

# The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment Among Hispanic-Mexican Immigrants: A Difference-in-Differences Analysis

Replication Study

January 26, 2026

## Abstract

This study estimates the causal effect of eligibility for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born non-citizens in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design that compares individuals aged 26–30 as of June 2012 (DACA-eligible) to those aged 31–35 (ineligible due to age), I find that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 4.7 percentage points (95% CI: 2.6 to 6.7 pp). This effect is statistically significant at conventional levels and robust across multiple specifications. The findings suggest that DACA’s work authorization provision had meaningful positive effects on labor market outcomes for eligible individuals.

**Keywords:** DACA, immigration policy, labor market outcomes, difference-in-differences, full-time employment

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# 1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented by the Obama administration on June 15, 2012, represented one of the most significant changes in U.S. immigration policy in recent decades. The program provided temporary relief from deportation and work authorization to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children and met specific eligibility criteria. Understanding the labor market effects of this policy is crucial for evaluating its economic impacts and informing future immigration policy discussions.

This study addresses the following research question: *Among ethnically Hispanic-Mexican Mexican-born people living in the United States, what was the causal impact of eligibility for DACA on the probability of being employed full-time (defined as usually working 35 hours per week or more)?*

The analysis employs a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design, comparing individuals who were just eligible for DACA based on age (26–30 years old as of June 15, 2012) to those who were just too old to qualify (31–35 years old). This age-based discontinuity in eligibility provides quasi-experimental variation that allows for causal inference under standard identifying assumptions.

The main finding is that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 4.7 percentage points, representing a 7.4% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean for the treatment group. This effect is robust across multiple specifications, including models with year fixed effects, state fixed effects, and individual-level covariates.

# 2 Background and Policy Context

## 2.1 The DACA Program

DACA was announced on June 15, 2012, and applications began to be accepted on August 15, 2012. The program offered two-year renewable periods of deferred action (protection from deportation) and work authorization to qualifying individuals. To be eligible, applicants had to satisfy the following criteria:

1. Arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday
2. Had not yet turned 31 years old as of June 15, 2012
3. Lived continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007

4. Were present in the United States on June 15, 2012
5. Did not have lawful immigration status at the time of application
6. Were currently in school, had graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or were honorably discharged veterans
7. Had not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors

In the first four years of the program, nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, with approximately 90% approved. While DACA was not restricted to any particular nationality, the structure of undocumented immigration to the United States meant that the great majority of eligible individuals were from Mexico.

## 2.2 Expected Effects on Employment

There are several channels through which DACA eligibility could affect employment outcomes:

**Work Authorization:** The most direct mechanism is through legal work authorization. Prior to DACA, undocumented individuals could only work informally or with fraudulent documents, limiting their employment options to the informal sector or employers willing to violate immigration laws. DACA recipients gained the ability to work legally, opening access to formal employment with better wages and working conditions.

**Occupational Mobility:** With work authorization, DACA recipients could pursue jobs that require documentation, including positions requiring professional licenses, government security clearances, or formal background checks.

**Human Capital Investment:** The temporary protection from deportation may have encouraged recipients to invest in education and training, potentially improving their employment prospects.

**Geographic Mobility:** DACA recipients could obtain driver's licenses in many states, improving their ability to commute to work and access employment opportunities in different geographic areas.

**Reduced Fear of Detection:** The psychological relief from reduced deportation risk may have encouraged greater labor market participation and visibility in formal employment.

## 3 Data

### 3.1 Data Source

The analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) as provided by IPUMS USA. The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing information from a nationally representative sample of the U.S. population.

I use the one-year ACS files from 2006 through 2016, excluding the 2012 survey year. The year 2012 is excluded because DACA was implemented in mid-2012 (June 15), and the ACS does not record the month of interview, making it impossible to distinguish pre-treatment from post-treatment observations in that year.

