



Mexico's Middle Class in the Neoliberal Era

Dennis Gilbert

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Mexico's modern middle class emerged in the decades after World War II, a period of spectacular economic growth and social change. Though little studied, the middle class now accounts for one in five Mexican households. This path-breaking book explores the changing fortunes and political transformation of the middle class, especially during the last two decades, as Mexico has adopted new, market-oriented economic policies and has abandoned one-party rule. Blending the personal narratives of middle-class Mexicans with analyses of national surveys of households and voters, Dennis Gilbert traces the development of the middle class since the 1940s. He describes how middle-class Mexicans were affected by the economic upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s and examines their shifting relations with the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Long faithful to the PRI, the middle class gradually grew disenchanted. Gilbert examines middle-class reactions to the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, the 1982 debt crisis, the government's feeble response to the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, and its brazen manipulation of the vote count in the 1988 presidential election. Drawing on detailed interviews with Mexican families, he describes the effects of the 1994–95 peso crisis on middle-class households and their economic and political responses to it. His analysis of exit poll data from the 2000 elections shows that the lopsided middle-class vote in favor of opposition candidate Vicente Fox played a critical role in the election that drove the PRI from power after seven decades. The book closes with an epilogue on the middle class and the July 2006 presidential elections.

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