In the second half of the 20th century, many South and Central American countries struggled to form republics—democratic governments. Many countries have had brief or interrupted democracies since the 19th century. However, the maps below indicate the years in which each country gained a relatively stable republic.

On the South American continent, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay have had to overthrow military regimes in order for democracy to take root. Sometimes it has taken years for an independent government to actually take office. For instance, in Bolivia decades of military dictators prevented democratic attempts at government. In addition, Brazil, which overthrew its military government in 1979, did not have a fully democratic presidential election until 1989. Ecuador has enjoyed periods of democracy after World War II, but those were erratic and inconsistent until 1979.

In other countries, hard-won democracies continue to be under assault. Colombia has been plagued by violence resulting from the drug trade and warring political parties. Peru and Suriname still battle forces opposed to democracy. In 1992, the president of Peru suspended many republican ideals, and the military in Suriname still indirectly influences its republican government.

In Central America, Panama, Nicaragua, and El Salvador have been torn by civil war and factional violence, but have managed to implement the democratic process. In Honduras and Guatemala, democracy is fragile, and the military has a high degree of influence. However, Costa Rica has a tradition of democracy dating back to 1890, though there were periods of political breakdowns until the birth of a new constitution in 1949.
Interpreting Text and Maps

1. Which country in South and Central America has the oldest stable democracy? the youngest?

2. In which decade did most of the democracies in South and Central America become stable?

3. According to the passage, which countries endured the most violence in Central America on their way to democracy?

4. According to the passage, which countries in South America currently have democracies under siege?

5. Which South American country is not independent?

6. Since World War II, which decade has seen the birth of no stable democracies in Central and South America?

7. In what years did more than one country form a democracy? Name the years and the countries.

8. According to the passage, what type of government did most of these countries have before their move to democracy? Why might that be the case?