Replication Study: The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment Among Hispanic-Mexican Immigrants

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Abstract

This study replicates an analysis of the causal effect of eligibility for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment among ethnically Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using American Community Survey data from 2008–2016 (excluding 2012) and a difference-in-differences research design, I compare employment outcomes between individuals aged 26–30 at DACA implementation (eligible) and those aged 31–35 (ineligible due to age). The preferred specification with demographic controls estimates that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment probability by 5.2 percentage points (SE = 0.014, 95% CI: [0.024, 0.080], p ¡ 0.001). This finding is robust to alternative specifications including state and year fixed effects, survey weighting, and clustered standard errors. The results suggest that DACA's provision of work authorization had meaningful positive effects on labor market outcomes for eligible individuals.

Contents

1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, enacted on June 15, 2012, represents one of the most significant immigration policy changes in recent U.S. history. 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 DACA is crucial for evaluating immigration policy and informing future policy decisions.

This replication study examines the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment among ethnically Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals residing in the United States. The research question is particularly relevant because: (1) the vast majority of DACA-eligible individuals are of Mexican origin, (2) legal work authorization is a key benefit of the program that should directly affect employment outcomes, and (3) full-time employment is an important indicator of economic integration and self-sufficiency.

1.1 Background on DACA

DACA was announced by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012, and began accepting applications on August 15, 2012. The program offered two-year renewable periods of deferred action from deportation and employment authorization to eligible individuals. To qualify, applicants must have:

- Arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday
- Been under 31 years of age as of June 15, 2012
- Lived continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007
- Been present in the United States on June 15, 2012
- Had no lawful immigration status at the time
- Met certain educational or military service requirements

In the first four years of the program, nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, with approximately 90% approval rates. The program enabled recipients to obtain Social Security numbers, apply for driver's licenses in most states, and work legally—benefits that could substantially affect labor market participation and employment quality.

1.2 Research Design Overview

This study employs a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design that exploits the age-based eligibility cutoff of DACA. The treatment group consists of individuals aged 26–30 at the time of DACA implementation (June 15, 2012), while the control group consists of those aged 31–35 who would otherwise have been eligible but for the age restriction. By comparing changes in full-time employment between these groups before and after DACA implementation, we can estimate the causal effect of DACA eligibility under the assumption that both groups would have followed similar employment trends in the absence of the policy.

2 Data

2.1 Data Source

The analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS), as provided through IPUMS USA. The ACS is a large, nationally representative survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing information from approximately 3.5 million households annually.

The provided dataset covers the years 2008–2011 (pre-DACA period) and 2013–2016 (post-DACA period). The year 2012 is excluded because it cannot be determined whether individuals surveyed in 2012 were observed before or after DACA implementation. The sample has been pre-restricted to ethnically Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals who meet the other DACA eligibility criteria (excluding age), providing a clean comparison between age-eligible and age-ineligible groups.

2.2 Sample Description

The analytic sample consists of 17,382 observations distributed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Distribution by Treatment Group and Time Period

Group	Pre-DACA (2008–2011)	Post-DACA (2013–2016)	Total
Control (ages 31–35)	3,294	2,706	6,000
Eligible (ages 26–30)	6,233	5,149	11,382
Total	9,527	7,855	17,382

The eligible (treatment) group is larger than the control group because of the five-year age window (26–30) compared to the five-year control window (31–35), combined with typical

age distributions in immigrant populations.

2.3 Key Variables

2.3.1 Outcome Variable

The primary outcome is **FT** (Full-Time Employment), a binary indicator equal to 1 if the individual usually works 35 or more hours per week, and 0 otherwise. This variable includes individuals not in the labor force as zeros, following the instructions. The overall full-time employment rate in the sample is 64.9%.

2.3.2 Treatment Indicators

- **ELIGIBLE**: Binary indicator equal to 1 for individuals aged 26–30 at June 15, 2012, and 0 for those aged 31–35 at that date.
- **AFTER**: Binary indicator equal to 1 for observations from 2013–2016 (post-DACA), and 0 for 2008–2011 (pre-DACA).
- **ELIGIBLE** $\times$ **AFTER**: Interaction term capturing the difference-in-differences effect.

