



# Democracy in Colombia: Clientelistic Politics and Guerrilla Warfare

*Jorge Pablo Osterling*

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## **Democracy in Colombia: Clientelistic Politics and Guerrilla Warfare** Jorge Pablo Osterling

In what is destined to prove the definitive text for the present generation on the political, economic, and social structure of Colombia, Jorge Pablo Osterling explores the enigmatic nature of this special, even critical, anchor to the northern tier of South America. In many ways, Colombia is a huge success story: it is one of the oldest, most stable, functioning democracies; the land is blessed with rich and diversified resources and products; and its foreign debt has been kept in check as a consequence of sound economic management.

But despite its positive social, cultural, economic, and political indicators, Colombia has been a nation beset by serious problems: overt corruption and unemployment are very high; and its public service facilities to outlying rural areas remain weak, thus making schooling, water supplies, health care, and electrification hard to establish at high levels. Above all, Colombia has a reputation, well earned, as one of the most violent nations in the world. Drug trafficking, common crime, and guerrilla activity are all pandemic and conspire to destabilize the regime.

In this straightforward, compelling account, Osterling shows how this paradox has evolved, and why it has persisted over the past fifty years. He draws attention to parallel political structures: a functioning set of civilian institutions that coexist alongside one of the most powerful closed, hierarchical political elites in Latin America. Osterling locates the central problem of the maintenance of interpersonal relations as being more important to the functioning of Colombian society than impersonal norms. This is a country in which political bosses vie with popular democracy for control of the country.

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