

# **VIOLENT CRIME AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

**Key trends from 2018 to 2023, with an emphasis on El Salvador**



## ACLED

Bringing clarity to crisis

### **Armed Conflict Location & Event Data**

An independent, impartial, international non-profit organization collecting data on violent conflict and protest in all countries and territories in the world.



## THE WORLD BANK

IBRD • IDA

### **World Bank Development Indicators**

Collection of development indicators, compiled from officially-recognized international sources. Time series data as far back as 1960.

# AGENDA AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ▪ **Violent Crime in El Salvador**

- On average, monthly attacks have drastically decreased in Central America from January 2018 to March 2024
- While violent crime trends are similar across most countries, the general decrease in crime is largely driven by El Salvador
- In the last six years, El Salvador has decreased monthly attacks from a peak of 95 in Jan 2019 to a low of 1 in Feb 2024
- El Salvador's decrease in crime comes from four major shocks, including gang violence policies and the COVID pandemic
- While many countries faced similar changes in crime, El Salvador's violence reduction policies sharply diminished attacks
- Their crime reduction is accelerated by decreases in violence against civilians and battles by armed, organized groups
- Major gang and unidentified group attacks have continuously fallen while protester involvement has sharply increased
- El Salvador reduced violent crime across the country, but increased it in rural areas near the Guatemala-Honduras border
- Gang-related descriptions of attacks have steadily decreased while police-related descriptions slightly increased

## ▪ **Relationship Between Violent Crime and Economic Development**

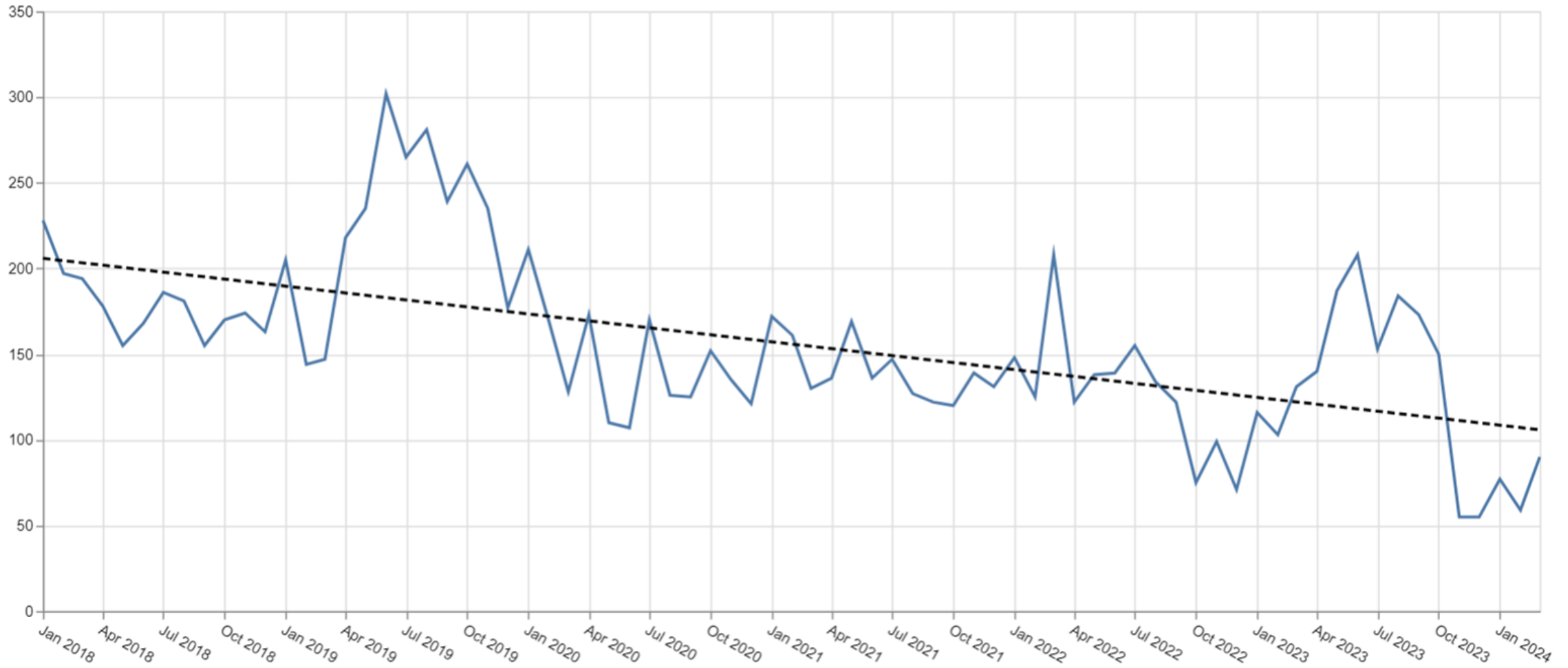
- Expected monthly attacks have decreased in Central America, mostly due to vast reductions by El Salvador
- Generally, decreases in the number of violent events are associated with increases in debt payments
- As violent events decrease, number of student enrollment tends to increase in the following year