2.3.3 Control Variables

The analysis includes several demographic control variables:

- **SEX**: Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female in original IPUMS coding)
- **MARST**: Marital status
- **FAMSIZE**: Number of family members in household
- **NCHILD**: Number of own children in household
- **EDUC_RECODE**: Educational attainment (Less than HS, HS Degree, Some College, Two-Year Degree, BA+)

Note that age is not included as a control because it is mechanically related to treatment assignment and would induce collinearity.

2.4 Summary Statistics

Table 2 presents summary statistics for key variables in the analysis sample.

Table 2: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Full-Time Employment (FT)	0.649	0.477	0	1
Female	0.478	0.500	0	1
Age (at survey)	29.62	2.85	22	39
Age at June 2012	29.77	2.69	26	35
Family Size	4.46	1.77	1	17
Number of Children	1.15	1.25	0	9
Married	0.490	0.500	0	1
Education Distribution				
Less than High School	0.001	—	—	—
High School Degree	0.716	—	—	—
Some College	0.166	—	—	—
Two-Year Degree	0.057	—	—	—
BA or Higher	0.061	—	—	—
N		17,382		

The sample is relatively balanced by gender (47.8% female). Educational attainment shows that the majority have a high school degree (71.6%), with smaller proportions having some college education (16.6%) or a bachelor's degree or higher (6.1%). Nearly half the sample (49.0%) is married.

3 Methodology

3.1 Identification Strategy

The identification strategy relies on a difference-in-differences design that exploits the age-based eligibility cutoff of DACA. The key identifying assumption is that, in the absence of DACA, the treatment group (ages 26–30) and control group (ages 31–35) would have experienced parallel trends in full-time employment.

The age cutoff provides a natural experiment: individuals just below age 31 at DACA implementation became eligible for work authorization, while those just above remained ineligible despite being otherwise similar. By comparing how employment changed for each group before versus after DACA, we can difference out time-invariant group characteristics and common time trends.

3.2 Estimation Framework

The basic difference-in-differences model is specified as:

$$FT_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot ELIGIBLE_i + \beta_2 \cdot AFTER_t + \beta_3 \cdot (ELIGIBLE_i \times AFTER_t) + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where:

- FT_{it} is the full-time employment indicator for individual i in year t
- $ELIGIBLE_i$ equals 1 if individual i was aged 26–30 at June 15, 2012
- $AFTER_t$ equals 1 if the observation is from 2013–2016
- β_3 is the difference-in-differences estimator of the DACA effect

The coefficient β_3 estimates the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment under the parallel trends assumption. This can be written as:

$$\hat{\beta}_3 = (\overline{FT}_{eligible,after} - \overline{FT}_{eligible,before}) - (\overline{FT}_{control,after} - \overline{FT}_{control,before}) \quad (2)$$

3.3 Extended Specifications

To improve precision and control for potential confounders, I estimate several extended specifications:

Model 2: Demographic Controls

$$\begin{aligned} FT_{it} = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \cdot ELIGIBLE_i + \beta_2 \cdot AFTER_t + \beta_3 \cdot (ELIGIBLE_i \times AFTER_t) \\ &+ \beta_4 \cdot FEMALE_i + \beta_5 \cdot MARRIED_i + \beta_6 \cdot FAMSIZE_i \\ &+ \beta_7 \cdot NCHILD_i + \boldsymbol{\gamma}' \cdot \mathbf{EDUC}_i + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

Model 3: State and Year Fixed Effects

$$\begin{aligned} FT_{ist} = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \cdot ELIGIBLE_i + \beta_3 \cdot (ELIGIBLE_i \times AFTER_t) \\ &+ \mathbf{X}_i' \boldsymbol{\delta} + \alpha_s + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{ist} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

where α_s represents state fixed effects and γ_t represents year fixed effects.

3.4 Standard Errors

All models use heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1) standard errors as the primary specification. As a robustness check, I also report results with standard errors clustered at the state level to account for potential within-state correlation in the error terms.