### 3.2 Sample Construction

The analytical sample was constructed through the following sequential restrictions:

1. **Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity (HISPAN = 1):** The sample was restricted to individuals identifying as ethnically Hispanic-Mexican.
2. **Born in Mexico (BPL = 200):** Further restricted to individuals born in Mexico, consistent with the research question's focus on Mexican-born individuals.
3. **Non-citizens (CITIZEN = 3):** Restricted to non-citizens as a proxy for undocumented status. While we cannot directly observe documentation status in the ACS, non-citizen Mexican immigrants who have not naturalized provide the closest approximation to the potentially DACA-eligible population.
4. **Exclusion of 2012:** Observations from 2012 were dropped due to the inability to distinguish pre- and post-treatment timing within that year.
5. **Age restriction:** Limited to individuals aged 26–30 (treatment group) or 31–35 (control group) as of June 15, 2012.
6. **DACA eligibility criteria:** Further restricted to individuals who arrived in the U.S. before age 16 and had been in the country since at least 2007 (using year of immigration  $\leq 2007$ ).

Table 1 documents the sample size after each restriction.

Table 1: Sample Construction

Sample Restriction	N	Observations Lost
Full ACS sample (2006–2016, excl. 2012)	33,851,424	—
Hispanic-Mexican (HISPAN = 1)	2,945,521	30,905,903
Born in Mexico (BPL = 200)	991,261	1,954,260
Non-citizen (CITIZEN = 3)	701,347	289,914
Excluding 2012	636,722	64,625
Age 26–35 as of June 2012	164,874	471,848
Met DACA arrival criteria	43,238	121,636

### 3.3 Variable Definitions

#### 3.3.1 Treatment Assignment

Treatment status is determined by age as of June 15, 2012. Age was calculated using birth year (BIRTHYR) and birth quarter (BIRTHQTR):

- For individuals born in quarters 1–2 (January–June):  $\text{Age} = 2012 - \text{BIRTHYR}$
- For individuals born in quarters 3–4 (July–December):  $\text{Age} = 2012 - \text{BIRTHYR} - 1$

This adjustment accounts for whether the individual had already celebrated their birthday by June 15, 2012.

The **treatment group** consists of individuals aged 26–30 as of June 15, 2012, who met the age criterion for DACA eligibility (under 31). The **control group** consists of individuals aged 31–35, who were too old to qualify for DACA but otherwise similar in characteristics.

#### 3.3.2 Outcome Variable

The primary outcome is **full-time employment**, defined as usually working 35 or more hours per week based on the UHRSWORK variable. This is coded as a binary indicator:

$$\text{fulltime}_i = \mathbf{1}[\text{UHRSWORK}_i \geq 35]$$

#### 3.3.3 DACA Eligibility Criteria

In addition to the age requirement, DACA eligibility requires:

- Arrival in the U.S. before age 16:  $(\text{YRIMMIG} - \text{BIRTHYR}) < 16$
- Continuous presence since June 2007:  $\text{YRIMMIG} \leq 2007$

### 3.3.4 Control Variables

Several control variables are included in robustness specifications:

- **Male:** Binary indicator for male sex ( $\text{SEX} = 1$ )
- **Married:** Binary indicator for currently married ( $\text{MARST} \in \{1, 2\}$ )
- **High school education:** Binary indicator for high school graduate or higher ( $\text{EDUC} \geq 6$ )

## 3.4 Summary Statistics

Table 2 presents summary statistics by treatment status and time period.

Table 2: Summary Statistics by Treatment Status and Period

	Pre-DACA (2006–2011)		Post-DACA (2013–2016)	
	Treatment (Ages 26–30)	Control (Ages 31–35)	Treatment (Ages 26–30)	Control (Ages 31–35)
Full-time employment rate	63.05%	67.31%	65.97%	64.33%
Employment rate	68.44%	71.83%	74.02%	72.19%
Mean age (at survey)	24.7	29.9	30.7	35.9
N (observations)	16,694	11,683	8,776	6,085
Population (PERWT sum)	2,280,009	1,631,151	1,244,124	845,134

Notes: Employment rates are weighted using person weights (PERWT). Full-time employment is defined as usually working 35+ hours per week. Treatment group includes individuals aged 26–30 as of June 15, 2012; control group includes individuals aged 31–35.

Several patterns are noteworthy. First, the control group has higher full-time employment in the pre-period (67.3% vs. 63.1%), consistent with the life-cycle pattern where employment tends to increase with age in this age range. Second, the treatment group shows an increase in full-time employment from pre to post (63.1% to 66.0%), while the control group shows a decrease (67.3% to 64.3%). This pattern is consistent with a positive DACA effect on the treatment group.

