

# 5 “Why didn’t they see it coming?” Ground-level diplomats, foreign policy, and unconstitutional regime change

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Since 2010, there have been 22 cases of unconstitutional regime change or a change in government that occurs outside the constitutional structures in place for political transition. In 2021, there were military coups in Chad, Mali, Guinea, Myanmar, and Sudan; attempted coups in Armenia and Nigeria; the dramatic takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban; and the dismissal of the government and freezing of Parliament by President Kais Saied of Tunisia (which some have called a “self-coup”). In 2022, Burkina Faso faced not one but two military coups in a single year, and there were coup attempts in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe, and a self-coup in Peru.

For international actors, the uncertainty of unconstitutional regime change presents unique challenges and opportunities. In the immediate aftermath of a coup or a revolution, states and international organizations (IOs) are expected to position themselves quickly and, in some cases, engage directly in resolving the constitutional crisis. In the months that follow, foreign actors can play a critical role in promoting stability and good governance, for example, by offering foreign assistance to incentivize certain behaviors or by punishing undemocratic behavior through the suspension of foreign aid or economic sanctions (Kapstein and Converse 2008). Thus, responses to unconstitutional regime change by foreign states and IOs strongly influence the likelihood that democracy will survive (or falter).

Given the importance of these moments, it is surprising how unprepared foreign states and IOs are for unconstitutional regime change, even when there are clear warning signs (Whitehouse 2020). In interviews I conducted in Burkina Faso in September 2015, foreign representatives told me that they were blindsided by the attempted coup against the transitional government even though it was the third coup attempt in less than a year. Similarly, foreign actors were unprepared for the 2021 coup in Myanmar despite clear indications that the military was unwilling to accept the results of the November 2020 elections (Crouch 2021). Mali has experienced three coups since 2012, yet each time foreign actors scrambled to respond.

The lack of preparedness for these dramatic moments means that instead of being proactive and well-coordinated, responses by foreign actors tend to be vague, uncoordinated, and even contradictory. In the case of Burkina Faso, for example, interviewees told me that they didn’t even know the proper protocols for a situation like this and instead were left scrambling to understand and position themselves on the rapidly changing events. In the case of Mali, observers noted that objections

to the coup from Mali's main security partners – France and the USA – as well as by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were 'tepid and ineffective' (Dion and Sany 2021).

In this chapter, I take a central question of this volume – why didn't they see it coming? – and apply it to the case of unconstitutional regime change, asking *why* decisionmakers fail to prepare for these critical moments and how this might affect related responses. What little we know about how international actors respond to unconstitutional regime change has focused on what states and foreign actors say after unconstitutional regime change, i.e., their public statements and declarations (i.e., Shannon et al. 2015). But these moments raise even deeper questions about why international actors fail to prepare for unconstitutional regime change, which although uncertain, is not necessarily unpredictable. Why do international actors often scramble to respond to events that analysts have been warning about for weeks or even months? Answering these questions helps us address key questions of this volume, including 'Where does uncertainty come from? What does it look like? And what does uncertainty "do" in global politics?'

Drawing on insights from delegation theory as well as observations of diplomatic practice, I theorize that understanding the role and incentives of foreign embassies and their staff helps us better understand the lack of preparedness of states and IOs for unconstitutional regime change. As the eyes and ears of foreign states and IOs around the world, it is the job of diplomats on the ground to inform their superiors about events abroad. When a coup takes place in Mali, it is the embassy staff who should have "seen it coming." It is also the embassy staff who are responsible for briefing key decisionmakers on events on the ground and providing guidance on what might happen next. However, ground-level diplomats are not just representatives of states, and they are also bureaucrats ultimately accountable to and rewarded by the organizations they work for. I theorize that diplomats' tripartite role as knowledge producers, representatives of their country, and bureaucrats in a hierarchical institution may undermine their ability to manage uncertainty effectively and efficiently (Cornut 2015).

