

Early Warning

Early Warning can be defined as the systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crisis for the purpose of anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; development of strategic responses to these crises; and the presentation of options to critical actors for the purpose of decision making. Successful early warning depends on: 1) the collection of sufficient, timely and relevant information, 2) timely analysis of this information, and 3) timely formulation of feasible policy options leading to early action.

FAST International

FAST International is an independent early warning program covering 20 countries/regions in Africa, Europe and Asia. The program aims at enhancing decision ability to identify critical developments in a timely manner so that coherent political strategies can be formulated to either prevent or limit destructive effects of violent conflicts, or identify windows of opportunity for peace-building.

FAST International is funded and utilized by a range of international development agencies that include the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Customers are provided with a constant and systematic collection of early warning information by way of real time access to the FAST Reporter, a web interface to access the FAST database. In addition, FAST International delivers short, precise and comprehensible scientific analyses based on a combined quantitative and qualitative approach that draws on strong analytical capacities of international and local expertise. The focus of FAST's analyses can be shaped to specific topics according to customers' needs and interests.

In addition, FAST International collaborates with local partner organizations such as the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria (South Africa) and with FEWER Eurasia in Moscow (Russia). Such cooperation entails shared monitoring of the Great Lakes region, Southern Africa, Georgia and North Caucasus region, as well as the exchange of country expertise and knowledge on conflict analysis and conflict prevention. Cooperation also facilitates a broader regional dissemination of early warning reports effectuating stronger engagement and perception of critical and/or positive developments in the specific countries/regions of interest. FAST International also cooperates with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). One objective of this cooperation is the development of a statistical prediction and risk analysis model, combining event data from FAST with structural data from the Facts on International Relations and Security Trends (FIRST) project at SIPRI.

The FAST Early Warning Methodology

FAST International uses a comprehensive methodology that combines the advantage of both qualitative and quantitative elements.

Quantitative Event Data Analysis

The core of FAST's methodology is based on event data analysis, a method informed by the logic that all events considered relevant to conflict development are assigned a certain numeric value according to a distinct conflict scale. These values can then be added up and graphically displayed in a curve, for specific time intervals. Use of event data has significant advantages for early warning due to its consistency, transparency, speed, and interactivity.

The collection of single cooperative and conflictive event data is done by local staff (Local Information Networks). Events are coded based on a standardized coding scheme, the IDEA (Integrated Data for Event Analysis) coding framework, which identifies the initiator and recipient of an action, the action itself, and the time and scope of the action. Event data is provided by a coding method developed by Virtual Research Associates (VRA®), a Harvard-based group of academic analysts. In addition to the advantages of event data analysis presented above, automated coding allows for the speedy digestion of a large amount of information in a very short period of time. Related Research Institutions Virtual Research Association (VRA®) and Kansas Event Data System (KEDS).

The various early warning indicators were created mainly for automated, parsed event data. However, LINS provide much more detailed information than computer-parsed event data. FAST International is in the process of developing more specified early warning indicators.

By aggregating all relevant events into early warning indicators on a weekly or monthly basis, and depicting them in different graphs, FAST generates an accurate picture of overall conflict potential or political stability in a selected location. As even the most profound quantitative analysis requires interpretation, data analysis is carried out in collaboration with internationally renowned country experts. The advantages of event-data analysis are as follows:

- A multitude of information is broken down into its component parts and depicted in easy-to-read graphs demonstrating aspects of conflict and cooperation within and between countries/communities.
- Event data counts and respective graphs provide checks and balances against de-sensitization toward violence and/or media hypes.
- Event data analysis allows for speedy tracking of specific violent or cooperative incidences over time and supports qualitative assessments.
- Event data graphs permit for comparison between countries/communities
- Event data analysis, if further developed, permits the forecasting of conflict trends.

FAST International also conducts research in the field of quantitative forecasting, with the aim to generate signaling models and actors network analysis that allow accurate predications of the potential for, or risk of, political crises.

Local Information Networks

In the countries being monitored FAST International employs Local Information Networks (LINS). They are responsible for tracking and reporting relevant information in accordance with the specific set of indicators. Each LIN consists of one Country Coordinator and two to six Field Monitors - depending on the size and/or

diversity of the country. Country Coordinators receive sound training in conflict analysis and event data methodology. The information collected by the LINs feed into a variety of conflict-related graphs that are subsequently analyzed and interpreted by FAST's international experts.

LINs offer the following advantages:

- Country-/area-specific information
- Up-to-date, independent, and constant information monitoring
- Targeted information collection customised to end-users' needs
- Constant contact between analysts and LIN
- Constant quality control of LINs through FAST analysts

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis is necessary for maintaining a context-specific understanding of political developments in the countries and regions monitored by FAST International, and for anticipating even minor changes that can be initiated by local, regional, and international actors. Qualitative analysis at FAST benefits from:

FAST Desk Officers: Desk Officers are responsible for recruiting and supporting the Country Coordinators and the Country Experts. The desk officers are also responsible for monitoring events and developments in the countries for which they are responsible and for analysis of relevant literature and secondary sources.

Country Experts: In order to generate synergy between local understanding and outside expertise, FAST works closely with international experts. The involvement of international expertise enables FAST to obtain an even more comprehensive and accurate reflection of developments in the target region. The international experts constantly monitor events and developments in the area of their responsibility and undertake analysis of relevant literature and secondary sources.

Fact-finding missions: FAST Desk Officers visit the region on which they specialize in order to obtain broader first-hand knowledge, assess the situation on the ground, and maintain close contacts with local analysts. These fact-finding missions are of particular importance in countries that are difficult to access by international news media, or which are potentially subject to one-sided coverage by Western news agencies. In addition, visits to FAST clients' local projects allows for the design of more appropriate response options.

FAST Products

FAST International offers a variety of early warning products. While some products, such as the FAST Updates (including Special Updates) and the Analytical Frameworks, are standardized and freely available on the internet, other products, such as the Country Risk Profiles and FAST Briefings, are tailored to customers' needs and thus intended for their use only.

• FAST Updates

The FAST Update provides the reader with an overview of events on a semi-annual basis. The tension barometers (graphs) display cooperative and conflictive developments that are analyzed by international FAST experts on the basis of specific indicators. Besides the interpretation of the tension barometers, the experts also provide an outlook on likely future developments. The FAST-Update is designed as a decision

support tool for decision makers and their staff of governmental and non-governmental organizations. FAST Updates (risk assessments) covering all target countries/regions are published on a semi-annual basis and are available either for download on the respective country page or by subscription.

- **FAST Special Updates**

FAST Special Updates are released to customers whenever major changes occur in one of the countries or regions under scrutiny, i.e. if the situation deteriorates or improves in a decisive way. FAST Special Updates follow the structure of the regular FAST Updates.

- **FAST Analytical Frameworks**

Core indicators derived from background analyses are depicted in the Analytical Framework. The key indicator groups are root causes, proximate causes, and intervening factors that may increase or decrease the likelihood of violent conflict. To keep the FAST analysis flexible, these frameworks are updated if significant new factors appear.

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