



Honduras and Nicaragua before and after the pandemic

Contrasting political trajectories and how they turned out

John Perry

Neighbors with similarities & differences

- Honduras – 9.7m population;
Nicaragua – 6.5m
- Two poorest countries in Latin America
(after Haiti)
- Honduras – neoliberal governments
except for brief period before 2009
military coup, and now in 2022
- Nicaragua – Sandinista government
since 2007 (and prior to that, 1979-90)
- Both countries rejected neoliberalism
in elections in November 2021



Nicaragua 2007 and Honduras 2009

Nicaragua: After 16 years of neoliberal gov't:

- *Public spending on health only 2-2.8% of GDP*
- *Semi-privatized, broken health system*
- *Few health facilities in rural areas*
- *3 million people without access to piped water*
- *Poverty running at 48%: extreme poverty 17%*

Honduras: 2009 coup ends improvements in health system:

- *Gradual recovery from devastating Hurricane Mitch (1998)*
- *Life expectancy had increased and infant mortality fallen*
- *Public health spending peaked at 4% of GDP*
- *28 public hospitals - but coverage poor*
- *Poverty had fallen to 47% and extreme poverty to 15%*



5 de noviembre 2006

Daniel Ortega

Fue elegido presidente de Nicaragua.



What happened next?

Nicaragua: massive investment program

- Highest regional growth in GDP until 2018
- By 2022, 24 new hospitals, 63% increase in health staff
- more hospital beds (1.8 per 1,000 population) than Mexico (1.5) and Colombia (1.7)
- one of highest public health spending levels in Latin America
- all services now free and open to everyone

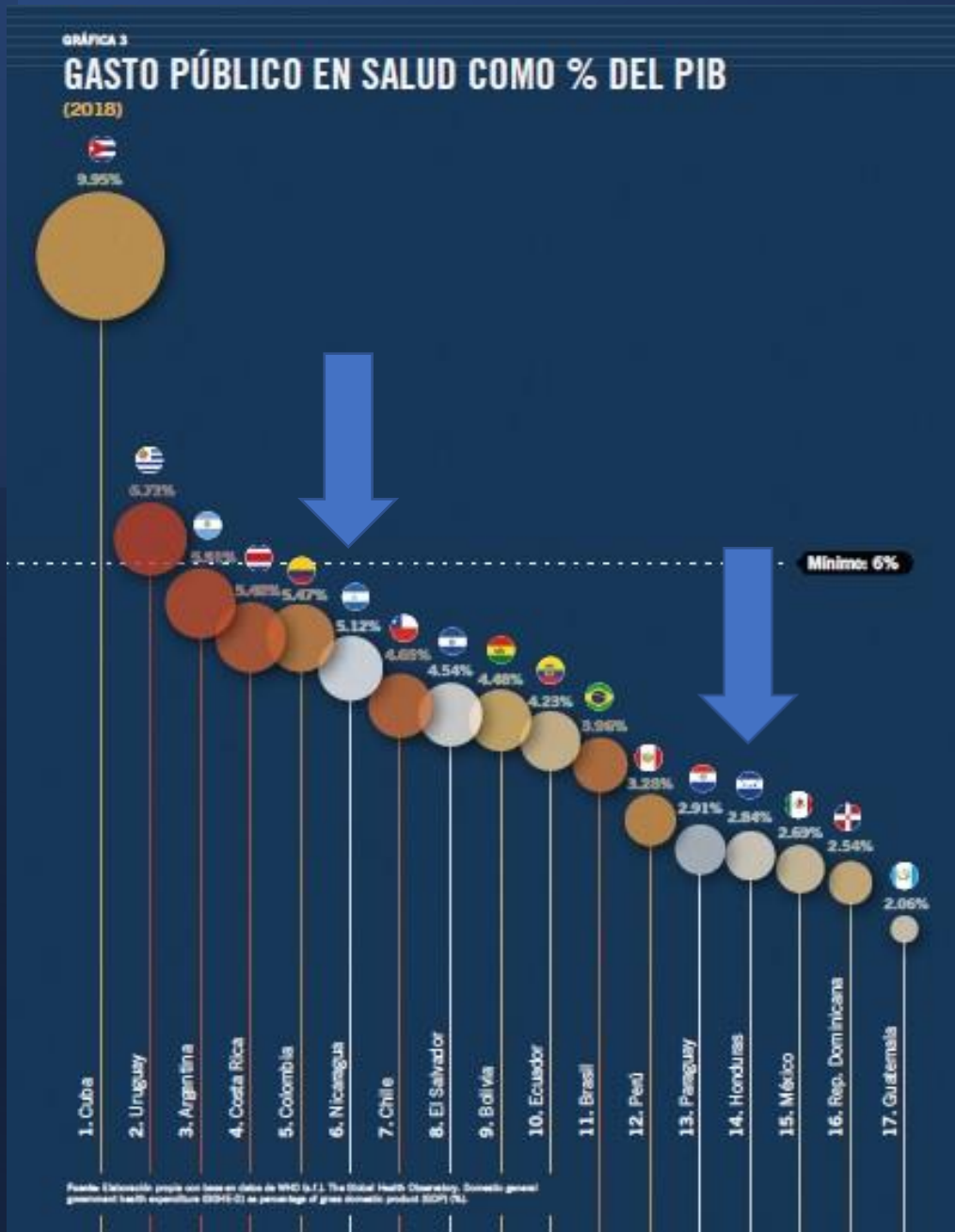
But health services targeted in 2018 coup attempt:

- health centers and ambulances destroyed
- people die because prevented from getting to hospital by violence at the roadblocks
- Health Minister personally sanctioned by US government



Public sector health expenditure as % of GDP – different Latin American countries

Public hospitals in Central America 2022



What happened next?

Honduras: health system hit by corruption and spending cuts

- 2010-2019 – lowest annual GDP growth in the region
- No new public hospitals, health spending fell to 2.8% of GDP
- only 0.6 hospital beds per 1,000 population
- collapse of national insurance scheme (IHSS) with \$300m robbed in 2013
- then \$90m more robbed in 2015 to finance JOH's election campaign
- corrupt contracts led to supplies being unusable or dangerous (e.g. vaginal depositories filled with flour)
- patients told to bring everything they need with them (syringes, bandages, etc.)



How did the countries tackle Covid-19? - Nicaragua

- Covid-19 commission set up January 2020
- Plan published for facing the crisis – February 9
- Tighter border controls – health checks, quarantine, follow-up visits to Covid patients
- Equipping one hospital solely for cases of respiratory illness + 18 others with Covid units
- 36,000 health workers trained in dealing with Covid
- Health brigades – almost 5 million house visits
- Disinfection of public spaces (markets, buses, etc.)
- Free Covid telephone advice line
- NO lockdowns.



Nicaragua: Covid instrumentalized as anti-government propaganda

Local opposition media forecast huge numbers of cases and deaths

“Citizens’ Observatory” reported “real” statistics (based on social media reports and rumors)

“Midnight burials” and “mass graves”

Fake news about effects of Russian and Cuban vaccines

Many people initially deterred from going to hospitals

In Nicaragua, rallies, denials and an absent president

Daniel Ortega not seen for a month as officials decline to confront virus

BY ISMAEL LÓPEZ OCAMPO AND MARY BETH SHERIDAN

MANAGUA, NICARAGUA — In the photo, a bunch of kids in swimsuits are sitting around a table at the beach. They’re drinking Cokes, waving, grinning.

“We have a unique country . . . and it’s best to enjoy it with your family!” wrote Juan Carlos Ortega, the son of Nicaragua’s president, in a tweet with the image of his children posted on April 4.

As much of Latin America shuts down in the face of the coronavirus, Nicaragua is striking out as a radical outlier — urging citizens to go to the beach, enjoy holiday cruises and turn out for Easter-season passion plays.

Rather than discouraging crowds, the Sandinista government is trying to manufacture them. It’s promoting festivities such as an event to distribute a sugary fruit treat — “the biggest almibar handout in Nicaragua.” Authorities haven’t closed borders, businesses or stadiums.