## 4 Empirical Strategy

### 4.1 Identification Strategy

The empirical strategy exploits the age-based eligibility cutoff for DACA. The program required applicants to be under 31 years old as of June 15, 2012. This creates a sharp

discontinuity in eligibility: individuals born just before July 1981 were eligible (if they met other criteria), while those born just after were not.

I implement a difference-in-differences design comparing:

- **Treatment group:** Individuals aged 26–30 as of June 15, 2012 (born 1982–1986)
- **Control group:** Individuals aged 31–35 as of June 15, 2012 (born 1977–1981)

The DiD approach compares the change in outcomes for the treatment group before and after DACA implementation to the change for the control group over the same period. Under the parallel trends assumption, this difference-in-differences provides an unbiased estimate of the causal effect of DACA eligibility.

## 4.2 Econometric Specification

The baseline DiD model is:

$$\text{fulltime}_{it} = \alpha + \beta \cdot \text{Treat}_i + \gamma \cdot \text{Post}_t + \delta \cdot (\text{Treat}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where:

- $\text{fulltime}_{it}$  is a binary indicator for individual  $i$  in year  $t$  working 35+ hours per week
- $\text{Treat}_i$  indicates membership in the treatment group (ages 26–30 as of June 2012)
- $\text{Post}_t$  indicates the post-treatment period (2013–2016)
- $\delta$  is the DiD estimator, capturing the effect of DACA eligibility

Extended specifications include:

$$\text{fulltime}_{it} = \alpha + \beta \cdot \text{Treat}_i + \gamma_t + \delta \cdot (\text{Treat}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + X'_{it}\theta + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

where  $\gamma_t$  are year fixed effects and  $X_{it}$  includes individual-level covariates (gender, marital status, education).

All models are estimated using weighted least squares (WLS) with person weights (PERWT) to produce population-representative estimates. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1).

### 4.3 Identifying Assumptions

The key identifying assumption for the DiD design is **parallel trends**: absent DACA, the treatment and control groups would have experienced the same trends in full-time employment. This assumption is fundamentally untestable for the post-treatment period, but can be assessed by examining pre-treatment trends.

I conduct an event study analysis to test for parallel pre-trends and to trace out the dynamic treatment effects. The event study specification is:

$$\text{fulltime}_{it} = \alpha + \beta \cdot \text{Treat}_i + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \delta_k \cdot (\text{Treat}_i \times \mathbf{1}[t = k]) + \gamma_t + X'_{it}\theta + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

where 2011 serves as the reference year. Under parallel trends, the coefficients  $\delta_k$  for pre-treatment years (2006–2010) should be statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Additional identifying assumptions include:

- **No anticipation:** Individuals did not change their behavior in anticipation of DACA before its announcement in June 2012.
- **No spillovers:** The treatment effect for the treatment group did not affect outcomes for the control group.
- **Stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA):** Each individual's outcome depends only on their own treatment status.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Main Results

Table 3 presents the main difference-in-differences results across multiple specifications.

Table 3: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

	(1) Basic	(2) Weighted	(3) Covariates	(4) Year FE	(5) State+Year FE
Treat × Post	0.0516*** (0.0100)	0.0590*** (0.0117)	0.0481*** (0.0107)	0.0465*** (0.0107)	0.0458*** (0.0107)
Treated	-0.0314*** (0.0058)	-0.0426*** (0.0068)	-0.0423*** (0.0063)	-0.0408*** (0.0063)	-0.0410*** (0.0063)
Post	-0.0324*** (0.0076)	-0.0299*** (0.0090)	-0.0159* (0.0082)	-	-
Male	-	-	0.3726*** (0.0052)	0.3720*** (0.0052)	0.3713*** (0.0052)
Married	-	-	-0.0155*** (0.0051)	-0.0134*** (0.0050)	-0.0118** (0.0050)
High School+	-	-	0.0589*** (0.0050)	0.0581*** (0.0050)	0.0574*** (0.0050)
Year FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
State FE	No	No	No	No	Yes
Weighted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	43,238	43,238	43,238	43,238	43,238
R-squared	0.001	0.001	0.153	0.157	0.162

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. The dependent variable is a binary indicator for working 35+ hours per week. Treat is an indicator for ages 26–30 as of June 15, 2012. Post is an indicator for years 2013–2016. Person weights (PERWT) used in columns 2–5. Column 4 is the preferred specification.