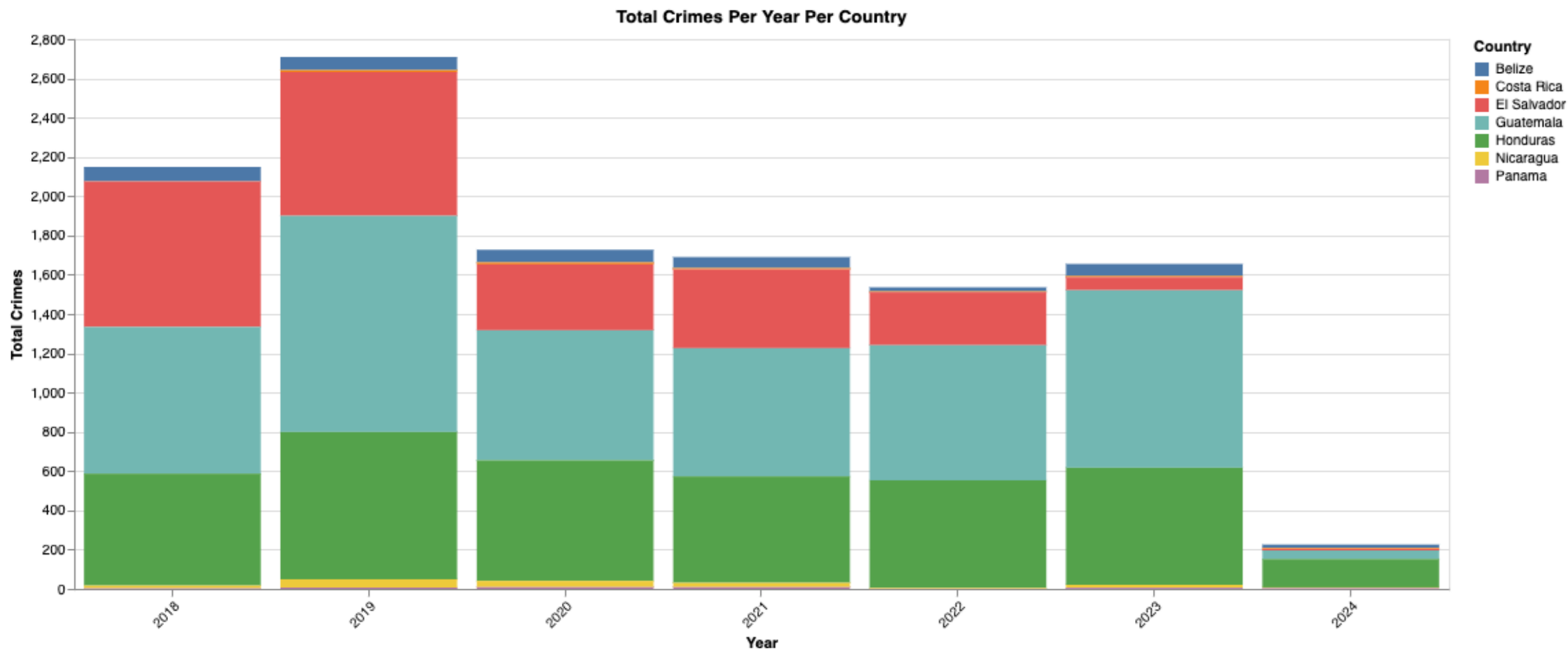
# Violent Crime in El Salvador

## On average, monthly attacks have drastically decreased in Central America from January 2018 to March 2024

Monthly Attacks in Central America

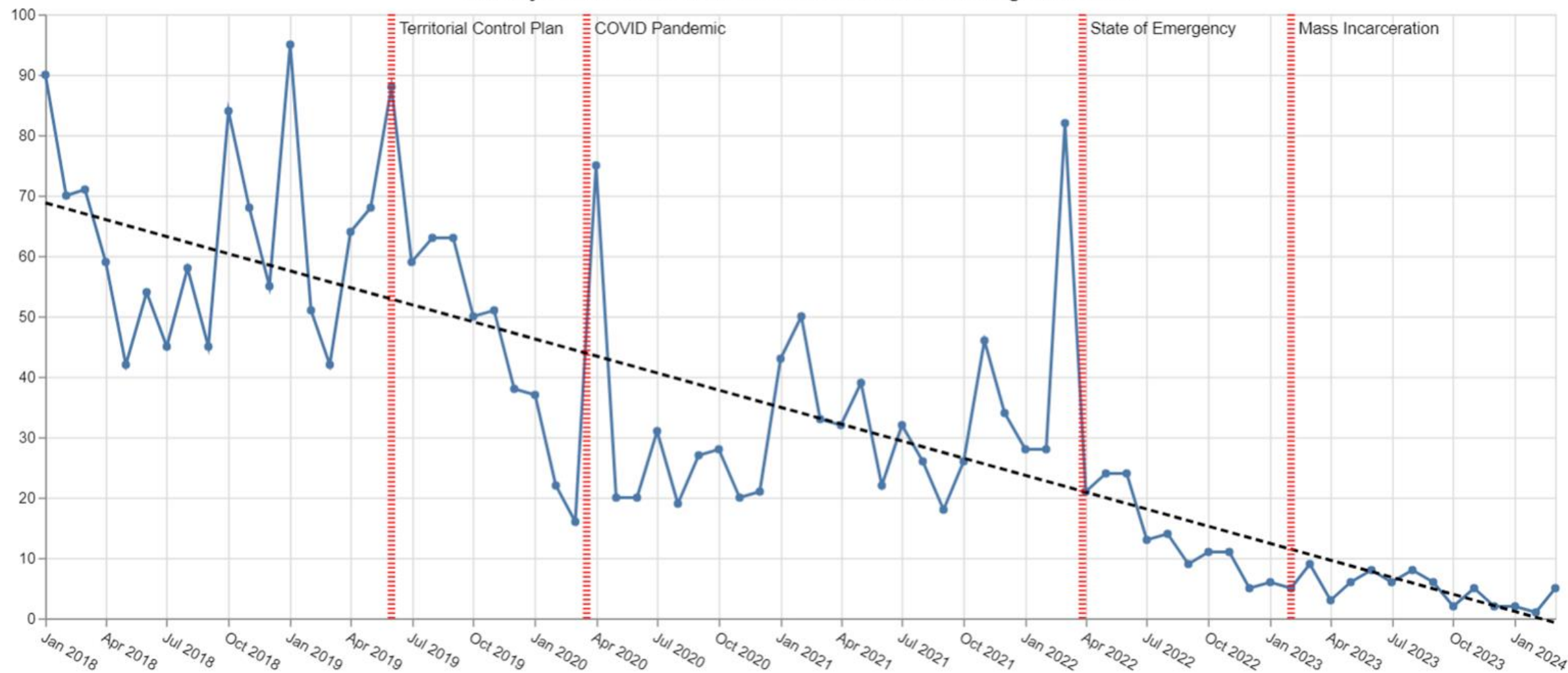


## While violent crime trends are similar across most countries, Central America's general decrease in crime is largely driven by El Salvador

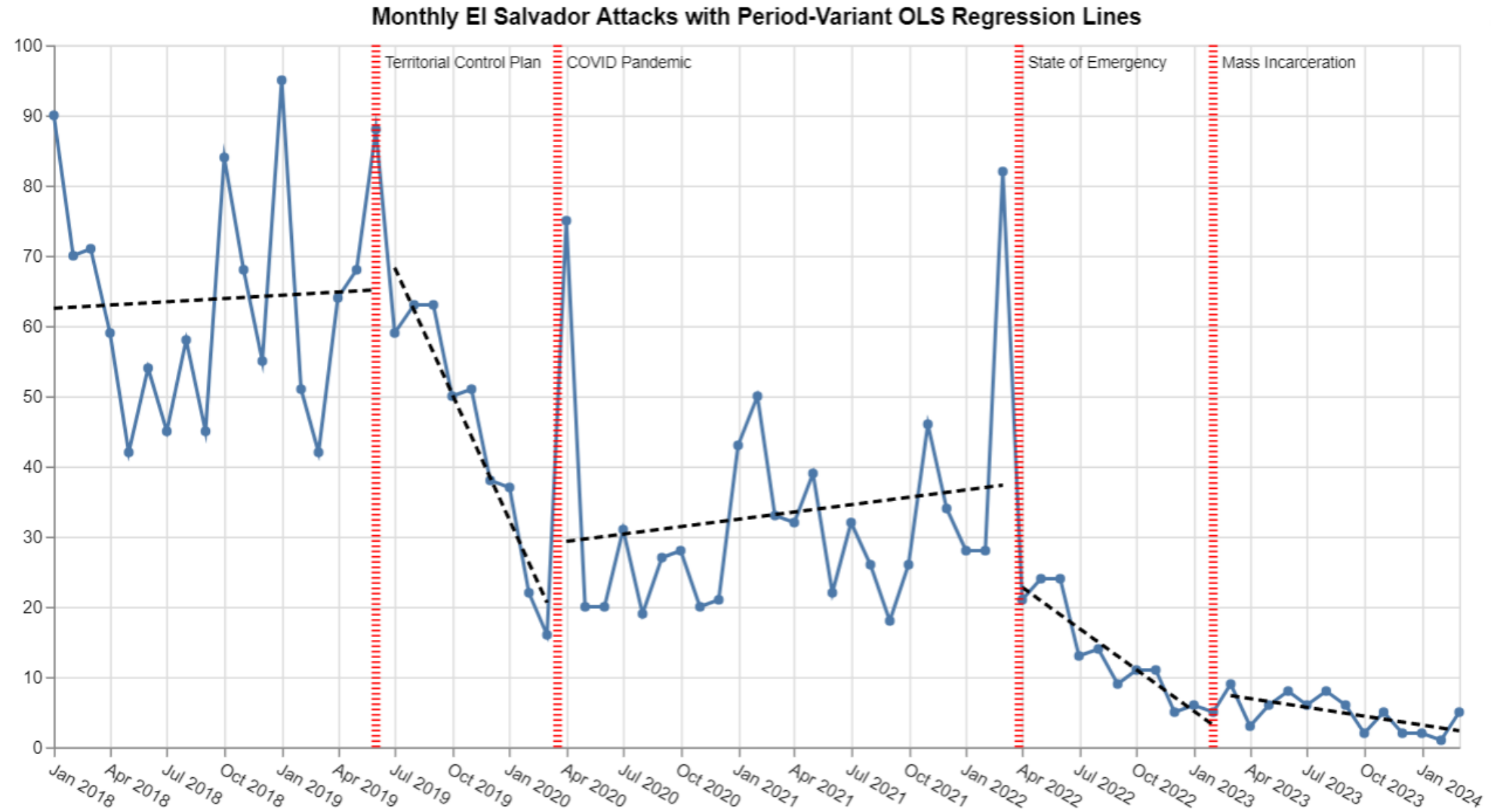


In the last six years, El Salvador has dramatically decreased monthly attacks from a peak of 95 in Jan 2019 to a low of 1 in Feb 2024