But what perhaps most sets the

they could be hurt by spillover effects. “We’re worried about their approach, because the recommendations of the [World Health Organization] are for social distancing,” said Costa Rica’s president, Carlos Alvarado.

“Calling for marches and crowds of people goes against these recommendations,” he told CNN en Español.

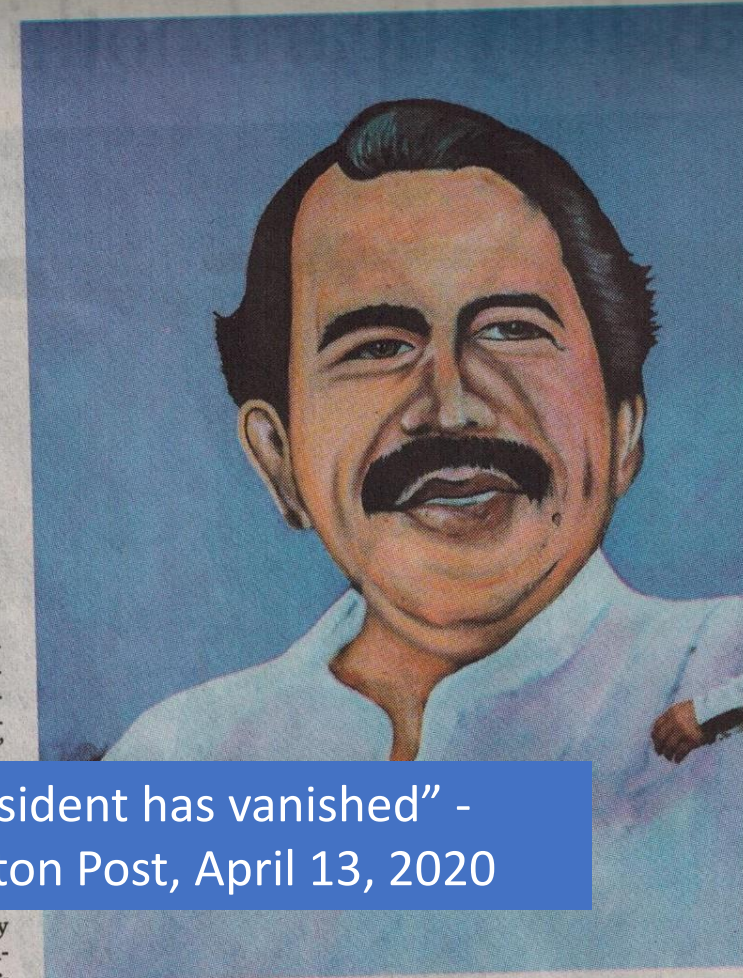
On Thursday, Michael G. Kozak, the acting assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, tweeted that “Daniel Ortega is nowhere to be found”

as his country’s hearts go out to #Nicaragua and factual deadly pandemic U.S. government

sanctions against Ortega’s family members and the police in retaliation for what it calls their corruption and brutality.

Ortega, 74, is one of Latin America’s best-known politicians, the leader of the Sandinista revolution that toppled a right-wing dictator in 1979. He returned to the presidency in 2007 and has won reelection twice since then. His government has turned sharply authoritarian in recent years.

In Ortega’s absence, Vice President Rosario Murillo — also his wife — has been giving daily



A man walks by a mural of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega in