In terms of the key themes and questions of this volume, the analysis of international responses to unconstitutional regime change clarifies the role of uncertainty in global politics in two important ways. First, echoing Kelman's (in this volume) reflections on disasters and uncertainty, this chapter demonstrates that international actors can (and should) be able to prepare for uncertainty. Like disasters, unconstitutional regime change is a case of *ontological extreme uncertainty* (albeit in this case perpetuated by humans), but that doesn't mean that it is entirely unpredictable. The question then becomes, given the challenges and opportunities that unconstitutional regime change presents, why don't international actors take steps to address and prepare for this uncertainty? Second, the chapter suggests that in order to understand how uncertainty is (un)managed in global politics, we need to open the black box of the state, in this case by considering the role and positionality of diplomats on the ground. Although they are on the front lines of managing uncertainty, key features of diplomats' practice may undermine their ability to respond to extreme uncertainty.

The chapter is organized as follows: in the first section, I define what I mean by unconstitutional regime change. In the second session, I examine what we know about international responses to unconstitutional regime change, noting that analyses of international responses to unconstitutional regime change have largely focused on what states and IOs *say* in these moments, not why international actors are so *unprepared* for these events and how this affects outcomes. In the third section, I contextualize unconstitutional regime change in the debates regarding uncertainty addressed in this volume, emphasizing that uncertainty is not the same as unpredictability. In the fourth section, I make a case for why, in these pivotal moments, foreign embassies and their staff are likely to play an important role, but how the system is not set up to support preparedness and in-depth analysis. I conclude by bringing the discussion back to the core questions of this volume: ‘How do we best study, understand, and address political phenomenon that is inherently uncertain? How do we define and theorize uncertainty in global politics? What can we learn from studying uncertainty in various forms and how can we use this knowledge to our advantage in individual planning, policymaking and global problem solving?’

### **What is unconstitutional regime change?**

For the purposes of this chapter, I define unconstitutional regime change as a change of government that occurs outside the constitutional structures for political transition. According to Krasner (1983), regime change involves an abrupt change not only in rules and decision-making but also in norms and principles. Thus, regime change is not simply the succession of different governments following an election. Rather, it implies a rupture in the fundamental structure of the state (Lawson 1993). At the time of writing, unconstitutional regime change has occurred 22 times since 2010 (see Table 5.1), with several countries, including Burkina Faso, Egypt, Mali, and Sudan, experiencing multiple unconstitutional transitions in the span of just over a decade.

Beginning in the early 2000s, a number of regional organizations, including the AU and the Organization of America States (OAS), began to develop strong norms against unconstitutional regime change (Souare 2014; Tansey 2018). In the Lomé Declaration of 2000, the Organization for African Union – the predecessor to the AU – first defined unconstitutional regime government with reference to four situations: military coups against a democratically elected government; interventions by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government; the replacement of democratically elected governments by armed dissident groups and rebel movements; and the refusal by an incumbent government to cede power to the winning party after free, fair, and regular elections (de Wet 2021).

These measures were consolidated by Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act of 2000 – the founding treaty of the AU – which elevated the condemnation and rejection of an unconstitutional regime change to a founding principle. Moreover, Article 30 of the AU Constitutive Act establishes that ‘[g]overnments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate

Table 5.1 Cases of unconstitutional regime change 2010-2022

<i>Year</i>	<i>Country</i>
2022	Burkina Faso (January, October)
2021	Chad, Guinea, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan
2020	Mali
2019	Sudan
2018	Armenia
2017	Zimbabwe
2014/15	Yemen
2014	Burkina Faso, Ukraine, Thailand
2013/14	Central African Republic
2013	Egypt
2012	Mali
2011	Egypt, Ivory Coast, Tunisia
2010	Kyrgyzstan, Niger

*Source:* CSP/INSCR Coup Dataset and supplementary materials.

To compile this list, I used the CSP/INSCR Coup Dataset and its supplementary materials to identify all cases of successful coups and forced leadership change. I then excluded cases where a regime change emerged after a lengthy civil war and/or protracted settlement process (e.g., Rwanda in 1994); cases where there was an international-led campaign to remove the executive from power, even if this was based on widespread public dissent (e.g., Libya in 2011); and, cases where the executive was removed from power based on impeachment trials or in anticipation of impeachment trials (e.g., Brazil in 2016). Data are available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>.

in the activities of the Union.’ This suspension clause is also echoed in Article 25 of the African Democracy Charter, which (a) provides for governmental suspension in case diplomatic initiatives have failed; (b) allows for the possibility of imposing economic sanctions; and (c) prohibits the perpetrators of unconstitutional regime change from standing in elections held to restore democratic order (de Wet 2021).

