

# As Mexico Sinks Deeper, AMLO Turns Spotlight on Presidential Jet

[Michael O'Boyle](#)



Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador speaks in a hangar in front of the Mexican presidential jet. Source: Office of the President

## LISTEN TO ARTICLE

As Mexico sinks into recession amid a widening Covid-19 outbreak, its leader began the week by changing the subject to the pampered excesses of his rivals, displaying -- yet again -- his predecessor's lavish presidential plane that he refuses to use and is trying to sell.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a leftist populist who holds forth to the media every morning at 7 a.m., moved his Monday news conference to a hangar at Mexico City's international airport where reporters were taken into

the Boeing 787 Dreamliner complete with king-size bed and conference room. It was brought back last week from California where it's been parked for more than a year.

The president has made the plane the symbol of past governments and opponents, whom he portrays as golf-loving, foreign-educated crooks using their power to enrich cronies and siphon public funds.

"There are those who want to return to this form of government," he said. "We have made the commitment to transform Mexico. The luxuries of government are over. The budget is money of the people and it will be used by those most in need."

That's a challenge the coronavirus has made far more difficult to meet. Data last week showed the economy [contracted](#) by the most on record in May and economists [expect](#) Latin America's second-largest economy to shrink this year by the most since the Great Depression. Meanwhile, Mexico is close to outpacing the U.K. to have the third-most deaths in the world from the coronavirus. Health officials [said](#) over the weekend that there may be tens of thousands of more deaths from the virus than have been reported so far.

[MEXICO INSIGHT: Track the Recession -- High Frequency Dashboard](#)

At his Monday news conference, the president limited questions to the plane.

Lopez Obrador has seen his popularity decline over his handling of the virus and the lack of support for big companies and millions of workers who have lost jobs. The return of the jet allows him to revive his anti-corruption campaign ahead of midterm elections next year, said Luis Estrada, director of political consultancy SPIN-TPC.

"He needs to try to turn back to his theme of corruption, and the presidential plane is clear proof of that corruption," Estrada said. "It is a very risky bet because he has not delivered anywhere else. They are desperate to show

results, but they will arrive at elections with the economy at its worst level.”

Officials said two offers for the plane have been made, one of which includes a \$1 million deposit. AMLO, as the president is known, said he hoped to announce a buyer in the coming days.

Last week, he said one of the offers was for \$120 million. In the past, he turned down an offer for \$125 million because it was less than a \$130 million government valuation of the jet.

The plane has been one of the president’s favorite political props to illustrate a “transformation” of Mexican politics he has pledged to carry out. But the symbolism got a little murky after buyers failed to emerge.

## **A Raffle**

Early this year, as headlines focused on how his first year of government had ended in a slight recession with record-high homicides, he came up with another plane-related idea -- to raffle it off to citizens for tickets that cost around \$25.

That led to a series of sketches and spoofs concerning what the winner might do with the aircraft, including turning it into a massive taco truck. When it became clear that the plane might prove burdensome (where to park it?), the president said the lottery would have cash payouts instead. That also hasn’t gone so well. Only 25% of the tickets for the raffle have been sold, officials said Monday. The president has designated the raffle earnings for medical equipment.

Lopez Obrador’s focus on the plane follows a string of other corruption cases. This month, a former chief executive officer of state oil company [Petroleos Mexicanos](#) was extradited from Spain to face corruption charges. AMLO said his testimony implicated lawmakers in taking bribes to pass a reform that opened the state-run energy sector to private investment. A former ruling party

governor is also facing extradition from the U.S. on charges of funneling millions to his party.

### [Mexico to Witness Corruption Drama With Ex-Pemex CEO Testimony](#)

Mexicans are set for months of headlines about the trials that will aid the president's anti-corruption campaign, said Javier Martin, a professor at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching ([CIDE](#)) in Mexico City.

"This is a deliberate attempt to change the conversation" from the issues of the outbreak, the economy and violence, Martin said of the plane tour. "It seems this is an administration that is betting more on symbols than on concrete results."

Before it's here, it's on the  
Bloomberg Terminal.

[LEARN MORE](#)