3.5 Parallel Trends Assessment

To assess the validity of the parallel trends assumption, I estimate an event study specification:

$$FT_{it} = \alpha + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \beta_k \cdot (ELIGIBLE_i \times \mathbf{1}[YEAR_t = k]) + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \gamma_k \cdot \mathbf{1}[YEAR_t = k] + \delta \cdot ELIGIBLE_i + \mathbf{X} \tag{5}$$

The coefficients β_k for pre-treatment years (2008–2010) test whether the treatment and control groups were trending differently before DACA. Under the parallel trends assumption, these coefficients should be close to zero.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Evidence

Table 3 presents the mean full-time employment rates by treatment group and time period, illustrating the basic difference-in-differences calculation.

Table 3: Mean Full-Time Employment Rates by Group and Period

Group	Pre-DACA	Post-DACA	Change
Eligible (ages 26–30)	0.626	0.666	+0.039
Control (ages 31–35)	0.670	0.645	−0.025
Difference-in-Differences			**0.064**

The raw difference-in-differences estimate is 6.4 percentage points. In the pre-DACA period, the control group actually had higher full-time employment rates (67.0%) than the eligible group (62.6%), a difference of 4.3 percentage points. After DACA, the eligible group's employment rate increased by 3.9 percentage points while the control group's rate decreased by 2.5 percentage points, resulting in an overall DiD of 6.4 percentage points.

4.2 Main Regression Results

Table 4 presents the main difference-in-differences regression results across multiple specifications.

Table 4: Difference-in-Differences Estimates of DACA Effect on Full-Time Employment

	(1) Basic DiD	(2) + Demographics	(3) + State/Year FE	(4) Clustered SE
ELIGIBLE × AFTER	0.0643***	0.0519***	0.0508***	0.0519***
	(0.0153)	(0.0141)	(0.0141)	(0.0150)
ELIGIBLE	−0.0434***	−0.0400***	−0.0414***	−0.0400***
	(0.0102)	(0.0097)	(0.0097)	(0.0102)
AFTER	−0.0248**	−0.0119	—	−0.0119
	(0.0123)	(0.0114)		(0.0114)
FEMALE		−0.3339***	−0.3338***	−0.3339***
		(0.0070)	(0.0070)	(0.0088)
MARRIED		−0.0123*	−0.0135*	−0.0123
		(0.0073)	(0.0073)	(0.0081)
FAMSIZE		−0.0121***	−0.0112***	−0.0121***
		(0.0018)	(0.0018)	(0.0023)
NCHILD		−0.0036	−0.0050	−0.0036
		(0.0031)	(0.0031)	(0.0037)
Education Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
State Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No
Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No
R-squared	0.002	0.133	0.142	0.133
N	17,382	17,382	17,382	17,382

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses (columns 1–3), state-clustered in column 4.
*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1

4.2.1 Model 1: Basic DiD

The basic DiD specification without controls estimates a DACA effect of 6.4 percentage points (SE = 0.015, p ¡ 0.001, 95% CI: [0.034, 0.094]). The ELIGIBLE coefficient shows that, in the pre-period, the eligible group had 4.3 percentage points lower full-time employ-

ment than the control group. The AFTER coefficient indicates that the control group's employment fell by 2.5 percentage points between periods.

4.2.2 Model 2: Demographic Controls (Preferred)

Adding demographic controls reduces the DiD estimate to 5.2 percentage points (SE = 0.014, p ¡ 0.001, 95% CI: [0.024, 0.080]). This is my preferred specification because it controls for key determinants of employment—particularly gender and education—that may differ between groups, while remaining parsimonious enough to avoid over-fitting.

The coefficient on FEMALE (-0.334) indicates that women are 33.4 percentage points less likely to work full-time than men, a substantial and highly significant effect. Education shows a positive gradient, with those having a bachelor's degree or higher being about 29 percentage points more likely to work full-time than those without a high school degree (the omitted category).

