

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2018

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

As you prepare to depart for Mexico, we write to urge you to raise the importance of strong, independent electoral systems in Mexico and Latin America more broadly.

As members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's Issues, we believe our foreign policy should champion democracy, human rights, and strong governance institutions. Over the past decades, many countries in the region have made enormous strides in improving democratic governance structures including independent judiciaries and strong electoral processes. We are increasingly concerned about growing efforts to undermine these hard-fought and widely supported advances, particularly those emanating from outside the region.

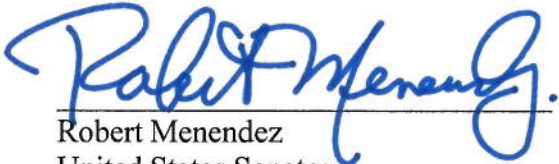
We are deeply troubled by recent news articles that Russia is reportedly using sophisticated technology to meddle in Mexico's upcoming election. According to a speech by National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, there is a "sophisticated effort to polarize democratic societies and pit communities within those societies against each other," noting Russia's interference in Mexico's presidential campaign specifically. Given Russia's history in the region, this unfortunately comes as no surprise; these recent actions are simply the latest chapter of Russia's malign influence throughout Latin America that threatens to destabilize the region. These reports are particularly disconcerting because of this year's busy electoral calendar in the Western Hemisphere with six contentious presidential elections, including Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.


As the chaos and violence following the latest Honduran elections affirms, strong electoral processes and institutions are critical to the integrity of democracy. Weak electoral systems can be easily exploited and manipulated by malicious actors like Russia. As such, we believe it is critical that USAID continue to play an active role in providing technical assistance, education and training to support countries' efforts to strengthen electoral systems.

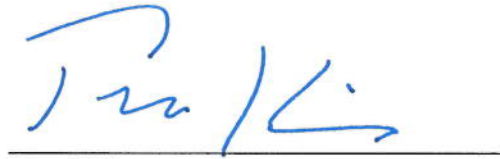
USAID's democracy and governance programs are vital for capacity building and in light of the mounting evidence of Russia's attempts to undermine democracy in the region we request an update on these programs, as well as other efforts to build resiliency against efforts to destabilize democratic governance structures. Furthermore, we must bolster credible international election observation missions including through the Organization of American States.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response and continued engagement on the topic since this will inevitably be an ongoing concern throughout the year.

Sincerely,


Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Marco Rubio
United States Senator


Tim Kaine
United States Senator