Monthly El Salvador Attacks With Period-Invariant OLS Regression Line



## El Salvador's decrease in crime comes from four major shocks, including gang violence policies and the COVID pandemic

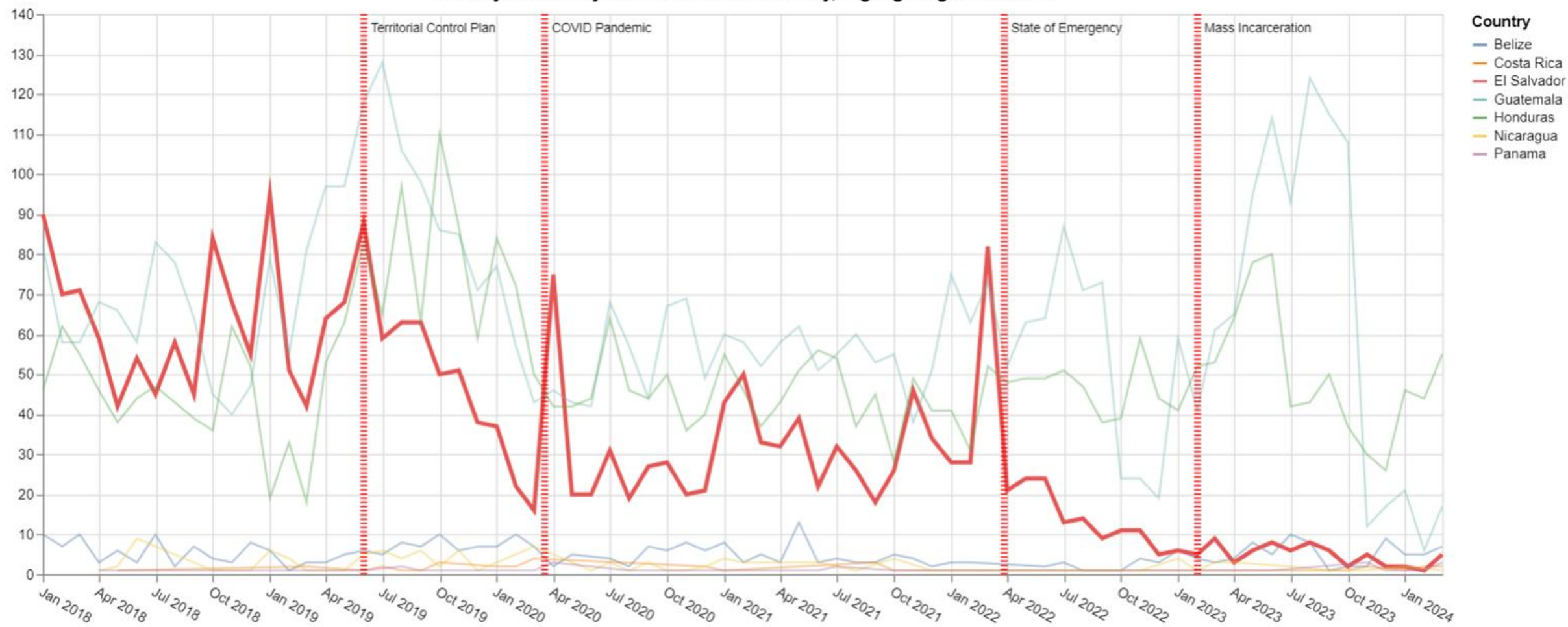




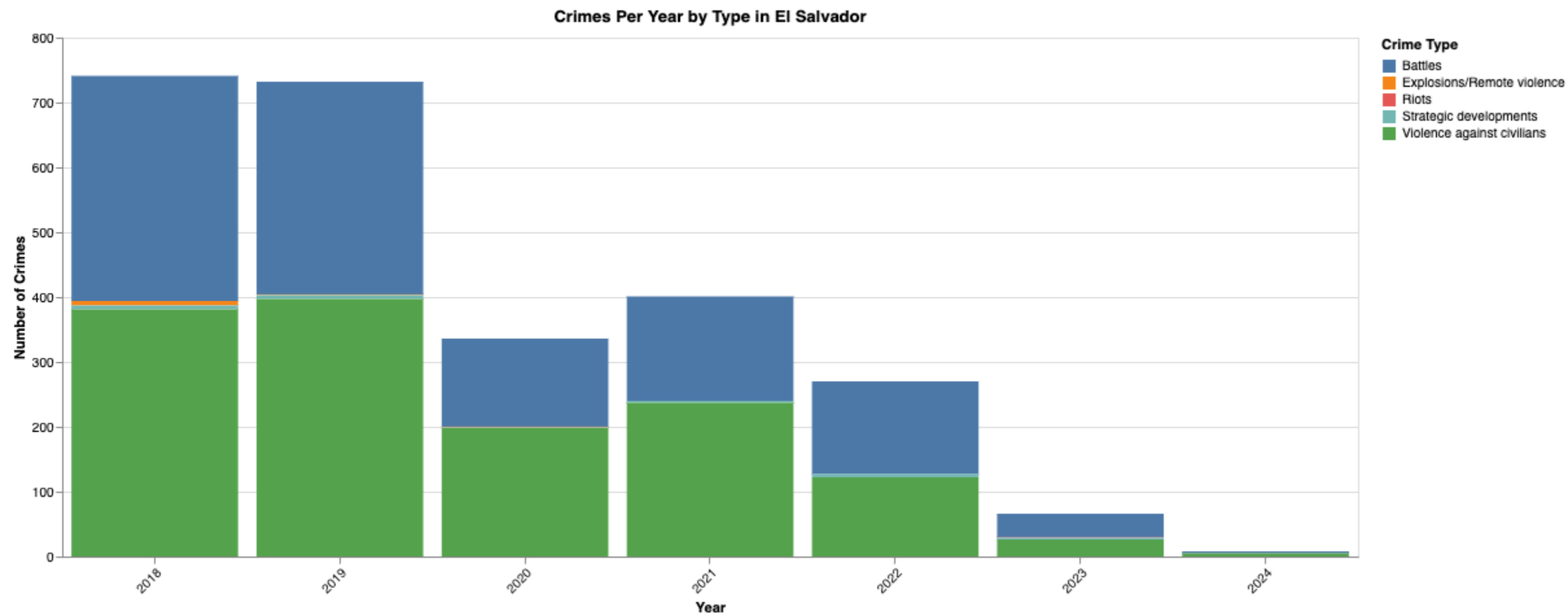


# While many countries faced similar changes in crime, El Salvador's gang violence reduction policies sharply diminished attacks

Monthly Attacks By Central American Country, Highlighting El Salvador



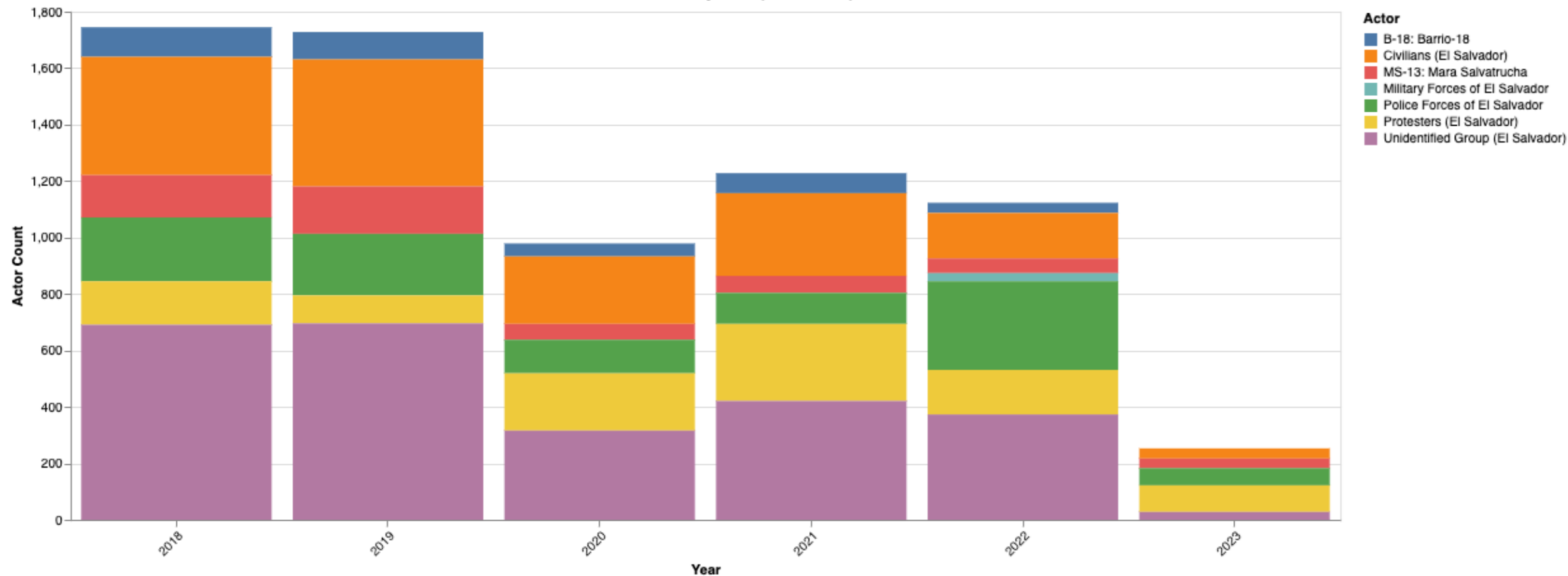
# El Salvador's crime reduction is accelerated by decreases in violence against civilians and battles by armed, organized groups



# Major gang and unidentified group attacks have continuously fallen while protester involvement has sharply increased



Actor Prevalence by Year (Count > 20)



# El Salvador reduced violent crime across the entire country, but increased crime in rural areas near the Guatemala-Honduras border

