sup>65</sup> U-Report is a UNESCO-funded project that enables youth and children to use their political voices.

Wenaklabs, a Chadian start-up, recently received funding from Facebook to set up a fact checking team, SaoCheck, while Tchad Info received funding from the European Union (EU) for the same purpose. In parallel, local Facebook users have set up their own control system, inspired by football's Video Assistant Referee, to allow users to publicly report cases of disinformation and hate speech on their pages. (Many observers, however, have told Crisis Group that most of the contested posts have been widely shared online by the time they are checked, reducing the system's effectiveness.<sup>66</sup>)

Social media companies are also developing systems to monitor their platforms, though these do not in all cases cover Chad. For example, while Facebook has a global third-party fact checking program, Chad is not part of it. Moreover, at present, there are no local fact checkers in Chad who have been certified by the International Fact-Checking Network.<sup>67</sup>

Since 2018, Facebook has organised workshops in West and Central Africa where young social media users from across the region, such as youth movement leaders and journalists, learn about misinformation, hate speech and responsible use of online platforms. The participants are then asked to provide similar courses in their home countries. The young Chadians who participate in this training speak very positively of it, saying they have been encouraged to become volunteer ambassadors for using social media responsibly.<sup>68</sup> They engage in educational activities and report regularly to Facebook on hate speech and disinformation.<sup>69</sup> These workshops, however, are not a substitute for established institutional channels and procedures, which Facebook has in place elsewhere to enable swift removal of harmful content; the latter would require official third-party programs in Chad and investments on the algorithmic detection side.<sup>70</sup>

## **VI. What Should Be Done**

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Over the past three years, social media has simultaneously grown as a mirror and an amplifier of Chadian society and its longstanding social and ethnic tensions. The growth is occurring at a tense time in Chadian politics. The junta has set the political transition on a new and controversial course, and it is unclear where it is headed. As the country debates its future online, decades of unaddressed grievances – among them ethnic, political and class divides – could surface and lead to unrest. Digital platforms are both a new, important space for democratic debate and a potential accelerator of division or even violence.

Influencers in particular will have a critical role to play in keeping social media from propagating a dangerous spiral of disinformation. The Chadian social media

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<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interviews, social media users, N'Djamena, May 2022.

<sup>67</sup> The International Fact-Checking Network was launched in 2015 to bring together the growing number of fact checkers around the world to fight misinformation.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Chadian men in their early thirties who participated in a Facebook training, N'Djamena, April 2022.

<sup>69</sup> Facebook's fact checking program covers more than 60 languages in 80 countries. Crisis Group telephone interview, Facebook officials, 7 July 2022.

<sup>70</sup> See "How Meta's third-party fact-checking program works", Facebook, 1 June 2021; and Facebook's Community Standards.

landscape is young and, so far, small. While some influencers are well established, others are just getting started, and many lack either a clear understanding of the power they wield or a sense of obligation to use it responsibly. Though concededly aspirational, a worthwhile initiative would be to enlist these influencers to help manage the online flow of disinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence (or at least avoid being vehicles for it), as well as to advance positive messages about civic participation that can help build stronger politics and greater social cohesion. Rough-and-tumble rhetoric may be part of much political discourse, but in a volatile environment like Chad, influencers should be attentive to the extent to which the words they use online can lead to violence in the real world and take steps to mitigate the risks.

While well-established voices and political figures (among others) may shrug off responsibility, Chadian civil society should make an active effort to encourage all influencers, and especially the emerging ones, to better understand and adopt best practices in their posting. To this end, local groups should partner with international actors, such as the UN and EU, and social media companies to support training that can be made available to all social media personalities with at least 10,000 followers. Ideally, this training should be provided by an institution with a proven record in this field. Such an initiative could also help promote the responsible use of social media among Chadian youth by encouraging simple pre-bunking and debunking, responsible sharing and source verification practices.

In parallel, the Chadian authorities should refrain from new internet shutdowns and otherwise steer clear of heavy-handed regulation of the online sphere. Given the likely concerns about a muscular state role in regulating the internet, international partners such as the EU should advocate for ANSICE to be reimagined so that – rather than acting as a regulatory, politically controlled body with an ill-defined mandate – its efforts are directed to the promotion of best practices in the use of social media and digital literacy. Ideally, it would be restructured, including through a formal change in its mandate, so that it enjoys greater independence from the presidency and at least partly involves civil society organisations in its activities.

At the same time, Facebook and other social media companies should improve their efforts to remove hate speech and reduce the visibility of disinformation. In the transition's tense political environment, and with elections scheduled for 2024, social media companies should engage early on with Chadian civil society, users and influencers to understand the risks and potential flashpoints on the horizon so that they can be nimbler when campaigns are in full swing. To get a handle on the environment, social media platforms should deploy dedicated electoral integrity teams well before their usual timeline – six months before election day could be insufficient. In parallel, international partners such as the EU should plan to deploy expert missions, with the aim of working with Chad's electoral commission and civil society organisations on guidelines, monitoring mechanisms and good practices for social media to prepare the ground for an eventual election observation mission.