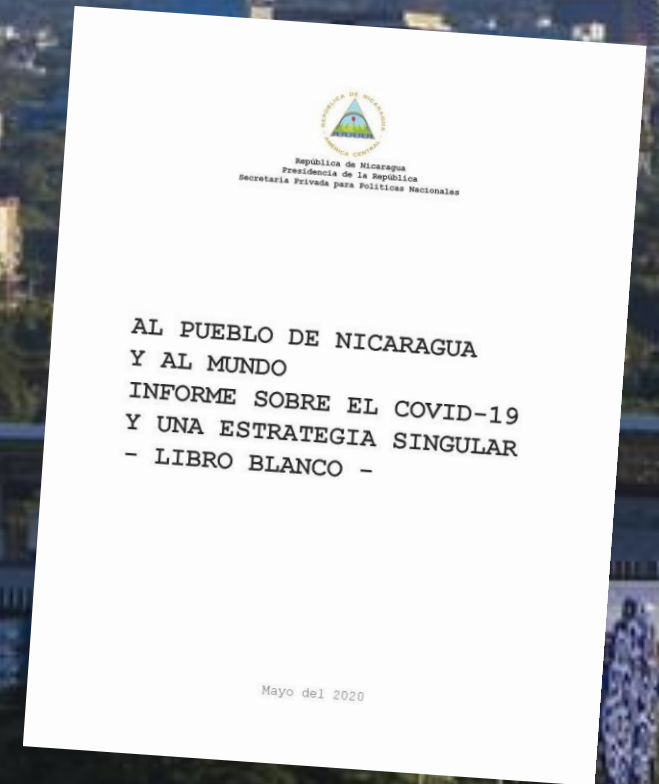
“The president has vanished” - Washington Post, April 13, 2020

Authorities have organized pro-government rallies, including one in mid-March dubbed “Love in

ued to hold matches, with some anxious players wearing masks. Public schools remained open until April 3, the start of an extended Easter break. The official tourism agency touted scores of Holy Week events, from fishing tournaments to beauty pageants.

Former foreign minister José Pallas said the government appeared to be afraid that the pandemic could damage the already

May 25, 2020: Sandinista government publishes its 75-page 'white paper' setting out its strategy to confront the epidemic, aiming to silence its critics



How did the countries tackle Covid-19? - Honduras

- Lockdowns, school closures and sometimes night-time curfews for two years
- Widespread protests against lockdown – people shot and imprisoned
- Depleted health service can't cope – medics on the street demanding PPE, patients camped outside hospitals under plastic
- Plentiful international aid, but widespread corruption, faulty medical supplies, contracts going to president's family
- Seven mobile hospitals bought at cost of \$47m, real value \$14, most still not operational





HOSPITALES MÓVILES



HOSPITALE



2021

HOSPITALES DE LATA

PANDEMIA Y MALAS DECISIONES

07



LATA



HONDURAS



Honduras fails to handle natural disasters

Hurricanes Eta and Iota hit both countries in November 2020

- Nicaragua:
 - almost no deaths, people evacuated, repairs quickly in hand
- Honduras:
 - 6,000 homes destroyed, 85,000 seriously damaged
 - 55,000 still in temporary shelters more than a year later

Médecins Sans Frontières: government's response "inadequate"