## Central America Events Visualization

Select a Country

El Salvador

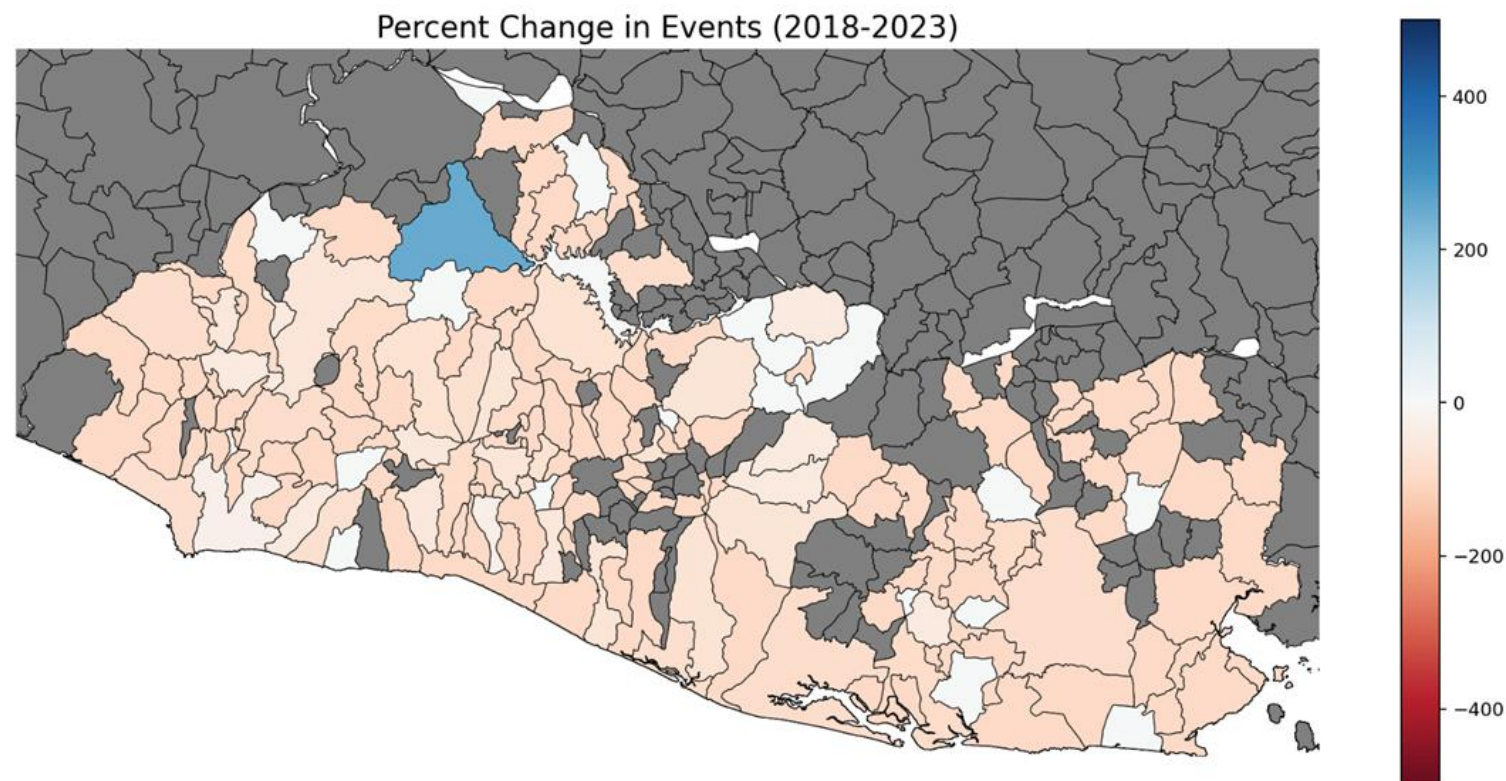
Select Event Type

All

## Summary Statistics

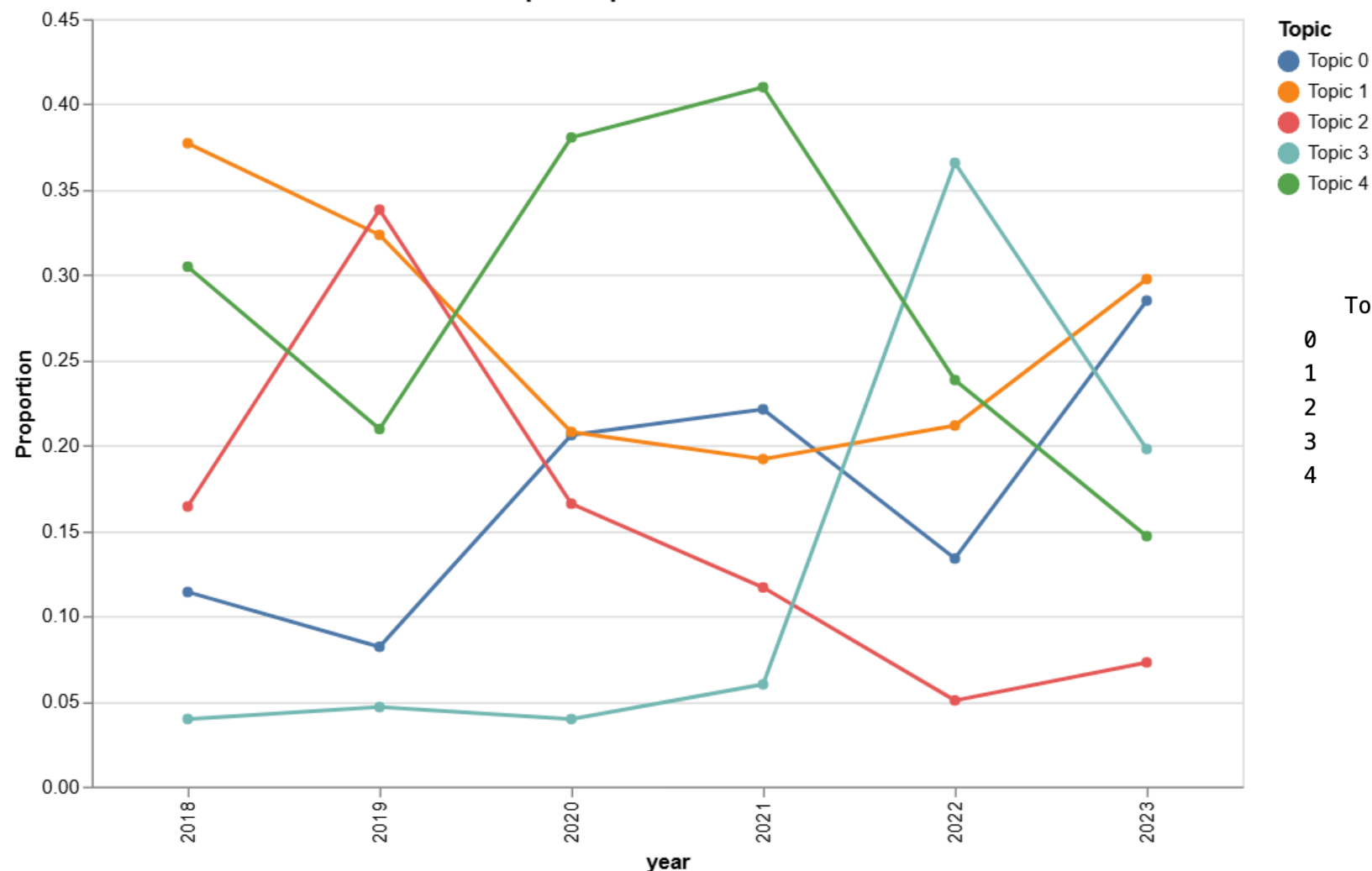
Summary Statistics:

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Total Events in 2018 : 1792.0  
Total Events in 2023 : 295.0  
Average Percent Change : -8.45%  
Total Percent Change : -83.54%



# Descriptions associated with deaths and violence have decreased while descriptions of protests and police members has increased

Topic Proportions Over Time



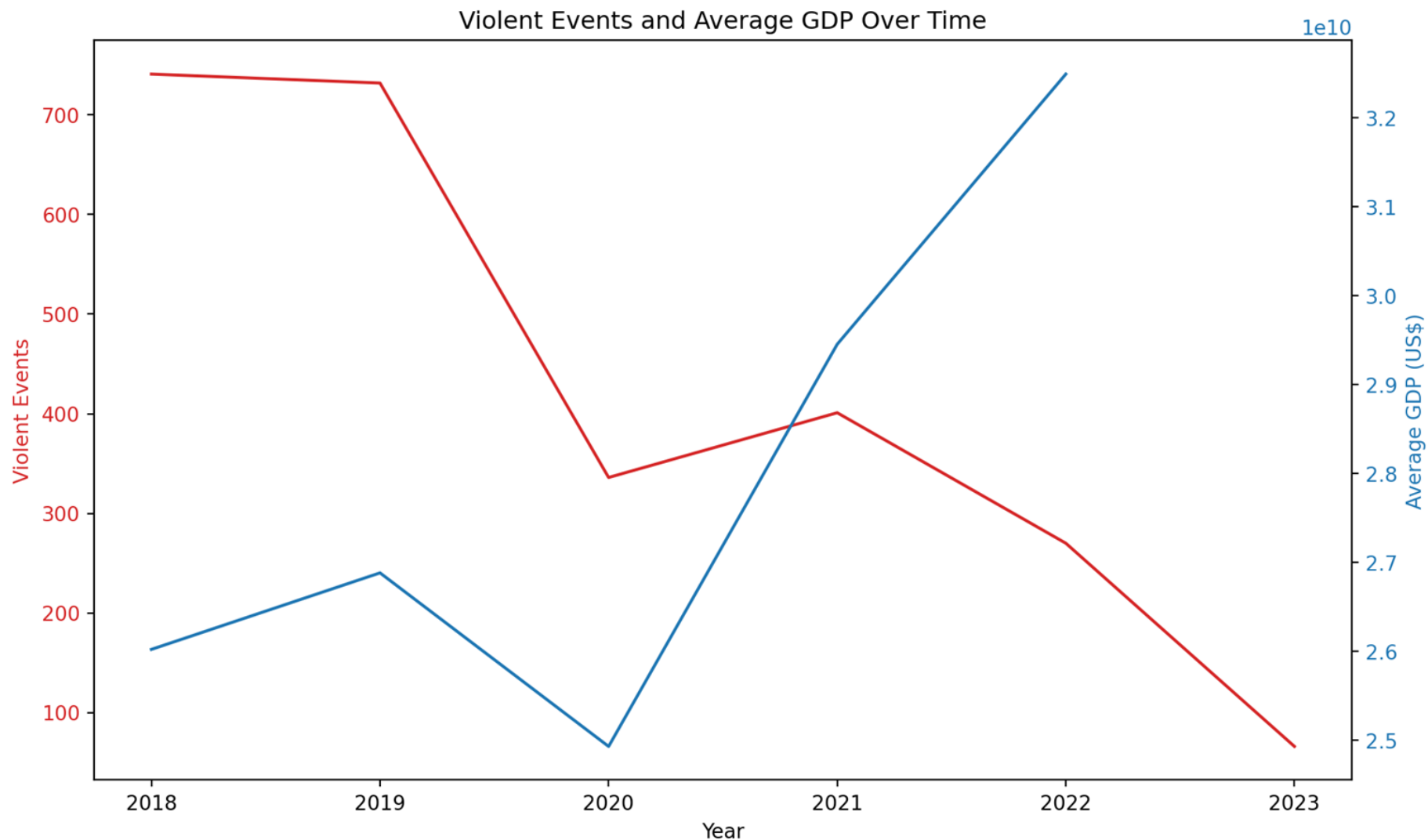
Topic  
 Topic 0  
 Topic 1  
 Topic 2  
 Topic 3  
 Topic 4

Topic	Words
0	0 salvador, protest, staged, workers, city
1	1 gang, police, members, 2018, armed
2	2 2019, gang, body, killed, motive
3	3 arrested, police, gangs, forces, operation
4	4 killed, fatality, shot, gang, 2018