Social media companies and donors should provide training to independent media and fact checking initiatives so that online platforms can expand their networks of certified fact checkers to Chad and increase their content's trustworthiness. Social media companies should also invest more in tailoring their initiatives and adapting their algorithms to the specific political contexts in which they operate – including markets that are still small, such as Chad. Improved algorithms and established local

partnerships could play an important role in reducing the chances that posts containing ethnic and religious hate speech, for example, become viral.

Finally, Chad's international partners should also offer technical and financial support to cultivate an independent online media scene – for example, native journalistic initiatives that can engage and inform citizens directly on Facebook with a mix of visually appealing fact checking, deconstruction of polarising narratives and investigative journalism. These initiatives also have the advantage of creating opportunities for both established and new journalists, and encourage civic engagement by young people. A more vibrant independent media could help serve as a watchdog for both online speech – identifying disinformation that feeds polarising narratives – and the misuse of official power.

## **VII. Conclusion**

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Social media has created a space where political discourse is freer for hundreds of thousands of Chadians who were previously excluded from public debates. The government seems to have chosen to engage with social media and influencers instead of banning them. But the new openness of online political discussion comes amid an increasingly contentious transition that may see an increase in social and ethnic tensions around the country, particularly as elections approach in 2024. Social media can be a useful tool for informing citizens and building their civic participation in advance of elections that are intended to return power to civilians, but it can also become a vector of unrest and violence. Authorities, donors, social media companies, civil society and influencers have an interest in avoiding that outcome. Working together and separately, they should promote a social media environment that fosters public engagement while working to manage the risks that online polarisation presents in this tumultuous period for Chad and its politics.

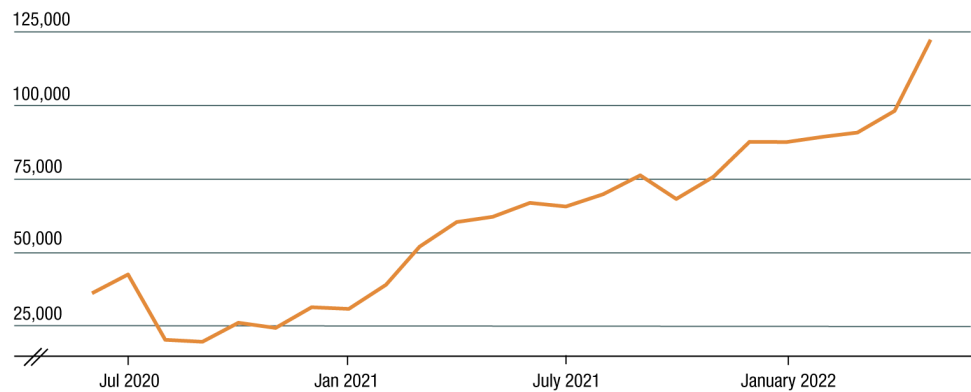
**N'Djamena/Brussels, 13 December 2022**

## Appendix A: Methodology: Network Growth

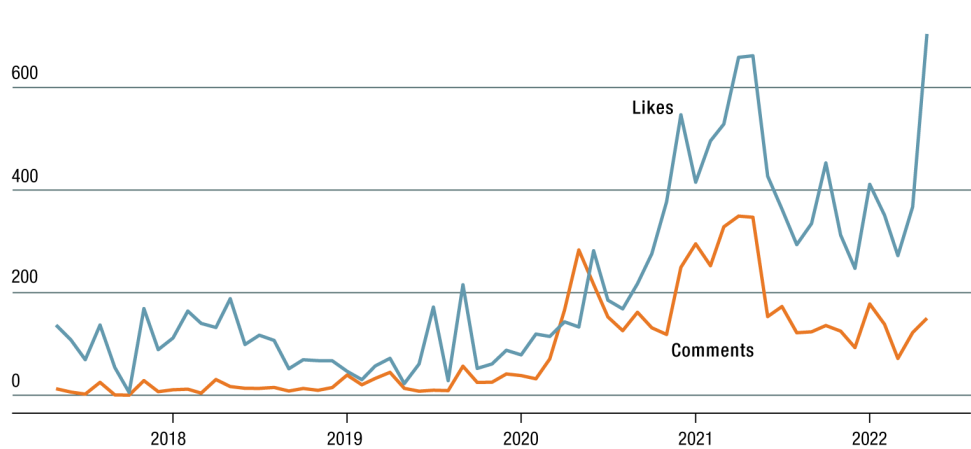
The field research for this briefing was done in April and May 2022. Crisis Group reviewed internet sources and related literature, interviewed ten people from Chadian institutions and ten internet users (focusing on influencers and youth), led a small survey among eighteen Facebook users, and conducted a netnography (ie, ethnography on the internet) that followed influencers and events on Facebook. Crisis Group also did a qualitative analysis of eighteen influencers and their actions on Facebook, as well as a computational language analysis of keywords (see Appendix B).