US response to Covid-19 in two countries

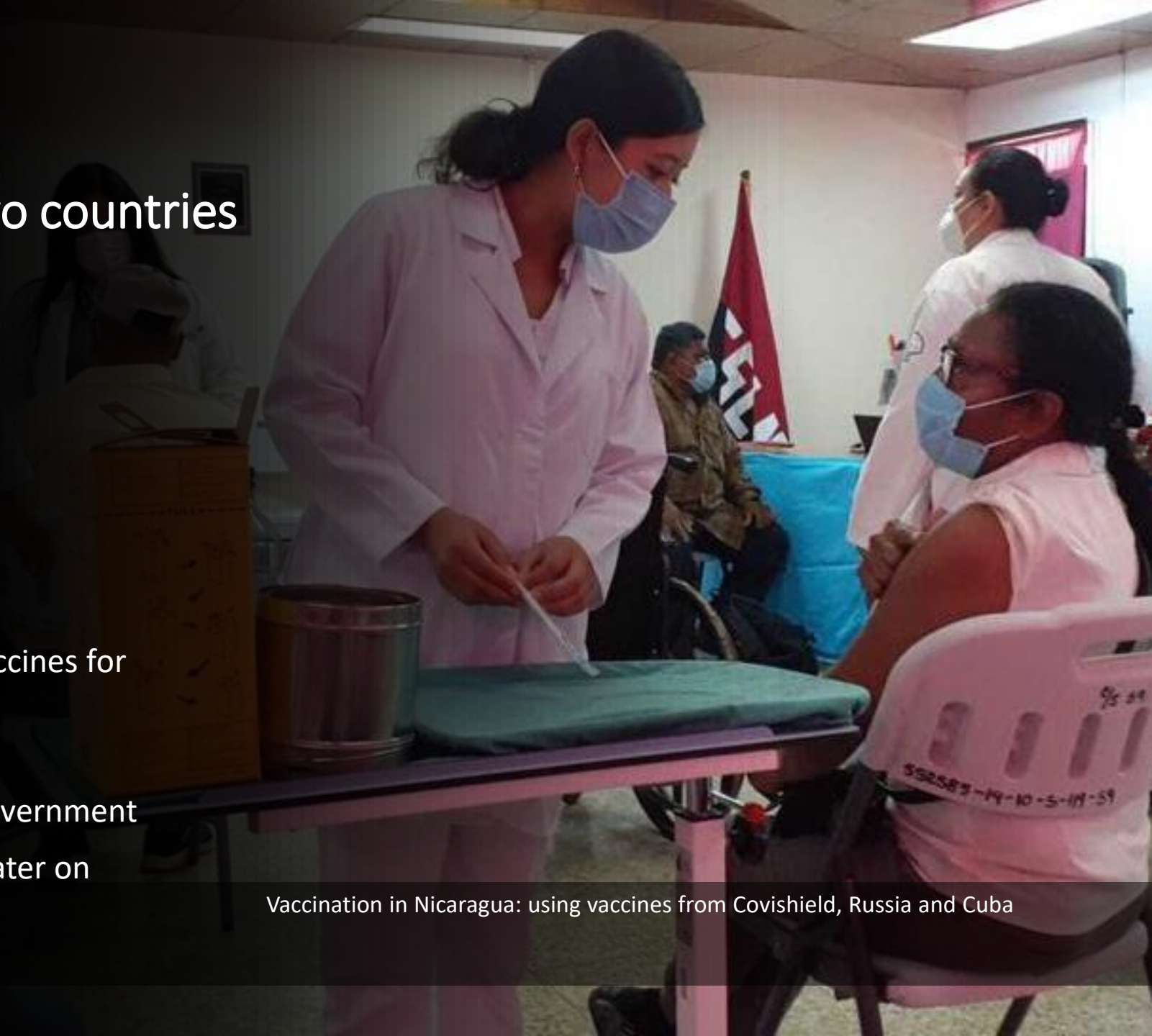
Honduras – initial US aid

- \$8m assistance
- 11,600 test kits
- 210 ventilators
- Benefits hugely from Biden promise of vaccines for Latin America

Nicaragua – US ‘aid’