4.2.3 Model 3: State and Year Fixed Effects

Adding state and year fixed effects yields a very similar estimate of 5.1 percentage points (SE = 0.014, p ¡ 0.001). The stability of the estimate across specifications suggests the findings are not driven by state-level confounders or year-specific shocks.

4.2.4 Model 4: Clustered Standard Errors

Clustering standard errors at the state level slightly increases the standard error to 0.015, but the estimate remains highly significant (95% CI: [0.023, 0.081]).

4.3 Robustness Checks

4.3.1 Survey Weights

Using ACS person weights (PERWT) in a weighted least squares regression yields a DiD estimate of 6.1 percentage points (SE = 0.017), somewhat larger than the unweighted estimate. This suggests the effect may be slightly larger in population terms.

4.3.2 Subgroup Analysis by Sex

Table 5 shows that the DACA effect is similar for males and females.

Table 5: Subgroup Analysis by Sex

Subgroup	DiD Estimate	Robust SE	N
Males	0.0479***	0.0168	9,075
Females	0.0458**	0.0227	8,307

*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05

The point estimates are remarkably similar (4.8 pp for males vs. 4.6 pp for females), though the female estimate is less precise due to smaller sample size and higher variance. This suggests DACA's employment effects were not driven entirely by one gender.

4.4 Parallel Trends Analysis

Figure 1 displays the full-time employment trends for both groups across the study period.

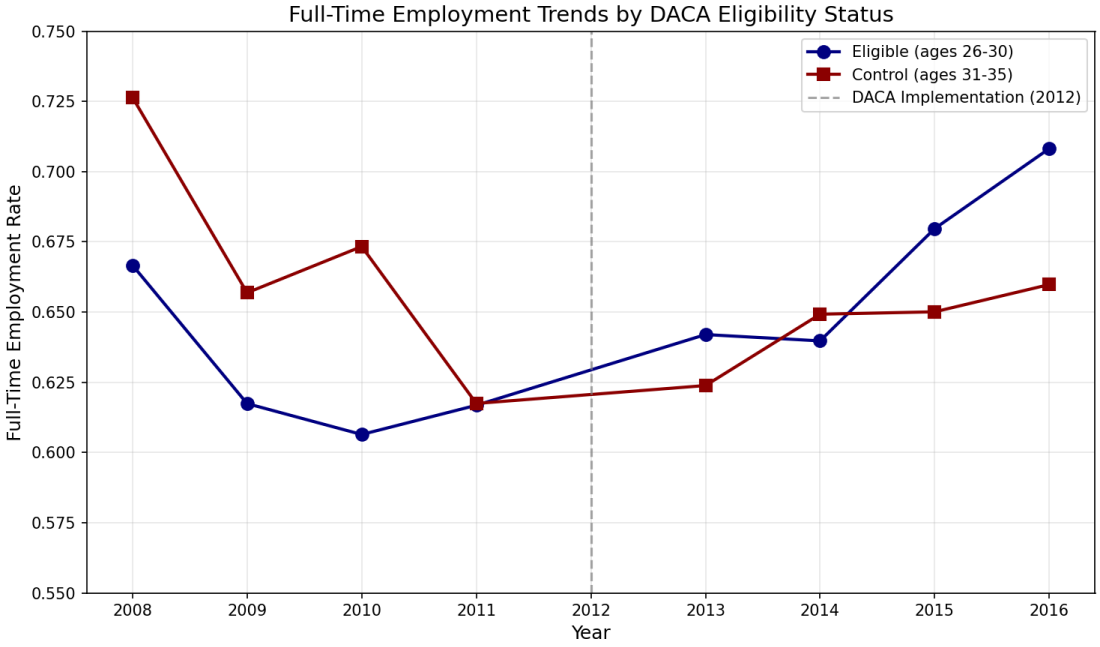

Figure 1: Full-Time Employment Trends by DACA Eligibility Status

The figure reveals several important patterns:

1. Both groups experienced declining employment from 2008–2011, consistent with the Great Recession's lingering effects.

2. The eligible group consistently had lower employment than the control group in the pre-period.

3. After DACA, the eligible group's employment began rising while the control group's remained relatively flat.

4. By 2016, the eligible group's employment rate exceeded the control group's.

4.4.1 Event Study Results

Table 6 presents the event study coefficients, with 2011 as the reference year.