### **What do we know about international responses to unconstitutional regime change?**

Both comparative politics and international relations (IR) scholars have extensively studied regime change, including the role of international actors (Grugel 1999; Huntington 1991; Levitsky and Way 2010; Pridham, Herring, and Sanford 1997; Whitehead 1996). This literature tells us that (a) political transitions are critical junctures (Capoccia and Keleman 2007; Collier and Collier 1991; Mahoney 2001; Pierson 2004) and (b) that external actors can play a crucial role in these moments (Pevehouse 2002; Schimmelfennig 2010; Vachudova 2005). However, this doesn't tell us what determines international responses to these events.

There is also an emerging literature on when states and multilateral organizations are willing to sanction countries for violating norms related to unconstitutional regime change. As noted above, several regional organizations have developed strong norms against unconstitutional regime change, particularly military coups, since the early 2000s (Souare 2014; Tansey 2018). However, these norms have been inconsistently applied (Masaki 2016; de Wet 2021). For example,

in 2021, the AU suspended Mali, Guinea, and Sudan in response to coups in these countries, but it failed to sanction Chad. To explain this inconsistency, scholars have focused on normative concerns, such as the protection of democracy, and material or strategic concerns on the part of states, such as trade or oil interests.

Shannon et al. (2015) find that coups against democracies and wealthy states receive more attention. Counterintuitively, however, they also find that coups against heavy traders and oil-rich states do not necessarily receive more reaction, challenging traditional IR theories that would predict that reactions are closely tied to strategic interests. Looking specifically at IOs, Hardt and Sasley (2017) find that institutions that are less economically integrated and whose member states are more cost-sensitive are more likely to use suspension to encourage compliance. Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019) find that suspension is less likely when the violator is geopolitically important to the regional power or the remaining member states; however, they also find that suspensions are more likely when IOs have certain institutional features, including lower voting thresholds and suspension clauses.

Taken together, this literature tells us that states and multilateral organizations play a central role in political transitions, but that established norms and policies are often overlooked when it comes to unconstitutional regime change. What it doesn't tell us is why international actors are so unprepared for these pivotal events, and how this lack of preparation affects the ability of international actors to influence outcomes.

### **Uncertainty is not the same as unpredictability**

In the language of this volume, unconstitutional regime change is a case of *ontological extreme uncertainty* brought on by human-generated sources – it ruptures the existing order along with the practices and expectations associated with it. For both domestic and international actors, our knowledge and understanding of the present and the future are limited because the outcomes of regime change are far from certain. Even if there is certainty about the “success” of a coup or a revolution (which there often is not, or steps would likely have been taken to prevent it), what kind of government will emerge and how it will govern is often highly uncertain. Writing about political transitions more generally, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1985: 76) note that:

the high degree of uncertainty and indeterminacy which surrounds those who participate in a transition, both with respect to their short-term interactions and, even more so, with respect to the medium- and long-term consequences which ensue. It is not just that the actors are uncertain about the identity, resources, and intentions of those with whom they are playing the transitional game. They are also aware (or should be aware) that their momentary confrontations, expedient solutions, and contingent compromises are in effect defining rules which may have a lasting but largely unpredictable effect on how and by whom the “normal” political game will be played in the future.

Particularly in discussions of coups, uncertainty has often been equated with unpredictability. As Walter Laqueur wrote in a foreword to Luttwak's classic text, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook* (1979), unpredictability makes coups

annoying not only for practicing politicians but also from the point of view of the political scientist. ... [A]lmost by definition [coups] are mortal enemies of orderly hypotheses and concepts: how does one account scientifically for the political ambitions of a few strategically well-placed individuals? (quoted in Luttwak 1979)

And, for de Bruin (2020), it is the unpredictability of coups that makes it rational for individual leaders to engage in counterbalancing activities to try to prevent coups and ensure the survival of their regime. Because domestic political actors lack information on if or when a coup might happen, it makes sense for them to engage in counterbalancing to try and prevent losing their position of power.

However, although uncertain, coups are often not as unpredictable as they are made out to be. While it is difficult to predict when an unconstitutional regime change might occur (indeterminacy), there are always domestic antecedents – even if they are underreported or their catalytic potential is underestimated (i.e., there is a *lack of information*). For example, as Acuto (2011: 526) notes, international crises 'can be anticipated and yet unavoidable. It is rather the escalation attribute of disruptive relations and alleged menace that defines crises.'