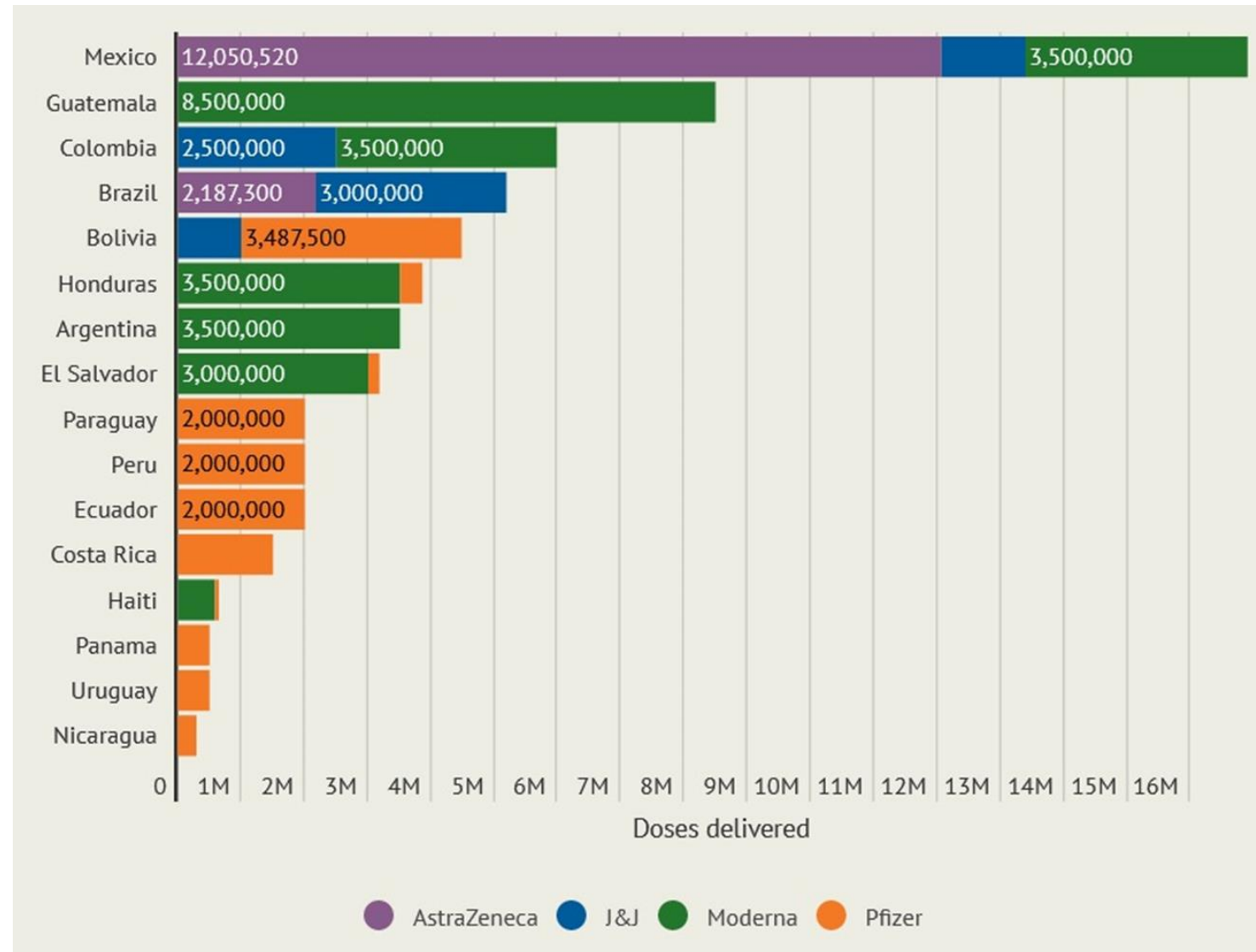
- Only \$0.75m assistance – to NGOs, not government
- No equipment, few vaccines, sent much later on
- Economic sanctions

Vaccination in Nicaragua: using vaccines from Covishield, Russia and Cuba



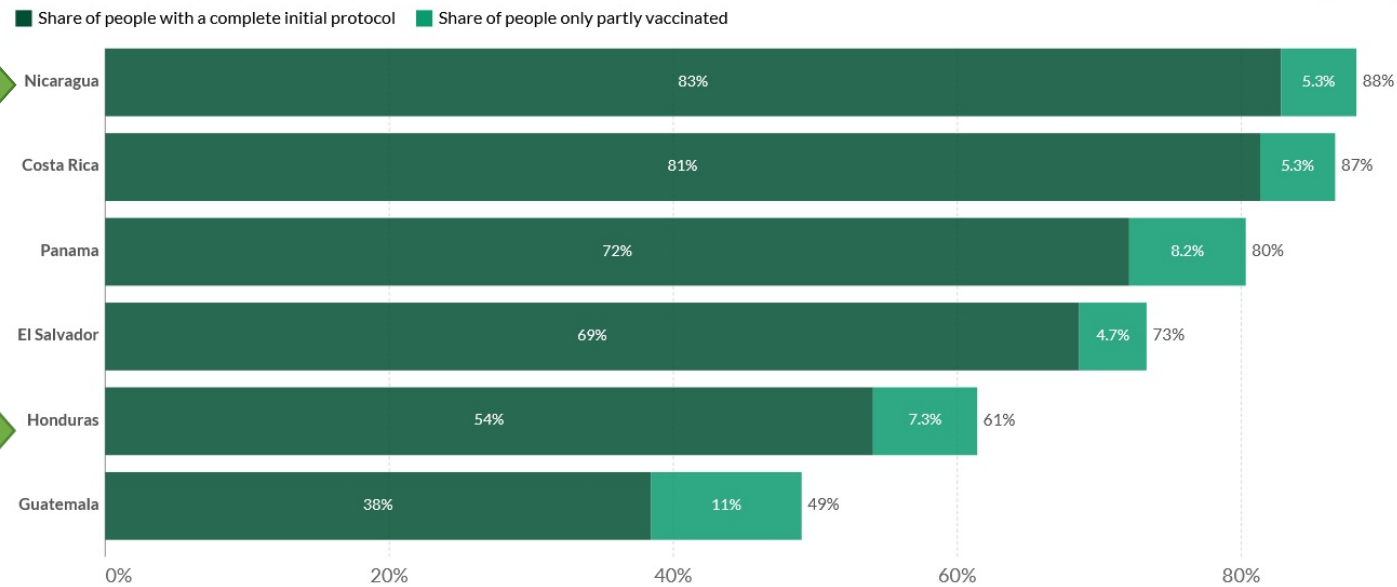
US anti-Covid vaccine donations in Latin America

- Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador near top of the list
- Nicaragua (and Cuba, Venezuela) at the bottom



Vaccinations, as at August 2022

Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19, Aug 24, 2022



Honduras – multiple donations but struggle to implement programs that reach poor communities

Nicaragua – slow start - had to wait for Russian and Cuban vaccines

But now – Nicaragua has highest vaccination level in the region, Honduras 2nd lowest

Fully vaccinated: Nicaragua (85%), Costa Rica (81%), Honduras (55%), USA (66%)

Different measures of mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America

World Health Organization		Centre for Economic and Social Rights for Amnesty International		Our World in Data from The Economist	
Country	Excess deaths/100,000 pop'n	Country	Deaths as %age of pop'n	Country	Cumulative excess deaths per 100,000
Peru	437	Peru	6.0	Peru	557
Bolivia	375	Mexico	5.9	Mexico	480
Mexico	242	Ecuador	4.5	Bolivia	446
Ecuador	228	El Salvador	3.0	Ecuador	383
Guyana	178	Puerto Rico	2.9	El Salvador	322
Colombia	161	Honduras	2.7	Brazil	320
Brazil	160	Bolivia	2.4	Argentina	320
Paraguay	138	Brazil	2.3	Colombia	319
Guatemala	137	Colombia	2.3	Honduras	299
El Salvador	131	Chile	1.5	Suriname	290
Honduras	113	Argentina	1.4	Paraguay	289
Chile	101	Nicaragua	1.2	Guatemala	238
Argentina	99	Costa Rica	1.0	Guyana	227
Costa Rica	94	Uruguay	0.9	Chile	199
Nicaragua	91	Cuba	0.8	Belize	183
Panama	88	Dominican Rep	0.8	Nicaragua	180
Belize	87	Guatemala	0.0	Venezuela	177
Suriname	62			Panama	166
Uruguay	45			Costa Rica	115
Venezuela	39			Uruguay	99