# Violent Crime and Economic Development Indicators

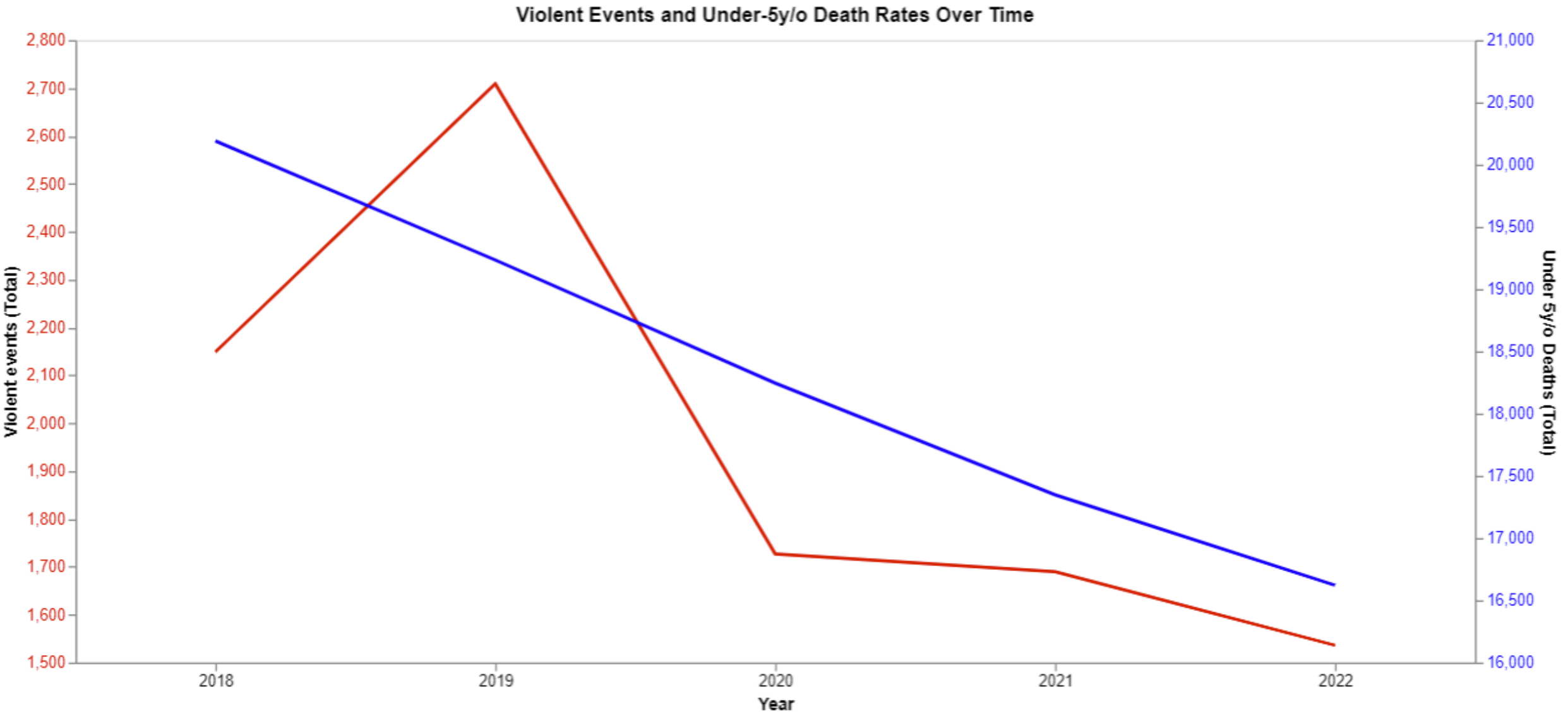


## Since 2020, Central American countries experiencing decreases in violent crime tend to benefit from increases in average GDP





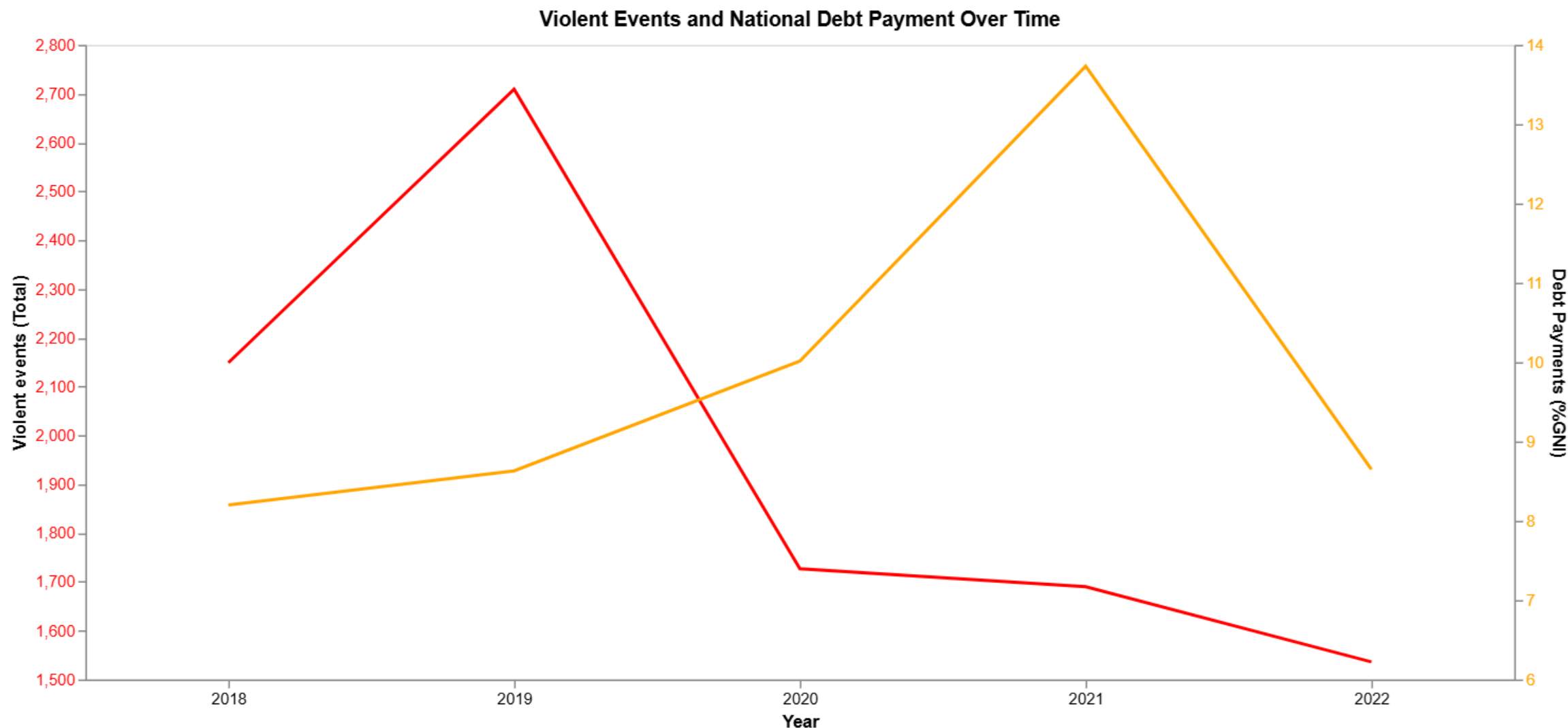
# Under 5-year-old deaths steadily decrease as violent events decrease over time





# Appendix

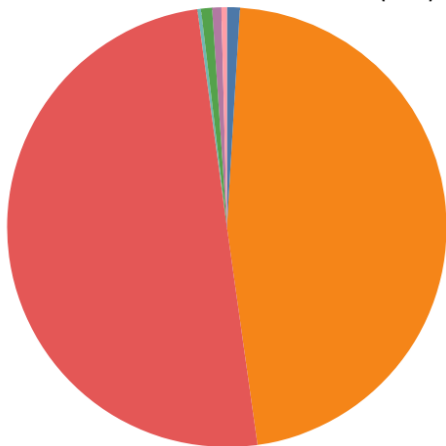
# Generally, decreases in the number of violent events are associated with increases in debt payments



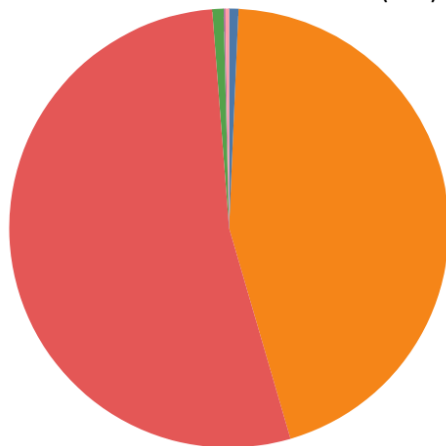


## Civilian attacks steadily increased as a proportion of crime until 2020, reversed in 2021, and sharply decreased in 2022

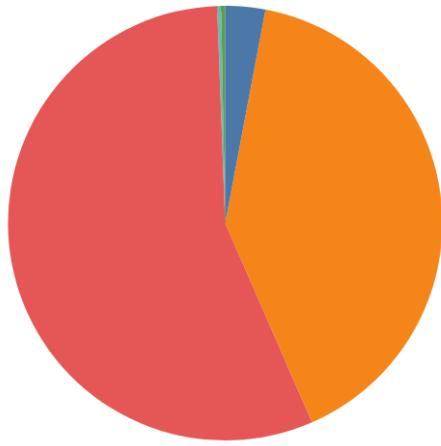
Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2018)



Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2019)



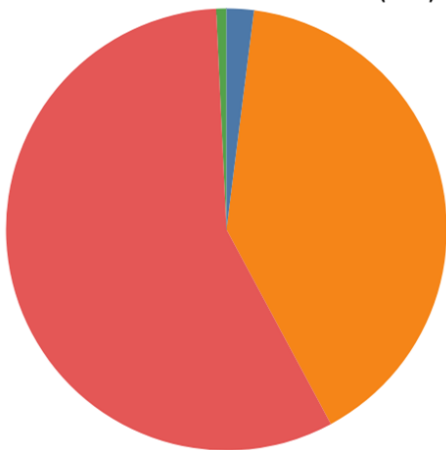
Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2020)



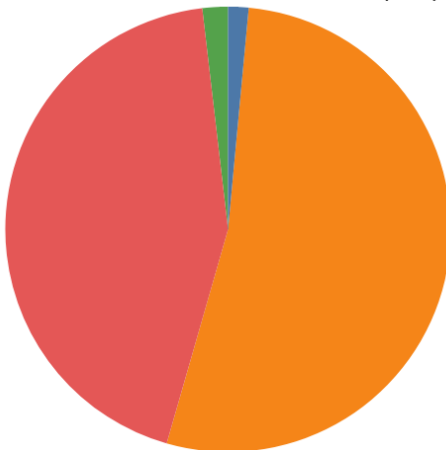
### Sub Event Type

- Abduction/forced disappearance
- Armed clash
- Attack
- Grenade
- Looting/property destruction
- Mob violence
- Remote explosive/landmine/IED
- Sexual violence

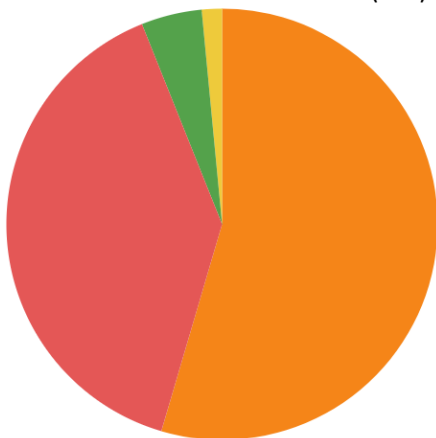
Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2021)