Consider the case of Mali, which experienced back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021. In both cases, there were clear warning signs of impending trouble. The first of these coups, which analyst Bruce Whitehouse (2020) even called a 'predictable coup,' took place in August 2020 after sustained and constant protests against the government of former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in the country's capital Bamako. These protests, led by the M5 group, were largely tied to frustrations over the state's inability to provide either economic or physical security. Keïta himself came to power in 2013 in elections that followed an earlier coup in 2012. However, over the next decade, citizens became disillusioned with his government, particularly its failure to address systemic corruption and insecurity, especially in Northern Mali (Whitehouse 2020).

Thus, there was initially widespread enthusiasm for the political changes ushered in by the 2020 coup. However, popular fervor faded as dignitaries of the old regime went unchallenged. In May 2021, tensions again reached a boiling point when a cabinet reshuffle omitted two former members of the military junta responsible for the 2020 coup: Defense Minister Sadio Camara and Security and Civil Protection Minister Modibo Kone. Within two hours of the announcement of the new government, Mali's transitional president Bah Ndaw and his prime minister Moctar Oaune were arrested by members of the same military junta that had carried out the 2020 coup (Haidara 2021).

The events in Mali are clearly characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, but this does not mean that they were completely unpredictable. Writing about another 2021 coup, Smith and Moakes (2021) similarly note that the September coup in

Guinea ‘was both foreseeable and preventable.’ They go on to argue that ‘this current predicament could have been avoided had the right lessons been learned from other coups that afflicted the region more recently, in Mali (twice) and in Chad – successive events that registered as only a blip on the international radar and failed to elicit meaningful action.’ Writing about the coup in Sudan in October 2021, Kirby (2021) notes: ‘There were plenty of warnings that Sudan’s democratic transition was in danger.’

In the context of debates about uncertainty, this undermines the importance of not equating uncertainty with unpredictability, and – analogous to Kelman’s chapter in this volume – opens up interesting questions about why international actors seem to fail to prepare for uncertainty. If unconstitutional regime change is so catalytic, why don’t international actors take steps to prepare for potential trouble? Why do warnings of impending trouble often go unheeded?

### **Looking beyond the state: The role of foreign embassies and ground-level diplomats**

To better understand the lack of preparedness for unconstitutional regime change, I theorize that we need to open the black box of the state, analyzing foreign policy organizations and the individuals who work for these organizations. In particular, I theorize that we should pay more attention to ground-level diplomats, that is, representatives of states and multilateral organizations posted abroad, including ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission, and political advisors.

In the event of a coup or a revolution, diplomats are the key link between events on the ground and the foreign state. It is the embassy staff who should have “seen it coming.” Diplomatic analysis, or ‘the attempt to convey an understanding of how authority and power relations operate and evolve within and between governments and between government and society,’ is the central function of foreign embassies (Smith 2011: 1). All but the smallest embassies have a political section (Rana 2013: 38), and the fact that embassies produce policy-oriented analysis tailored to the needs of their foreign ministry means that diplomatic missions remain ‘the home country’s best source of comprehensive information on the country of location’ (Rana 2013: 53). As Neumann writes, ‘today’s field diplomat is first and foremost an information gatherer who writes dispatches back to her foreign ministry’ (Neumann 2012: 33).

During crises, such as unconstitutional regime change, the role of embassies is likely to be even more important. Writing about the response to the revolution in Egypt, Cornut (2015: 385–386) notes that ‘changes in Western government’s political postures in January and February 2011 required reliable on the ground information and accurate, timely political analysis, for which governments relied heavily on embassies to produce.’ Time pressures and *a lack of information* force politicians to rely on bureaucrats (in this case, diplomats) who are closer to events on the ground (Rosenthal et al. 1991; Hart et al. 1993), while *incomplete information* provides an advantage to those that are more knowledgeable (Milner 1997: 21).

In the case of unconstitutional regime change, events unfold rapidly in places that are often considered peripheral. Diplomats are the ones who are supposed to have local connections and access to inside information. They are also the link between other states and multilateral organizations operating in a particular national context (Hardt 2014; Swedlund 2017). As a result, diplomats become a central node in how states and international organizations respond to coups and revolutions.