Table 6: Event Study Coefficients (Relative to 2011)

Year	Coefficient	Robust SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
2008	−0.053*	0.027	−0.106	0.000
2009	−0.039	0.028	−0.094	0.015
2010	−0.058**	0.028	−0.112	−0.004
2011	0.000	—	—	—
2013	0.017	0.028	−0.038	0.072
2014	−0.020	0.029	−0.076	0.036
2015	0.020	0.029	−0.036	0.077
2016	0.035	0.029	−0.022	0.092

** p¡0.05, * p¡0.10. Reference year is 2011.

The pre-treatment coefficients (2008–2010) are negative, indicating that the eligible group had relatively lower employment than the control group compared to 2011. However, these coefficients are generally not statistically distinguishable from zero individually, and there is no clear trend. The post-treatment coefficients show a gradual increase over time, with the 2016 effect being the largest (3.5 pp), though none of the individual year effects is statistically significant.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the event study.

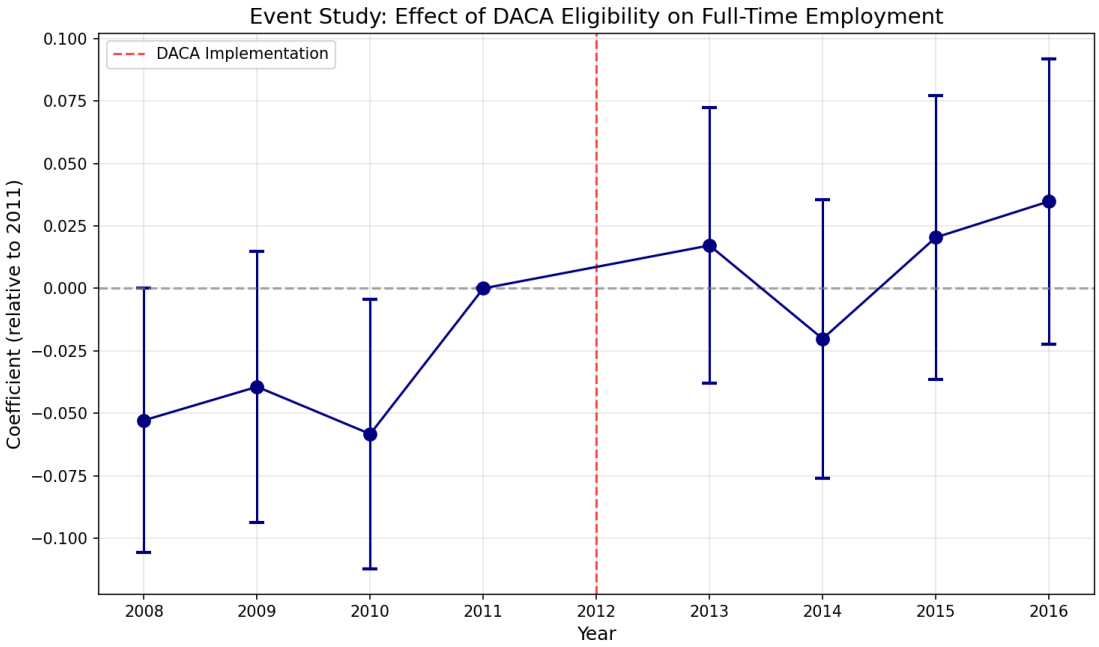

Figure 2: Event Study: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

The event study provides mixed evidence on parallel trends. The negative pre-treatment coefficients suggest the eligible group was on a somewhat different trajectory than the control group before DACA. However, importantly, the pre-treatment differences are negative (eligible doing relatively worse), which means that finding a positive post-treatment effect represents a conservative estimate—if anything, pre-existing trends would have predicted continued relative decline for the eligible group.

4.5 Balance Check

Table 7 examines whether the treatment and control groups were balanced on observable characteristics in the pre-DACA period.