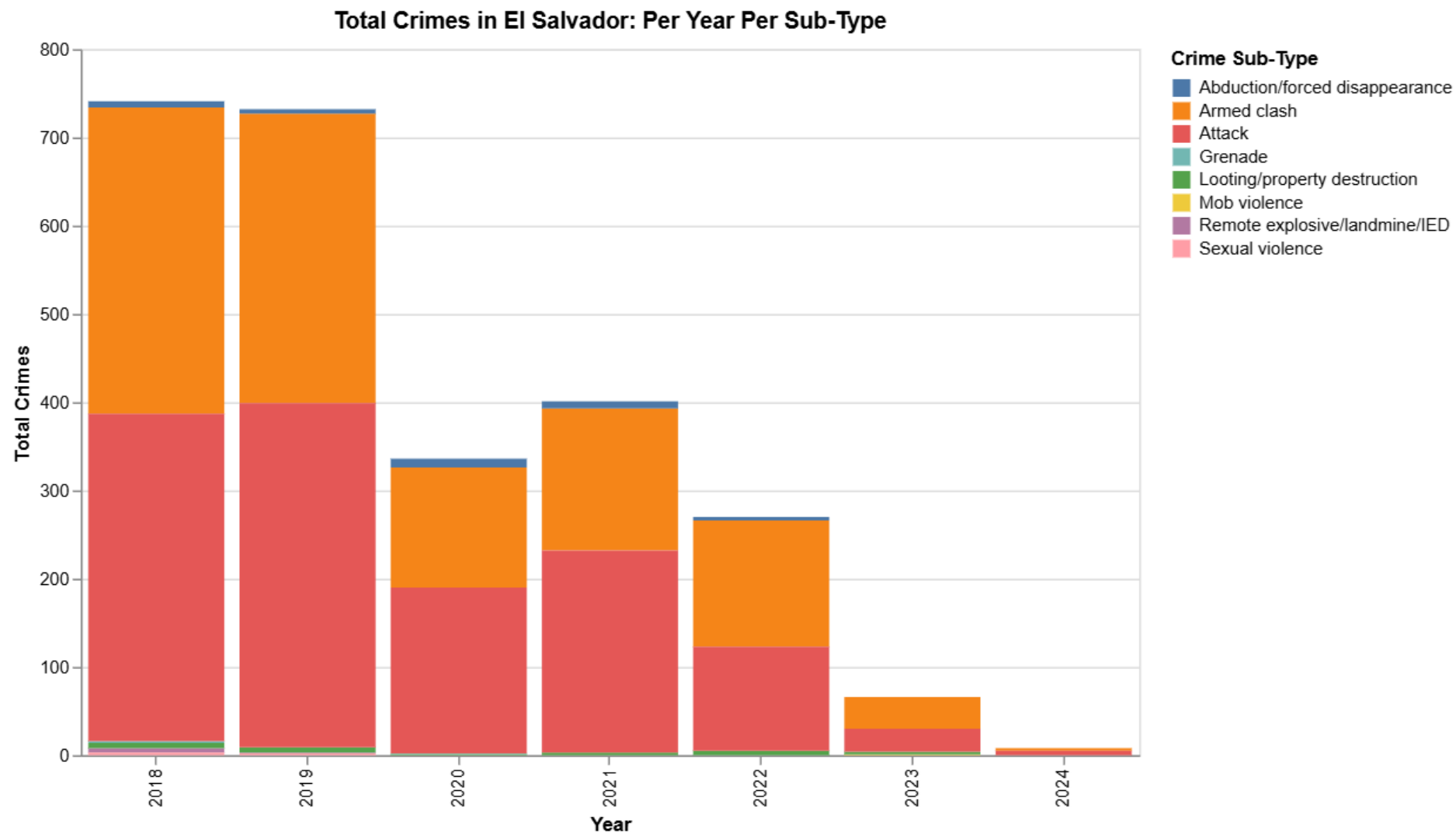
Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2022)



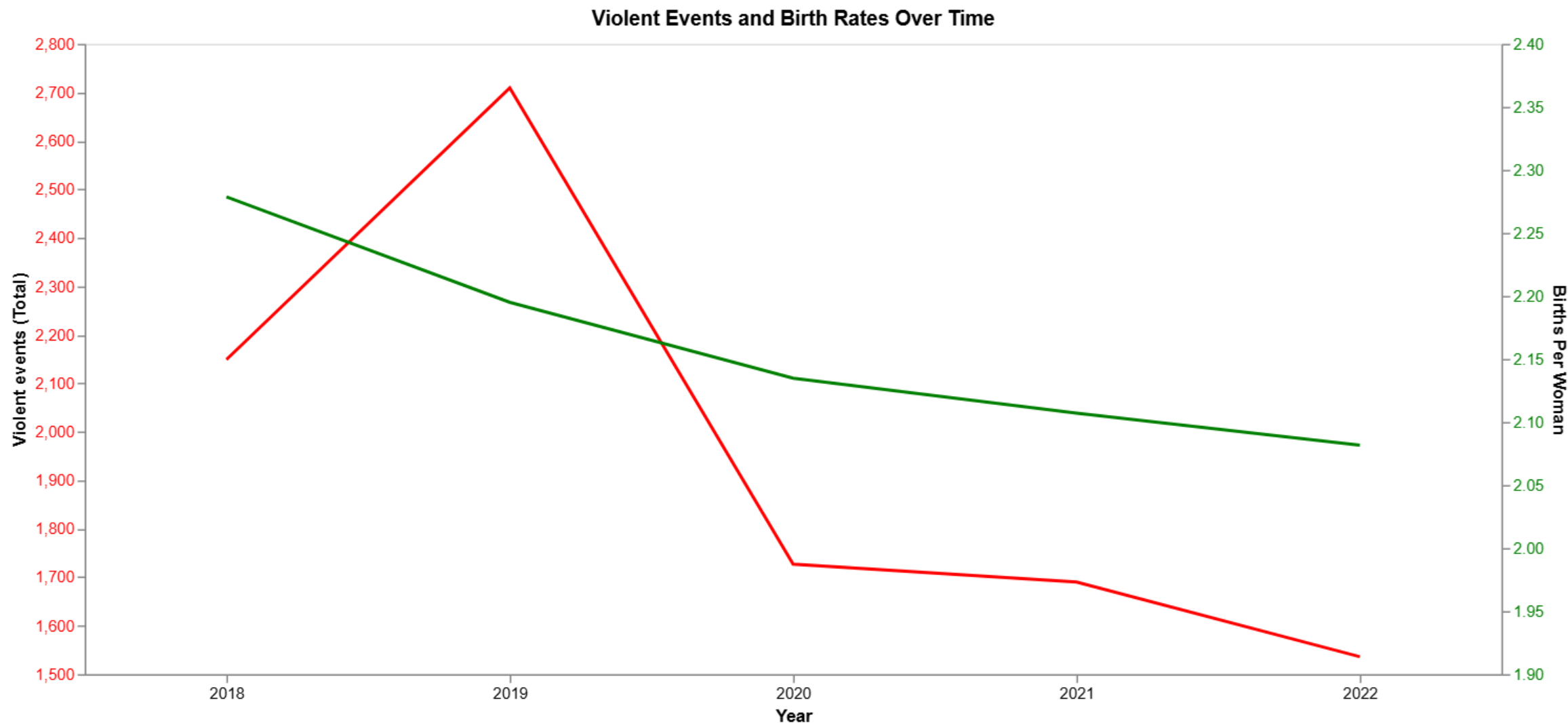
Crime Event Distribution in El Salvador (2023)



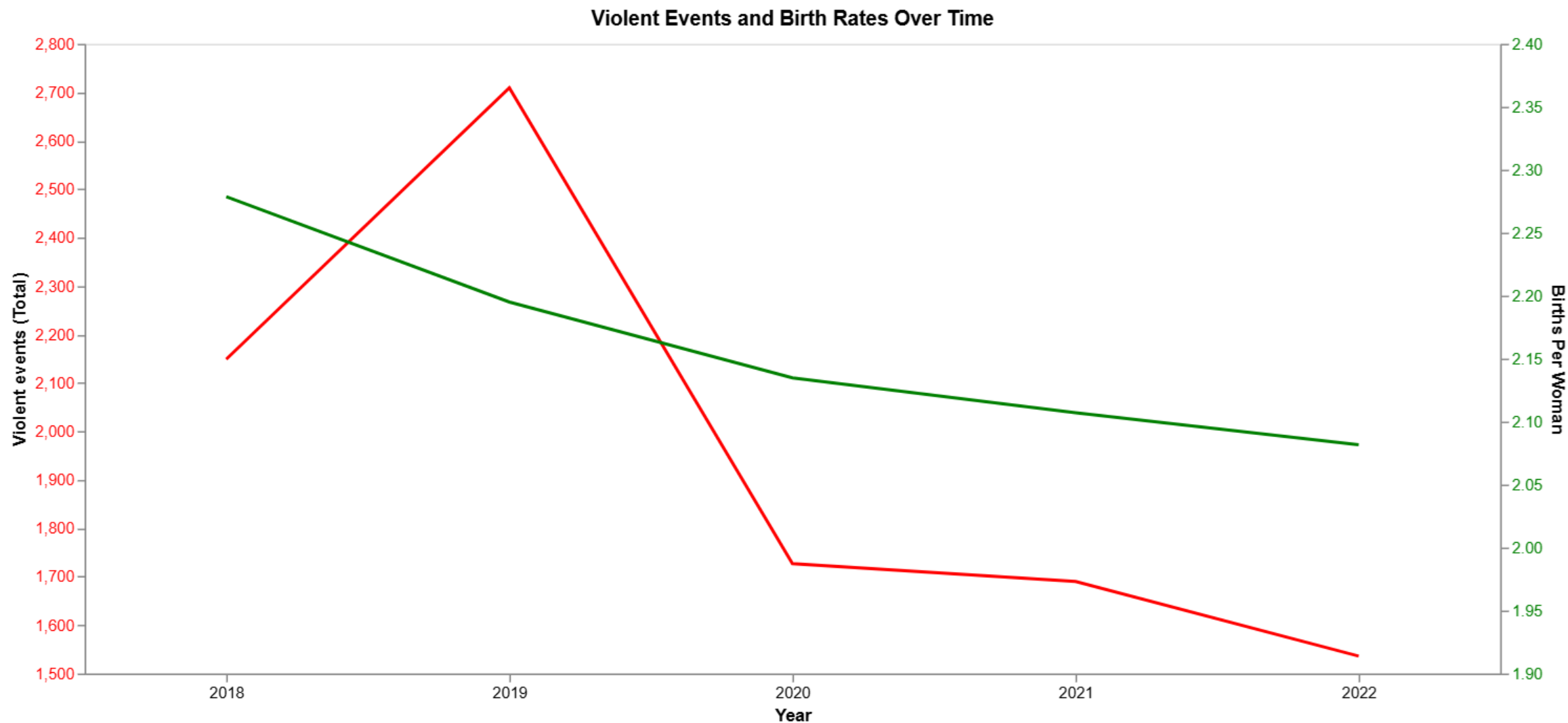
# Civilians are facing less attacks, while organized criminal groups are engaging in less armed clashes