In this way, diplomats are on the front lines of managing uncertainty, but they also face a great deal of uncertainty. Diplomats in the field are there to build bridges between sending and receiving countries. Suddenly, however, they find themselves without a host government to engage with. Should diplomats work to quickly establish strong ties with the new (likely transitional) government? Or should they continue to engage with members of the previous regime who may eventually return to power or at least remain influential in the future? What if the new regime is highly undemocratic or has a history of atrocities? Should they recommend a change in foreign policy goals? For diplomats in the field, uncertainty in this case can be understood in different ways. Because the outcomes are far from certain, there is likely to be *a lack of information*. But there is also likely to be *a multiplicity of interpretations* that diplomats will have to sift through and, given their positionality, may struggle to make sense of.

According to Cornut (2015), the defining characteristic of diplomats' political work in embassies is the simultaneous management of three social roles: knowledge producer, representative of their country, and bureaucrat in a hierarchical institution. This tripartite role means that diplomats are constantly managing pressures to produce accurate and informed analysis, to represent the needs and interests of their country, and to respond to the needs and demands of the bureaucracies in which they are embedded. In what follows, I theorize that diplomats' positionality as bureaucrats in complex foreign policy organizations may, at least at times, make diplomats less likely to prepare for the *extreme uncertainty* of unconstitutional regime change and may even undermine policymaking during periods of such uncertainty.

### *A narrow field of vision*

First, there is ample evidence that although diplomats are supposed to be their country's eyes and ears on the ground, they tend to rely on a limited number and type of sources. As Cornut (2015) shows in the case of the Egyptian revolution, information from official sources carries a disproportionate weight in diplomatic analysis. As one ambassador told Cornut (2015: 393, emphasis added), 'diplomats often prefer to talk to government counterparts, because "there are established channels, there are established protocols of communication. *It is much easier.*"' Moreover, diplomats tend to rely heavily on the briefing notes of their predecessor. While this helps preserve institutional memory, it can also reinforce existing analytical frameworks.



Foreign diplomats also tend to gravitate toward similar interlocutors who speak and communicate in certain ways. As one diplomat working in Tanzania told me, diplomats flock to domestic informants that speak their language (referencing, in this case, both their English language skills and their ability to understand international development terminology), ‘like flies on a piece of poop.’ They also tend to move in relatively tight-knit circles, relying on their counterparts in other embassies not only for information but also for camaraderie and socialization – a reality that is apparent to anyone who has lived or worked in a place with a high concentration of international diplomats (Autesserre 2014; Mosse 2011).

Finally, there is also a reluctance within diplomatic circles to express dissenting views. As one informant told Cornut (2015: 393), ‘We do not like to dissent. So if everybody is saying that the regime is very stable [...] we are almost embarrassed to say otherwise in the end. When we see that everybody is going in one direction, and everybody has the impression that it is very stable, we are embarrassed to say “Yes, but still be careful because there is this and that.”’ Similarly, Laura Seay (2011: 77) observes that expatriate circles in the Democratic Republic of Congo resemble ‘a giant echo chamber in which the opinions of international actors are largely in line with one another, but far removed from those they intend to help.’

Taken together, these norms and established practices mean that, rather than hearing a diverse range of voices, diplomats often get their information disproportionately from certain sources, and their working and personal environments are similar across contexts. As early as in the 1970s, Hedley Bull (1977: 17) worried that this would undermine knowledge of complex political environments, writing that ‘diplomats’ knowledge comes from day-to-day personal contact with the leading political strata in the country to which a diplomat is accredited, sometimes to the detriment of his understanding of society at large in that country ... such knowledge alone can be misleading.’ Similarly, in an insider exposé of the failure of the UN to intervene in the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, Michael Barnett (1997: 556) writes: ‘A good cable, I learned, is not only clear and succinct; it also offers an account that is consistent with the interests, both personal and bureaucratic, of one’s superiors. [...] [B]ureaucrats will often privilege the needs of, and take their identity from, the bureaucracy rather than the society that they ostensibly represent’ (Barnett 1997: 563).

Of course, some diplomats may seek out professional and personal relationships with a more diverse set of actors, while others might strongly dissent (Autesserre 2014). The point, however, is that there are limited professional incentives for them to do so. Indeed, diplomatic work is explicitly designed to prevent diplomats from “going native.” For example, the rationale behind relatively short diplomatic assignments is to ensure that diplomats act in the best interest of their home countries rather than their host countries. However, a limited or narrow understanding of certain contexts is likely to be particularly problematic when there is *extreme uncertainty* that ruptures a preexisting order. In the case of unconstitutional regime change, if diplomats have a narrow field of vision, they may not see the “writing on the wall” or be sensitive to the level of popular unrest in a particular context. And, even if they do catch wind of it, they may not feel empowered to express an alternative viewpoint.