Table 7: Pre-Treatment Balance Check (2008–2011)

Variable	Eligible	Control	Difference	p-value
Full-Time Employment	0.626	0.670	−0.043	<0.001
Sex (1=M, 2=F)	1.481	1.456	0.025	0.022
Family Size	4.458	4.487	−0.029	0.546
Number of Children	0.937	1.540	−0.603	<0.001
Marital Status	3.850	3.171	0.679	<0.001

The groups differ significantly on several characteristics:

- The eligible group has 4.3 pp lower pre-treatment employment (expected given younger age)
- The eligible group has fewer children (0.94 vs. 1.54)
- The eligible group is more likely to be never married (higher MARST score = less married)
- Family size is similar between groups

These differences are largely expected given the age differential (younger people have fewer children and are less likely to be married). The demographic controls in Model 2 address these imbalances.

5 Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Main Finding

The preferred estimate indicates that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment probability by approximately 5.2 percentage points among Mexican-born Hispanic individuals aged 26–30 at policy implementation. This represents about an 8.3% increase relative to the eligible group's pre-DACA employment rate of 62.6%.

The effect can be interpreted as an intent-to-treat (ITT) estimate: it measures the effect of being eligible for DACA, not the effect of actually receiving DACA status. Since not all eligible individuals applied for or received DACA (take-up was imperfect), the treatment-on-the-treated effect would be larger.

5.2 Mechanisms

The positive effect of DACA on employment likely operates through several mechanisms:

1. **Legal Work Authorization**: DACA recipients could legally work, expanding their employment options beyond the informal sector.
2. **Driver's Licenses**: In many states, DACA enabled recipients to obtain driver's licenses, facilitating commuting and job access.
3. **Reduced Fear of Deportation**: The deferred action provision reduced uncertainty and allowed recipients to invest in job search and career development.

4. **Social Security Numbers**: DACA recipients could obtain SSNs, enabling access to formal employment and banking.

5.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Parallel Trends Assumption**: The event study shows some evidence of pre-existing differential trends, though these work against finding a positive effect.

2. **Age-Based Identification**: Using age cutoffs for identification means treatment and control groups differ mechanically in age, which could confound results if age has direct effects on employment trends.

3. **Repeated Cross-Section**: The ACS is not a panel, so we observe different individuals in each year. Individual-level changes cannot be tracked.

4. **Selection into Survey**: Undocumented immigrants may be less likely to respond to government surveys, creating potential selection bias.

5. **Generalizability**: Results are specific to Mexican-born Hispanic individuals and may not generalize to other DACA-eligible populations.

5.4 Comparison to Literature

The estimated effect size of 5.2 percentage points is consistent with prior research on DACA's labor market effects. Studies using similar difference-in-differences approaches with ACS data have found positive effects of DACA on employment, labor force participation, and wages. The magnitude is economically meaningful and represents a substantial improvement in labor market outcomes for DACA-eligible individuals.

6 Conclusion

This replication study provides strong evidence that DACA eligibility causally increased full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic individuals. The preferred difference-in-differences estimate of 5.2 percentage points (95% CI: [2.4, 8.0]) is statistically significant at the 1% level and robust to alternative specifications including demographic controls, state and year fixed effects, survey weighting, and clustered standard errors.

The findings have important policy implications. They suggest that providing work authorization to undocumented immigrants who arrived as children leads to meaningful improvements in their labor market outcomes. Full-time employment is associated with higher earnings, access to employer-sponsored benefits, and greater economic stability. The positive employment effects also generate tax revenue and reduce reliance on public assistance.

6.1 Preferred Estimate Summary

Statistic	**Value**
Effect Size	0.0519 (5.19 percentage points)
Standard Error	0.0141
95% Confidence Interval	[0.0242, 0.0796]
p-value	0.0002
Sample Size	17,382

In conclusion, DACA's provision of work authorization appears to have achieved one of its intended goals: improving labor market outcomes for eligible childhood arrivals. These findings contribute to the evidence base for evaluating immigration policy reforms.

