laboratory for testing policy innovations; in practice, most policy-making still runs in a national groove. One puzzle, in fact, is to explain why convergence occurs without explicit emulation. In other words, why do high-income countries adopt broadly similar policies in the same time period without the self-aware learning from abroad that policy convergence suggests?

**Policy convergence** is the tendency for countries’ policies to become more alike. Note that convergence may occur in a specific sector without producing convergence overall because a country may be innovating in another sector, increasing divergence.

To begin, we review the general process of diffusion. Figure 18.2 shows the scheme proposed by Rogers (1962). It distinguishes between a few innovators, early adopters, the early and late majority, and a small number of laggards.

Although not designed with cross-national policy diffusion in mind, Rogers’ analysis does allow us to interpret the spread of a particular policy and to ask why certain countries are innovators, either in a particular case, or in general. Innovation is perhaps most likely to emerge in high-income countries with the most acute manifestation of a specific problem; with the resources to commit to a new policy; and with the governance capacity to authorize and deliver. A new government with fresh ideas and a desire to make its mark is an effective catalyst.

Knill and Tosun (2012, p. 275) identify a series of factors encouraging policy convergence across nations (Box 18.4). Only one of these is direct learning and transfer from country to country, thus providing some clues as to how convergence can emerge with only limited lesson-drawing.

Of the factors listed in Box 18.4, independent problem-solving is surely one of the more significant contributors to convergence. As countries modernize, they develop similar problems calling for a policy response. At an early stage of development, for example, issues such as urban squalor, inadequate education, and the need for social security force themselves onto the agenda. The problems of development come later: obesity, for example, or the social cost of care for the elderly. In national responses to such difficulties, we often observe policy-making in parallel, rather than by diffusion.

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**Figure 18.2 The diffusion of innovations**

In analyzing how new ideas percolate through the units in a social system (such as countries in the world), Rogers distinguished between innovators, early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and laggards (non-adopters excluded).

![Figure 18.2](image)

*Source: Adapted from Rogers (1962).*

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**BOX 18.4**

**Mechanisms of policy convergence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>As countries develop, similar problems emerge, often resulting in similar policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International agreements</strong></td>
<td>Countries seek to comply with international laws, regulations, and standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International competition</strong></td>
<td>Policies providing an economic or political advantage will be replicated elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy learning</strong></td>
<td>Explicit lesson-drawing (can occur even when no competitive advantage ensues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Coercion and conditionality (e.g. adopt our policies in exchange for our aid) are additional mechanisms.*

*Source: Adapted from Knill and Tosun (2012), table 11.5.*