### ***The pressure for normality***

There is also good reason to believe that the bureaucracies in which diplomats work are not designed to respond adequately to events that, by their very nature, disrupt the status quo. Diplomatic structures are highly routinized and mechanized (Cornut 2015; Liska 1975; Neumann 2005). The bread and butter of international diplomats is “routine diplomacy,” or the ‘daily business of diplomats and governments officials engaged in communication processes of an international nature’ (Acuto 2011: 529). The main task of ‘habitual diplomatic relations is to perpetuate the inertia that assures the existence of their state or organization within the global arena ... this task derives mainly from the social need to maintain a common set of rules and institutionalized practices that assure a certain degree of predictability’ (Acuto 2011: 529). While useful for maintaining structure and order in complex bureaucracies, the routine nature of diplomatic work not only means that diplomats are likely to struggle to respond and adapt to uncertainty but also that when moments of uncertainty occur, they are likely to prioritize a return to normality over a fundamentally new approach to engagement.

At the individual level, diplomats’ careers depend on demonstrating their usefulness to their superiors. Writing about the different accountability structures for politicians and top-level bureaucrats, Alesina and Tabellini (2016: 179) note that while politicians want to please voters and win elections, bureaucrats are motivated by career concerns: ‘They want to fulfil the goals of their organization because this improves their external professional prospects.’ Unconstitutional regime change puts these relationships at risk. At the same time, if normal diplomatic relations are suspended or if the new government has new priorities, unconstitutional regime change can also jeopardize projects that diplomats have been working to implement. As a result, diplomats often prefer to quickly return to the status quo. Acuto (2011: 531), for example, argues that the pressure for normality means that the goal of crisis diplomacy becomes about ‘reinstating the habitual inertia of international process,’ as quickly as possible.

While this may be useful for quickly restoring organizational missions and functions, it can also encourage a tendency to prioritize organizational needs or personal career incentives over a meaningful response to the changing political context. I saw evidence of this in Burkina Faso. Diplomats pushed for quick and early elections despite the potential for electoral violence, because they feared that delays would stall the aid packages and programs that justified their presence in the country (Swedlund 2015). Similarly, diplomats told me that they avoided calling the coup a coup because they did not want to trigger legal requirements to suspend aid. Doing so would jeopardize projects and potentially their jobs.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined a case of *ontological extreme uncertainty*. Unconstitutional regime change ‘ruptures everyday routines and expectancies in major ways,’ in the language used in this volume. These effects are evident not only for the citizens of the countries in which these events take place but also for

the foreign diplomats assigned to these countries. However, I have also argued that while these events are highly uncertain, they are not necessarily unpredictable and that the lack of preparedness by states and IOs for these events is both puzzling and detrimental to their ability to respond effectively and efficiently to these pivotal moments. To better understand this lack of preparedness, I theorized that we should turn to foreign embassies and the men and women who staff them. Although they are at the front lines of managing uncertainty, key features of diplomatic practice may undermine the ability of diplomats to respond effectively and efficiently to extreme uncertainty.

As Matejova and Shesterinina point out in the introductory chapter of this volume, uncertainty is a given in global politics, but what it looks like and what it does in global politics varies. Unconstitutional regime change highlights two important implications for the study of uncertainty in IR more broadly. First, unconstitutional regime change underscores the need to avoid conflating uncertainty and unpredictability. While unconstitutional regime change is uncertain, we know a great deal about the domestic conditions that foster it and – at least in hindsight – there are often clear signs. The question then becomes: Why don't international actors take steps to address and prepare for the possibility of unconstitutional regime change?

Second, the chapter suggests that in order to understand how uncertainty is managed (or unmanaged) in global politics, we need to open up the black box of the state, in this case considering the role and positionality of diplomats on the ground. Diplomats are often on the frontlines of uncertainty, but their triple role as knowledge producers, representatives of their country, and bureaucrats in a hierarchical institution may undermine their ability to manage uncertainty effectively and efficiently.

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