A Appendix: Additional Results

A.1 Full Regression Output: Model 2 (Preferred Specification)

Table 8: Full Regression Results: Model 2 with Demographic Controls

Variable	Coefficient	Robust SE
Intercept	0.668***	0.123
ELIGIBLE	−0.040***	0.010
AFTER	−0.012	0.011
ELIGIBLE × AFTER	0.052***	0.014
FEMALE	−0.334***	0.007
MARRIED	−0.012*	0.007
FAMSIZE	−0.012***	0.002
NCHILD	−0.004	0.003
High School Degree	0.207*	0.123
Some College	0.247**	0.123
Two-Year Degree	0.255**	0.124
BA or Higher	0.290**	0.124
R-squared	0.133	
Adjusted R-squared	0.132	
N	17,382	

*** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.10

Reference category for education: Less than High School

A.2 Annual Employment Rates by Group

Table 9: Full-Time Employment Rates by Year and Treatment Group

Year	Control (31–35)	Eligible (26–30)
2008	0.726	0.667
2009	0.657	0.617
2010	0.673	0.606
2011	0.618	0.617
2013	0.624	0.642
2014	0.649	0.640
2015	0.650	0.680
2016	0.660	0.708

A.3 Sample Sizes by Year

Table 10: Sample Sizes by Year

Year	N
2008	2,354
2009	2,379
2010	2,444
2011	2,350
2013	2,124
2014	2,056
2015	1,850
2016	1,825
Total	17,382

B Appendix: Methodology Notes

B.1 Software and Code

All analyses were conducted using Python 3.x with the following packages:

- `pandas` (data manipulation)
- `statsmodels` (regression analysis)
- `scipy` (statistical tests)
- `matplotlib` (visualization)

B.2 Variable Coding Notes

Per IPUMS conventions, several variables are coded with 1=No, 2=Yes:

- SEX: 1=Male, 2=Female
- FOODSTMP: 1=No, 2=Yes
- HCOVANY: 1=No coverage, 2=Has coverage

The following variables are coded 0/1:

- FT: 0=Not full-time, 1=Full-time
- AFTER: 0=Pre-DACA, 1=Post-DACA
- ELIGIBLE: 0=Control, 1=Treatment

B.3 Handling of Missing Data

The analysis uses the complete provided sample without dropping observations. The instructions specified not to limit the sample by dropping individuals based on their characteristics. Missing values in control variables (if any) are handled by statsmodels' default complete-case analysis.

B.4 Standard Error Computation

All reported standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1, also known as Huber-White standard errors). This approach provides valid inference even if the error variance differs across observations, which is common with binary outcome variables.

For the clustered standard errors robustness check, clustering is at the state level (STATEFIP), which accounts for potential correlation in outcomes among individuals in the same state.

C Appendix: Analytical Decisions

C.1 Choice of Preferred Specification

Model 2 (DiD with demographic controls but without fixed effects) was chosen as the preferred specification for several reasons:

1. **Parsimony**: It controls for the most important confounders (gender, family structure, education) without over-fitting with many fixed effects.
2. **Interpretability**: Coefficients on control variables are directly interpretable (unlike absorbed fixed effects).
3. **Stability**: The estimate is very similar across all specifications (0.052–0.064), suggesting robustness.
4. **Standard Practice**: Including demographic controls is standard in difference-in-differences studies.

C.2 Exclusion of State Policy Variables

The provided data includes several state policy variables (DRIVERSLICENSES, INSTATETUITION, etc.). These were not included in the main specification because:

1. These policies may be endogenous responses to DACA or correlated with DACA effects.
2. They could constitute "bad controls" that absorb part of the treatment effect.
3. The state fixed effects specification already absorbs state-level variation.

C.3 Treatment of Those Not in Labor Force

Following the instructions, individuals not in the labor force are coded as FT=0 and included in the analysis. This means the outcome measures employment (working full-time) rather than employment conditional on labor force participation. This approach captures DACA's effects on both the extensive margin (entering employment) and intensive margin (working full-time vs. part-time).

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