Similar countries, different outcomes

Nicaragua

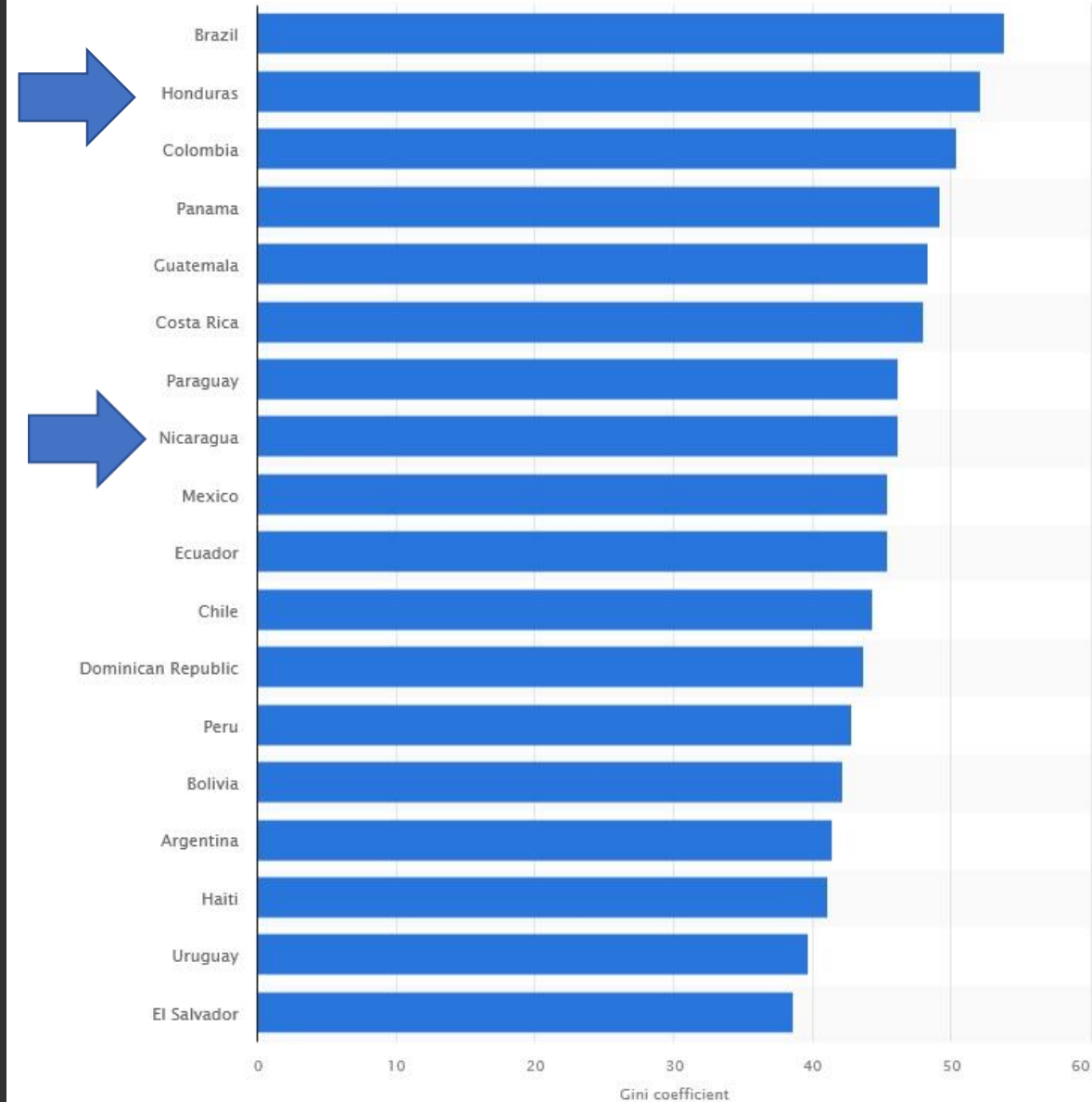
- one of lowest excess death levels in Latin America
- economy suffered in 2018 and again in 2020 but in 2021 grew by over 10%
- country returned to previous levels of safety (lowest homicide rate in C America)
- Sandinista government re-elected in November 2021

Honduras

- Half population living in poverty before 2020 – now 74%
- GDP per head fell below Nicaragua – Honduras now 2nd poorest L Am country
- Public debt is 6 times what it was before 2009
- Honduras 2nd most unequal country in L America (see chart)
- Corrupt neoliberal government defeated in November 2021

Corporate media refuse to acknowledge Nicaragua's success

Gini co-efficient – Latin American countries



What happened at my local hospital in Masaya?

- One of 19 equipped nationally to deal with Covid cases
- At the peak in June 2020 – 90 patients in intensive care in the Covid unit
- Numbers fell to nine by end of June and to six by the end of July 2020
- Photo shows an event in August 2020 to thank staff (doctors, nurses, porters, cleaners) for their efforts – attended by several patients who had recovered





LIVE FROM
NICARAGUA
UPRISING
OR COUPS?
A READER

Essential reading!

Downloadable at:
<https://afgj.org/nicanotes-the-revolution-wont-be-stopped-nicaragua-advances-despite-us-unconventional-warfare>

