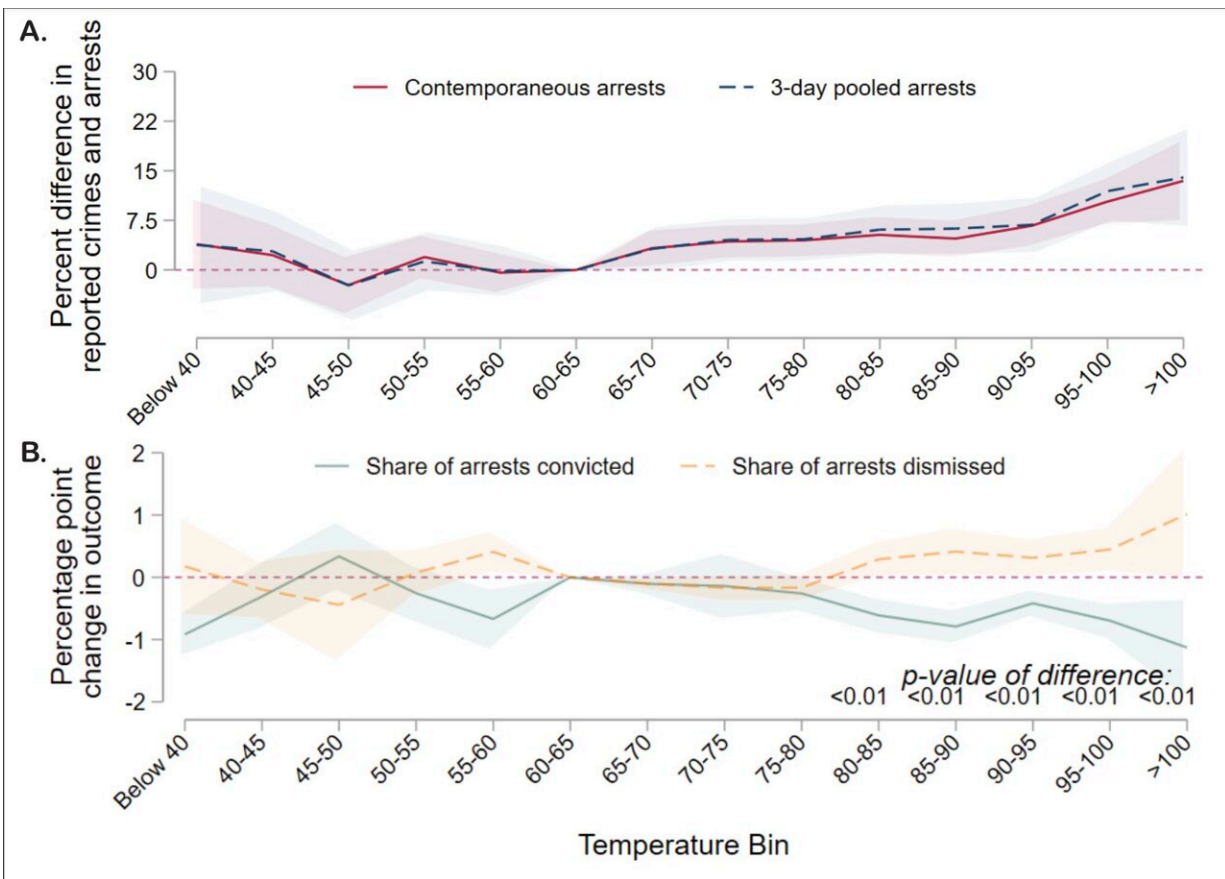


# Investigating heat's effects on the decision-making of police and judges

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Outcomes related to police behavior on hot days. Credit: Behrer et al

High temperatures affect the decision-making of police officers and judges. Previous research has shown that heat can increase criminal

activity, with the leading theory proposing that heat reduces emotional control and increases aggression.

A. Patrick Behrer and Valentin Bolotnyy investigate the effects of [heat](#) on the behavior of those who respond to [criminal activity](#). The work is [published](#) in the journal *PNAS Nexus*.

The authors analyzed records of 10 million arrests across the state of Texas from 2010 through 2017, along with the legal outcomes that followed each arrest.

These data were merged with daily temperature data. Police made fewer arrests per reported crime on the hottest days in the sample, and these arrests were more likely to be dismissed in court, suggesting that more of the hot-day arrests were difficult to justify legally.

Judges dismissed fewer cases, issued longer prison sentences, and levied higher fines when ruling on hotter-than-average days. Heat did not exert a meaningful influence on the decisions of prosecutors.

According to the authors, unless measures like [air-conditioning](#) and increased staffing and teamwork are used, [climate change](#) is likely to worsen police and judicial decision-making in places like Texas through an increased frequency of hot days.

**More information:** A Patrick Behrer et al, Heat and law enforcement, *PNAS Nexus* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad425](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad425)

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