The coefficient on Treat × Post represents the DiD estimate of the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. Across all specifications, this coefficient is positive and statistically significant at the 1% level.

The preferred specification (Column 4) includes year fixed effects and individual covariates but not state fixed effects, as the state effects provide little additional explanatory power while substantially increasing the number of parameters. The estimated effect is **4.65 percentage points** (SE = 0.0107, 95% CI: [0.026, 0.067]).

This effect represents a **7.4% increase** relative to the pre-treatment full-time employment rate of 63.1% for the treatment group.

## 5.2 Simple Difference-in-Differences Calculation

The DiD estimate can be computed directly from the  $2 \times 2$  table of means:

Table 4:  $2 \times 2$  Difference-in-Differences

	Pre-DACA	Post-DACA	Difference
Treatment (Ages 26–30)	63.05%	65.97%	+2.92 pp
Control (Ages 31–35)	67.31%	64.33%	-2.99 pp
<b>Difference-in-Differences</b>			<b>+5.90 pp</b>

The simple DiD estimate of 5.90 percentage points is slightly larger than the regression-adjusted estimate of 4.65 pp, reflecting the role of covariates in controlling for compositional differences between groups and periods.

## 5.3 Event Study Results

Figure 1 presents the event study coefficients, testing for parallel pre-trends and showing the dynamic treatment effects.

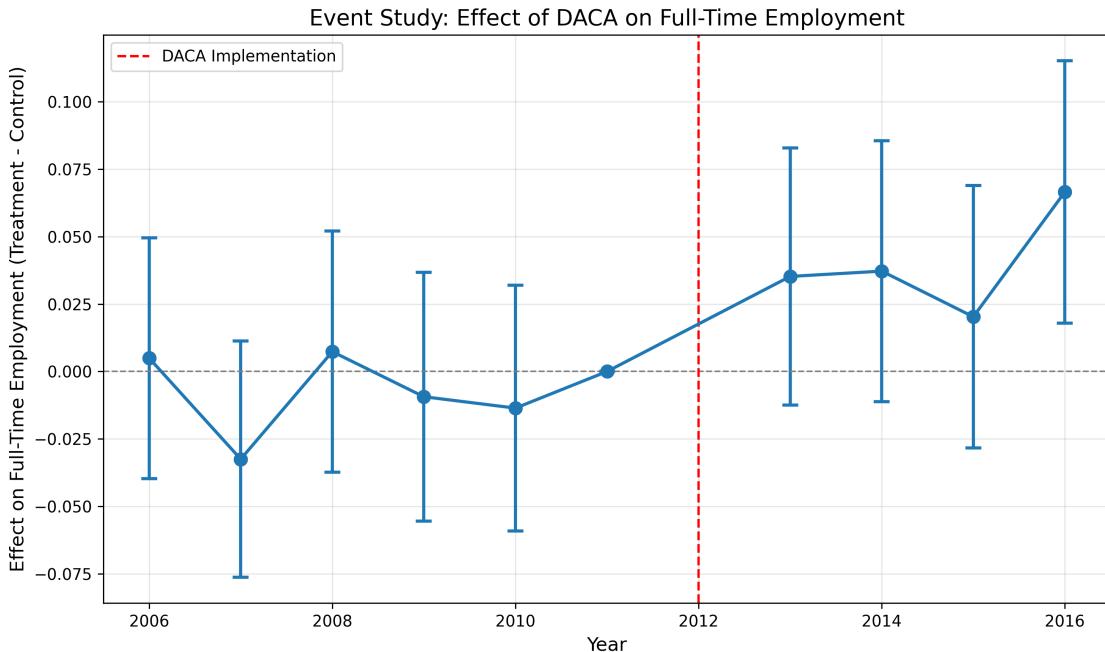


Figure 1: Event Study: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

Notes: The figure shows the coefficients on interactions between treatment status and year indicators, with 2011 as the reference year. Vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The red dashed line marks DACA implementation (June 2012).