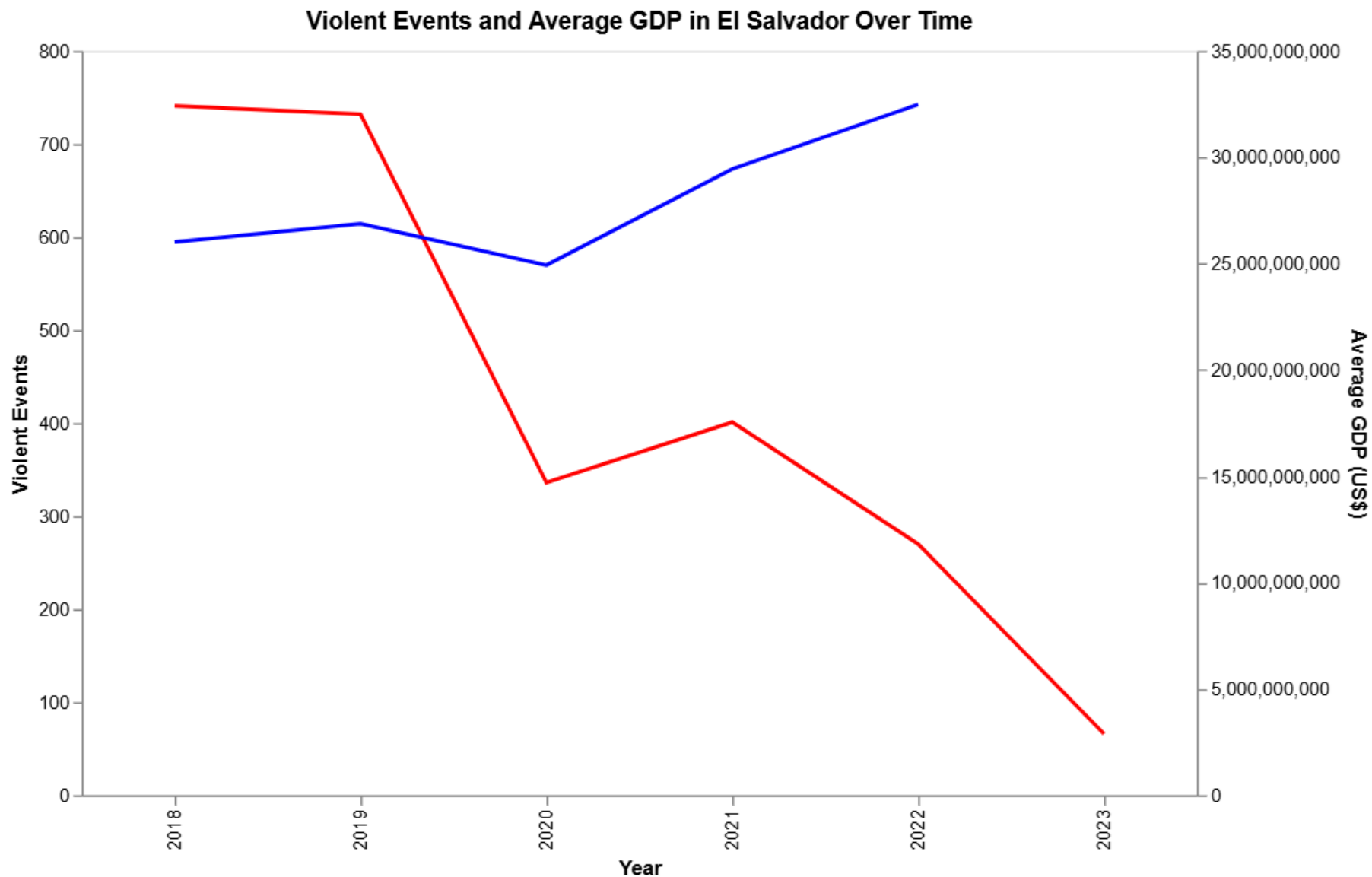
# As violent events decrease, number of student enrollment tends to increase in the following year



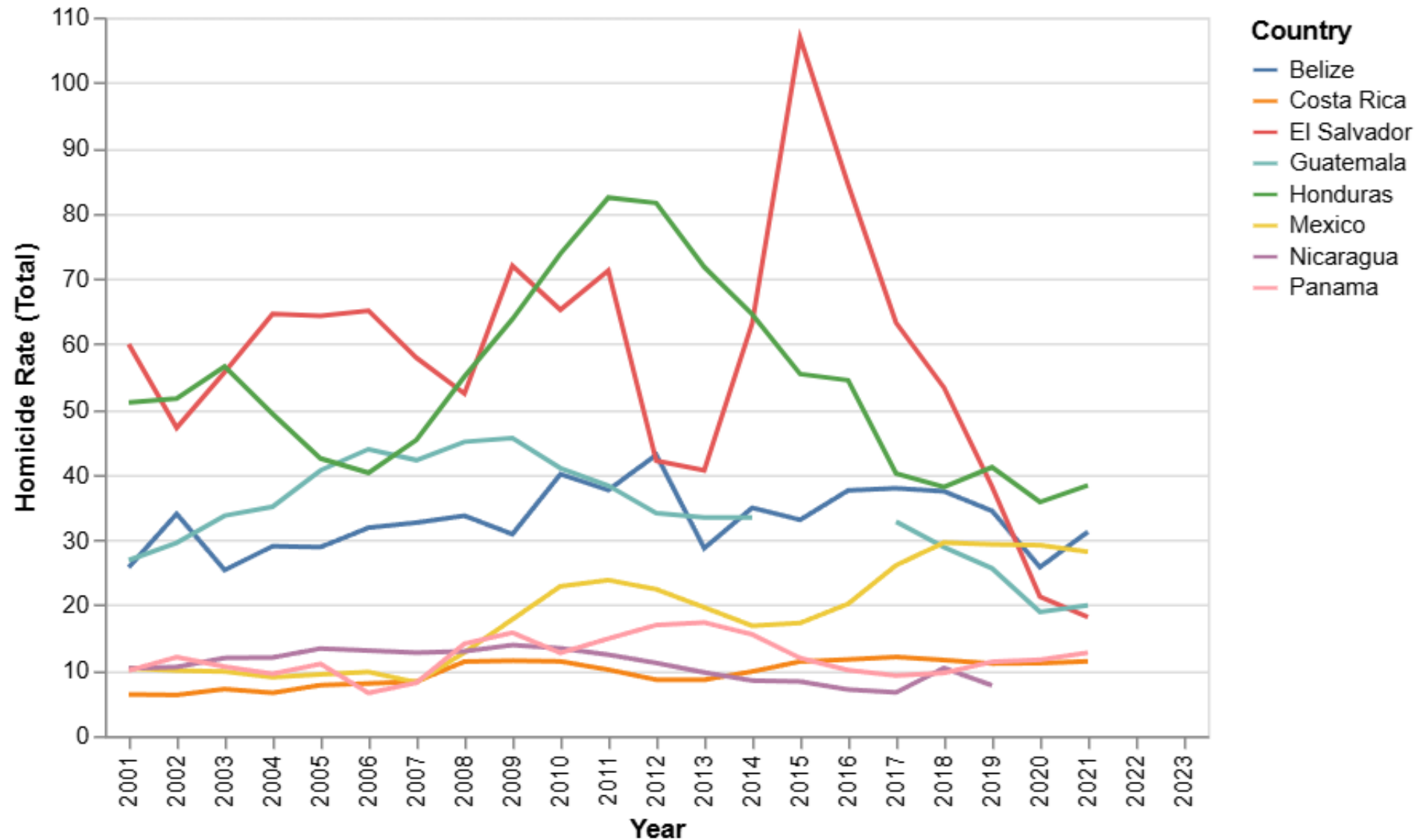
# Violent events vs. birth rates over time