Appendix A presents the results of the activity of eighteen Chadian influencers on Facebook (Figure 1) and the interactions that occurred around their posts (Figure 2). The visible increase in activity from January 2020 to June 2022 can be explained by the change in Chadian internet policies starting in 2019 and, later, by heightened public debate around the 2021 presidential election, the death of Idriss Déby and the transition period that began thereafter. COVID-19 may also have contributed to the increase, but it remains difficult to evaluate the pandemic's impact.

**Figure 1. Facebook plot of eighteen Chadian pages and their average number of followers, by month: 2020-2022**



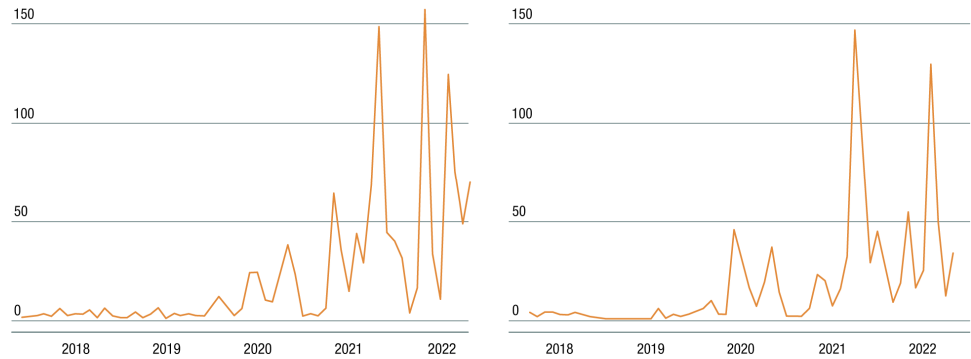
**Figure 2. General sense of page activity: Likes and comments on 18 Facebook pages, by year: 2017-2022**



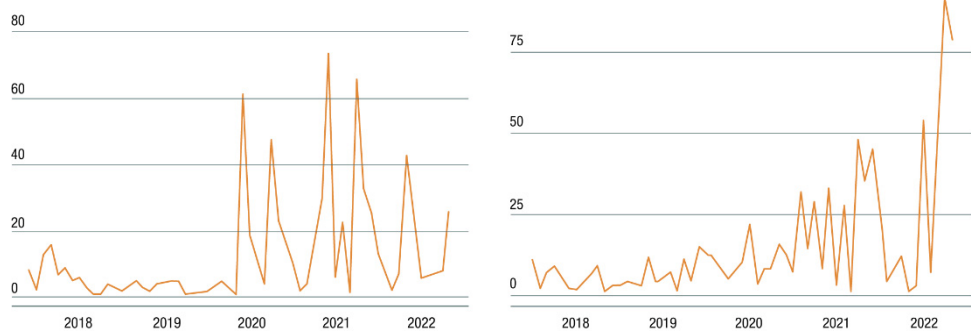
Source: Crisis Group.



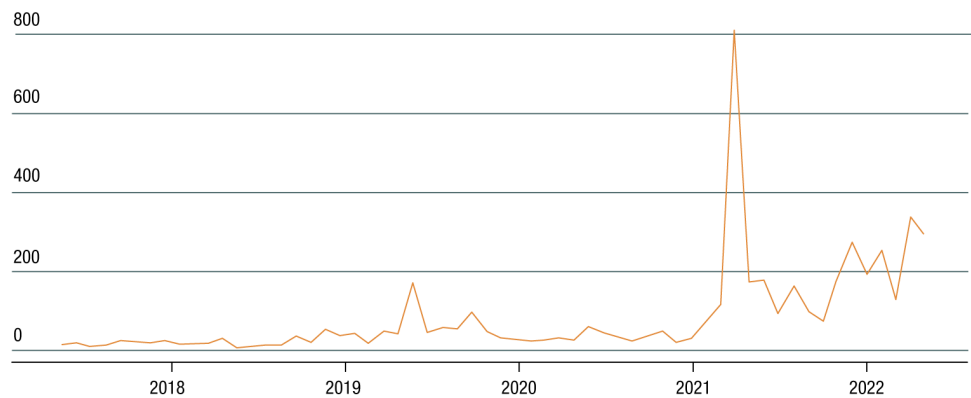
**Figure 4. Search with the combination of words: “Sudistes” and “Tchad” (left) and “Nordistes” and “Tchad” (right)**



**Figure 5. Search with the combination of words: “armée ethnique” (left) and “Kirdi” and “Tchad” (right)**



**Figure 6. Search for the word: “Zaghawa”**



Source: Crisis Group.

The figures also show a rise in polarising language around the April 2021 presidential election, when rebels were reported to be approaching N'Djamena. This trend further increased after the 2021 death of Idriss Déby, when the use of “Zaghawa” reached its peak.

## Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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