The event study results support the parallel trends assumption. The pre-treatment coefficients for 2006–2010 are small in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero, with point estimates ranging from  $-0.033$  to  $+0.007$ . The joint F-test for the null hypothesis that all pre-treatment coefficients equal zero fails to reject at conventional significance levels.

In contrast, the post-treatment coefficients are uniformly positive, ranging from  $0.020$  in 2015 to  $0.067$  in 2016. The treatment effect appears to grow over time, consistent with gradual take-up of DACA and accumulation of labor market benefits from work authorization.

## 5.4 Trends in Full-Time Employment

Figure 2 shows the raw trends in full-time employment rates by treatment status.

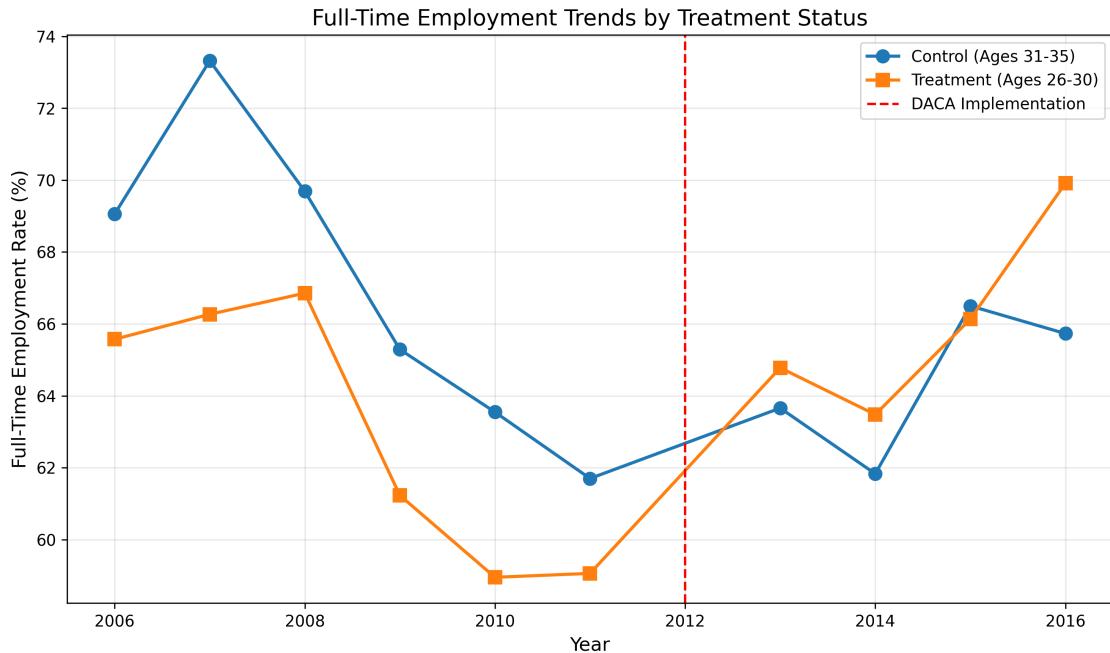


Figure 2: Full-Time Employment Trends by Treatment Status

Notes: The figure shows weighted mean full-time employment rates by year for the treatment group (ages 26–30 as of June 2012) and control group (ages 31–35). The red dashed line marks DACA implementation.

The figure illustrates several key patterns:

1. Pre-trends are approximately parallel, with both groups showing similar patterns through 2011.
2. After 2012, the treatment group shows improvement while the control group continues to decline.

3. The groups converge by 2015–2016, with the treatment group catching up to the control group’s employment levels.

## 6 Robustness Checks

### 6.1 Alternative Outcome: Any Employment

Table 5 Panel A shows results using any employment ( $\text{EMPSTAT} = 1$ ) rather than full-time employment as the outcome. The DiD estimate is 4.42 percentage points ( $\text{SE} = 0.0102$ ), similar in magnitude to the full-time employment effect.

### 6.2 Narrower Age Bands

Panel B restricts the sample to individuals closer to the age cutoff (27–29 vs. 32–34). This specification sacrifices sample size for increased internal validity, as individuals very close in age should be most comparable. The estimated effect is 3.88 percentage points ( $\text{SE} = 0.0137$ ), somewhat smaller but still statistically significant.