# Violent events vs. average GDP in El Salvador over time

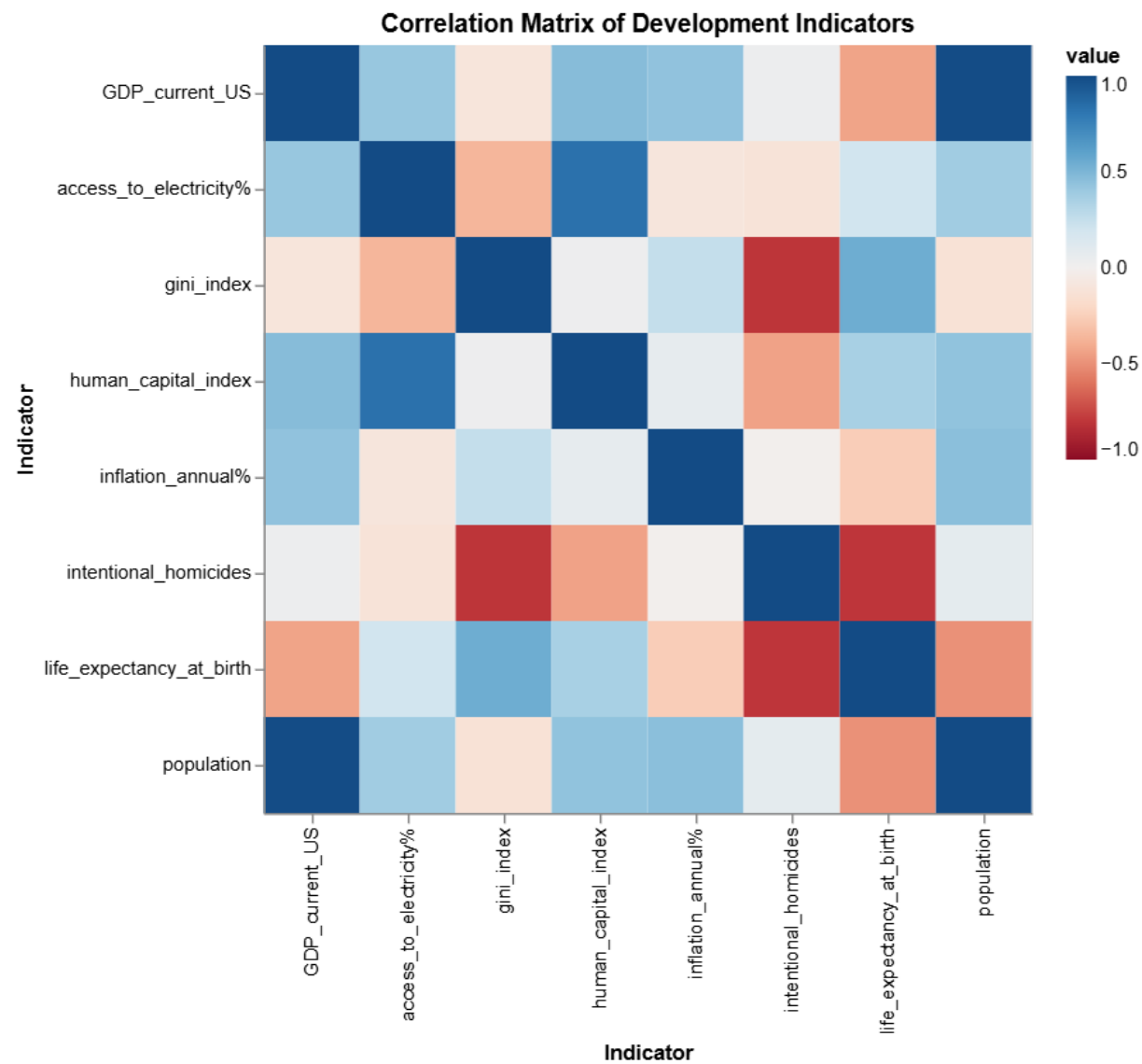


## Central American country homicide rates across time (WB data)

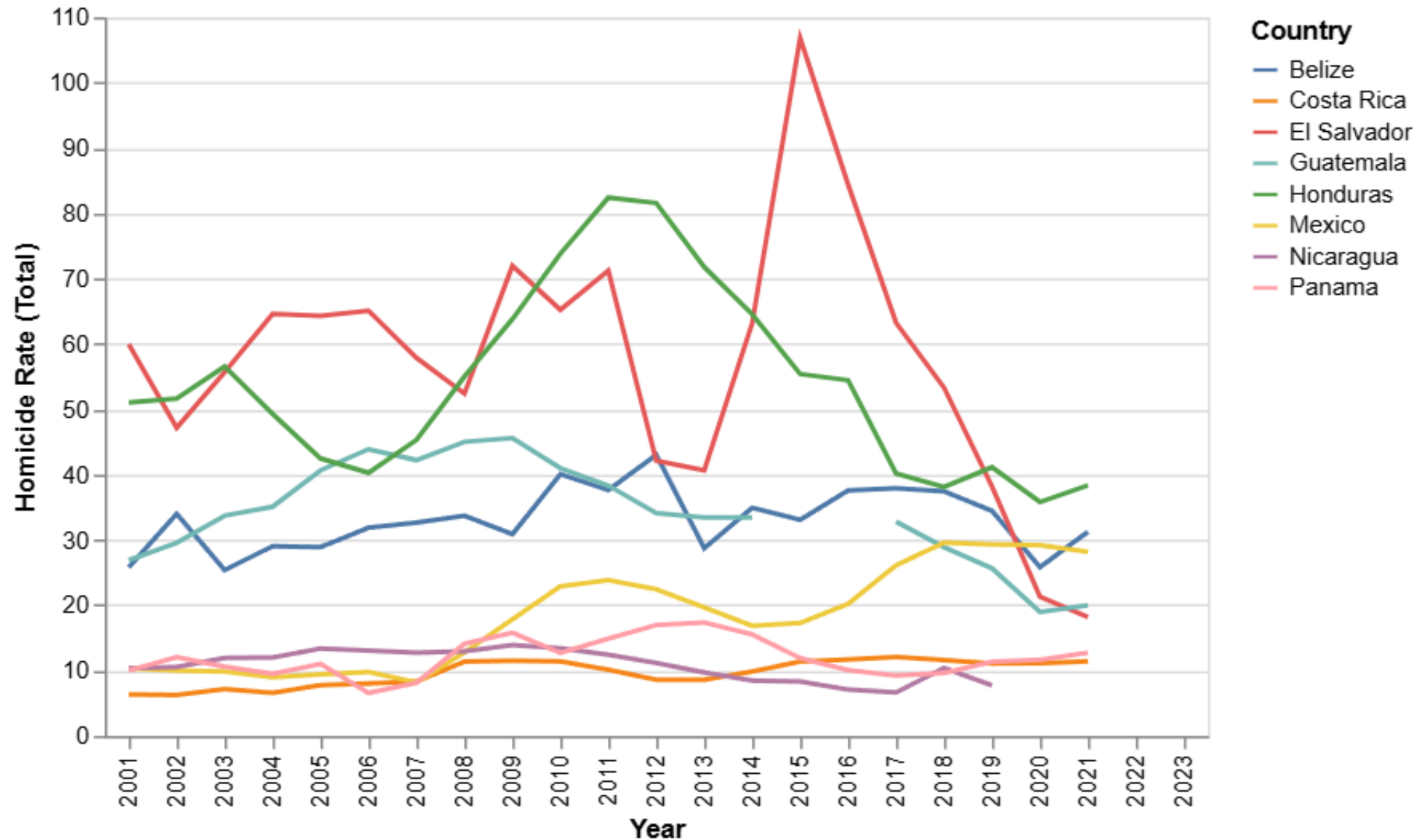




# Correlation matrix of development indicators

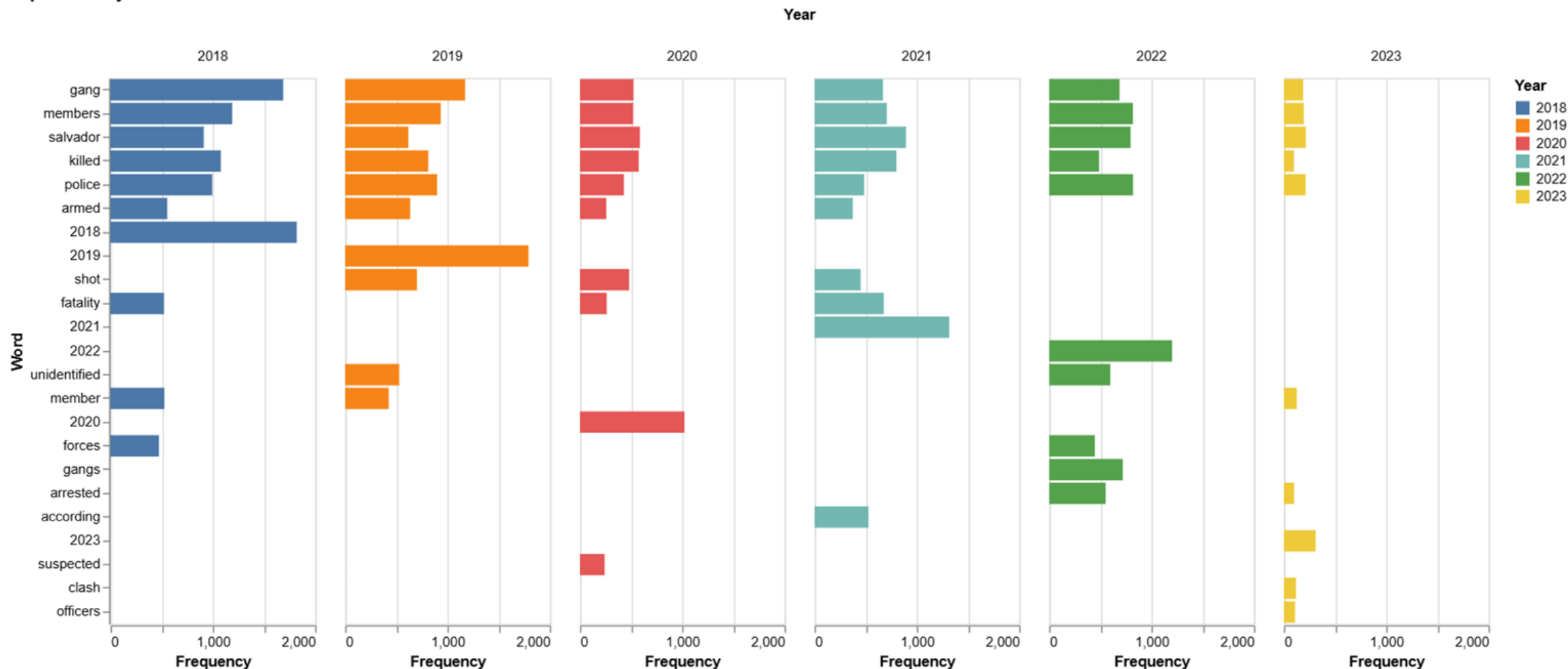


## Central American country homicide rates across time (WB data)



# Gang-related descriptions of attacks in El Salvador have steadily decreased while police-related descriptions slightly increased

Top Words by Year



# QUESTIONS?