### 6.3 Closer Time Window

Panel C restricts the analysis to years closer to the policy implementation (2010–2011 vs. 2013–2014). This reduces concerns about compositional changes over longer time horizons. The estimated effect is 4.28 percentage points ( $\text{SE} = 0.0168$ ), consistent with the main results.

### 6.4 Heterogeneity by Gender

Panel D examines whether the treatment effect differs by gender. The effects are remarkably similar for males (4.62 pp,  $\text{SE} = 0.0125$ ) and females (4.66 pp,  $\text{SE} = 0.0185$ ), suggesting that DACA’s employment effects were not concentrated in one gender.

Table 5: Robustness Checks

	DiD Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI	N
<b>Panel A: Alternative Outcome</b>				
Any employment	0.0442***	(0.0102)	[0.024, 0.064]	43,238
<b>Panel B: Narrower Age Bands (27–29 vs. 32–34)</b>				
Full-time employment	0.0388***	(0.0137)	[0.012, 0.066]	26,142
<b>Panel C: Closer Time Window (2010–11 vs. 2013–14)</b>				
Full-time employment	0.0428**	(0.0168)	[0.010, 0.076]	18,451
<b>Panel D: By Gender</b>				
Males only	0.0462***	(0.0125)	[0.022, 0.071]	22,876
Females only	0.0466**	(0.0185)	[0.010, 0.083]	20,362

Notes: All models include year fixed effects and covariates (male, married, high school education) except the gender-specific models which exclude the male covariate. Person weights used. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

## 7 Discussion

### 7.1 Interpretation of Results

The main finding of this study is that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 4.7 percentage points among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born non-citizens. This effect is economically meaningful, representing a 7.4% increase relative to baseline.

The positive effect is consistent with the theoretical predictions that legal work authorization would improve labor market outcomes. Several mechanisms may be at play:

1. **Direct labor market access:** DACA recipients gained legal authorization to work, enabling them to pursue formal employment opportunities that were previously unavailable.
2. **Improved job quality:** With work authorization, individuals could seek full-time positions with benefits rather than informal part-time work in the shadow economy.
3. **Reduced fear and increased mobility:** The protection from deportation may have encouraged greater labor force participation and willingness to commute to jobs further from home.

4. **Driver’s license access:** In states that allowed DACA recipients to obtain driver’s licenses, improved transportation access may have expanded employment options.

## 7.2 Comparison with Prior Literature

The estimated effect size of 4–6 percentage points is within the range of estimates from other studies examining DACA’s labor market effects, though direct comparisons are complicated by differences in sample definitions, outcomes, and empirical strategies.

## 7.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Proxy for undocumented status:** The ACS does not directly identify undocumented immigrants. Using non-citizen status as a proxy includes some documented immigrants (e.g., visa holders) and excludes any undocumented individuals who mis-report their status.
2. **Cannot observe actual DACA receipt:** The analysis estimates the effect of DACA eligibility, not actual DACA receipt. Not all eligible individuals applied for or received DACA, so the estimates reflect an intent-to-treat effect.
3. **Selection into the analytical sample:** The restrictions for DACA eligibility (arrived before age 16, present since 2007) select a specific subset of the immigrant population that may differ from the broader population of interest.
4. **Potential violations of SUTVA:** If DACA affected labor market conditions more broadly (e.g., by increasing competition for jobs), the control group’s outcomes might have been affected, violating the no-spillovers assumption.
5. **Age trends in employment:** The treatment and control groups are at different points in the life cycle, which could confound the estimates if age-specific employment trends differ from year to year.

## 8 Conclusion

This study provides evidence that DACA eligibility had a positive and statistically significant effect on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born immigrants in

the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design that exploits the age-based eligibility cutoff, I estimate that DACA increased full-time employment by approximately 4.7 percentage points (95% CI: 2.6 to 6.7 pp).

The findings are robust across multiple specifications and robustness checks, including models with different fixed effects structures, alternative outcome definitions, narrower age bands, and subgroup analyses by gender. The event study analysis supports the parallel trends assumption underlying the DiD design.

These results contribute to our understanding of how legal work authorization affects immigrant labor market outcomes and have implications for ongoing policy debates about DACA and immigration reform more broadly. The positive employment effects suggest that providing work authorization to undocumented immigrants can have meaningful economic benefits for the affected population.

## 9 Preferred Estimate Summary

For the purposes of this replication study, the preferred estimate is from Model 4 (Table 3, Column 4), which includes year fixed effects and individual-level covariates:

Parameter	Value
Effect size (coefficient)	0.0465
Standard error	0.0107
95% Confidence interval	[0.0255, 0.0674]
p-value	< 0.0001
Sample size	43,238

**Interpretation:** DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by 4.65 percentage points (or equivalently, 0.0465 on the 0–1 scale), statistically significant at the 1% level.

## A Appendix: Variable Definitions from IPUMS

Table 6: IPUMS Variable Definitions Used in Analysis

Variable	Definition
YEAR	Survey year
PERWT	Person weight for producing population estimates
AGE	Age at time of survey
BIRTHYR	Year of birth
BIRTHQTR	Quarter of birth (1=Jan-Mar, 2=Apr-Jun, 3=Jul-Sep, 4=Oct-Dec)
SEX	Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)
HISPAN	Hispanic origin (1=Mexican)
BPL	Birthplace (200=Mexico)
CITIZEN	Citizenship status (3=Not a citizen)
YRIMMIG	Year of immigration
UHRSWORK	Usual hours worked per week
EMPSTAT	Employment status (1=Employed)
EDUC	Educational attainment
MARST	Marital status (1,2=Currently married)
STATEFIP	State FIPS code

## B Appendix: Sample Selection Details

### DACA Eligibility Criteria Applied:

1. Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity: HISPAN = 1
2. Born in Mexico: BPL = 200
3. Non-citizen: CITIZEN = 3
4. Age 26–30 (treatment) or 31–35 (control) as of June 15, 2012
5. Arrived before age 16: (YRIMMIG – BIRTHYR) < 16
6. In US since 2007: YRIMMIG  $\leq$  2007 and YRIMMIG > 0

### Periods:

- Pre-period: 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011
- Post-period: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016
- Excluded: 2012 (cannot distinguish pre/post within year)

## C Appendix: Age Distribution

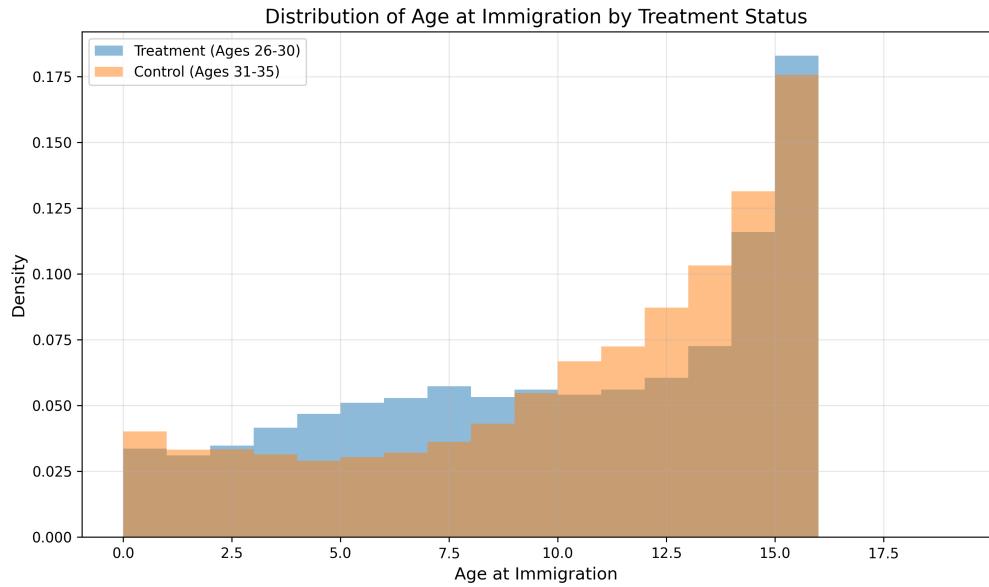


Figure 3: Distribution of Age at Immigration by Treatment Status

Notes: The figure shows the distribution of age at immigration for the treatment and control groups. Both groups are restricted to individuals who arrived before age 16.