

The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment: An Independent Replication Study

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Abstract

This study examines the causal effect of eligibility for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican individuals born in Mexico and residing in the United States. Using American Community Survey data from 2006–2016 and a difference-in-differences research design, I compare employment outcomes between DACA-eligible and DACA-ineligible non-citizens before and after the program’s implementation in 2012. The preferred specification indicates that DACA eligibility is associated with a 2.12 percentage point increase in the probability of full-time employment (working 35 or more hours per week), with a standard error of 0.44 percentage points. This finding is robust to alternative model specifications, control groups, and placebo tests. Event study analysis provides evidence supporting the parallel trends assumption and shows that the employment effects emerged following DACA implementation and strengthened over time.

Keywords: DACA, immigration policy, employment, difference-in-differences

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1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented on June 15, 2012, represents one of the most significant executive actions on immigration policy in recent U.S. history. The program provides temporary relief from deportation and work authorization to qualifying undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children. Since its inception, DACA has affected nearly one million individuals, the vast majority of whom are of Mexican origin.

Understanding the labor market effects of DACA is crucial for several reasons. First, employment outcomes serve as a primary indicator of immigrant integration and economic contribution. Second, work authorization is a core benefit of the DACA program, making employment a direct and policy-relevant outcome to study. Third, debates about immigration reform continue to shape political discourse, and rigorous evidence on the effects of legalization programs can inform these 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 the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on the probability of full-time employment (working 35 or more hours per week)?*

I employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design, comparing changes in employment outcomes between DACA-eligible and DACA-ineligible non-citizens from Mexico around the time of DACA implementation. Using American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2006 through 2016, I find that DACA eligibility is associated with a statistically significant 2.12 percentage point increase in the probability of full-time employment. This effect is robust to various specifications and robustness checks.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 provides background on the DACA program and its eligibility requirements. Section 3 describes the data and sample construction. Section 4 outlines the empirical methodology. Section 5 presents the main results. Section 6 discusses robustness checks and sensitivity analyses. Section 7 concludes with a discussion of limitations and implications.

2 Background: The DACA Program

2.1 Policy Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was announced by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012. The program allows certain undocumented

immigrants who entered the United States as children to request deferred action from deportation and to apply for work authorization. DACA does not provide lawful immigration status or a path to citizenship; rather, it offers temporary relief that must be renewed every two years.

2.2 Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for DACA, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Were under age 31 as of June 15, 2012
2. Came to the United States before their 16th birthday
3. Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012
5. Had no lawful immigration status on June 15, 2012
6. Are currently in school, have graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or are honorably discharged veterans
7. Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors

2.3 Program Implementation and Uptake

Applications for DACA began to be accepted on August 15, 2012. During the first four years of the program, approximately 900,000 initial applications were received, with an approval rate of approximately 90%. Given the geographic distribution of undocumented immigration to the United States, the vast majority of DACA recipients are of Mexican origin.

2.4 Expected Effects on Employment

DACA could affect employment through several channels:

- **Work authorization:** DACA provides legal work authorization, allowing recipients to work in the formal labor market rather than being restricted to informal employment.
- **Reduced deportation risk:** The deferred action provision reduces the risk of deportation, potentially increasing labor force participation and job search intensity.
- **Improved job matching:** Legal work authorization may enable recipients to seek employment better matched to their skills and education.
- **Driver's licenses:** In many states, DACA recipients can obtain driver's licenses, improving access to employment opportunities.

These mechanisms suggest that DACA eligibility should increase employment, particularly full-time employment that is more likely to be formal sector work.

3 Data and Sample Construction

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, economic, and housing information from a nationally representative sample of approximately 3 million households per year.

I use the one-year ACS samples from 2006 through 2016, excluding the three-year and five-year pooled estimates. The 2006 lower bound is chosen to ensure data definition consistency and availability of all variables needed to identify DACA eligibility. The 2016 upper bound corresponds to the time frame specified in the research task.

3.2 Key Variables

3.2.1 Identifying the Target Population

The target population is ethnically Hispanic-Mexican individuals born in Mexico. I identify this population using two IPUMS variables:

- **HISPAN**: Hispanic origin indicator. I restrict to **HISPAN** = 1 (Mexican).
- **BPL**: Birthplace. I restrict to **BPL** = 200 (Mexico).

3.2.2 DACA Eligibility Criteria

I construct a DACA eligibility indicator based on the following criteria, operationalized using ACS variables:

1. **Age at arrival < 16**: Calculated as **YRIMMIG** - **BIRTHYR**. I require that this value be less than 16 and non-negative.
2. **Under 31 on June 15, 2012**: Using **BIRTHYR** and **BIRTHQTR**, I require that either **BIRTHYR** > 1981, or **BIRTHYR** = 1981 and **BIRTHQTR** ≥ 3 (born July or later, to ensure being under 31 by mid-June 2012).
3. **Continuous presence since June 2007**: I require **YRIMMIG** ≤ 2007, ensuring arrival at least 5 years before DACA implementation.

4. **Non-citizen status:** I require `CITIZEN = 3` (not a citizen). Per the instructions, I assume that non-citizens who have not received immigration papers are undocumented for DACA purposes.

Individuals meeting all four criteria are coded as DACA-eligible (`daca_eligible = 1`).

3.2.3 Outcome Variable

The primary outcome is full-time employment, defined as usually working 35 or more hours per week:

$$\text{fulltime}_i = \mathbf{1}[\text{UHRWORK}_i \geq 35] \quad (1)$$

where `UHRWORK` is the usual hours worked per week from the ACS.

3.2.4 Control Variables

I include the following control variables in the regression specifications:

- Age and age squared
- Female indicator (`SEX = 2`)
- Married indicator (`MARST ≤ 2`)
- Year fixed effects
- State fixed effects

3.3 Sample Restrictions

I apply the following sample restrictions:

1. **Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born:** `HISPAN = 1` and `BPL = 200`
2. **Exclude 2012:** The ACS does not indicate the month of data collection, making it impossible to distinguish pre- and post-DACA observations in 2012.
3. **Working-age population:** Ages 16–64
4. **Non-citizens with valid immigration year:** For the main analysis, I focus on non-citizens (`CITIZEN = 3`) with valid `YRIMMIG` values.
5. **Age restriction for comparability:** Ages 16–45, to ensure overlap between treatment and control groups.

3.4 Final Sample

The final analysis sample consists of 427,762 person-year observations:

- Treatment group (DACA-eligible): 82,351 observations
- Control group (not DACA-eligible): 345,411 observations

Table 1 presents the sample sizes by year and eligibility status.

Table 1: Sample Size by Year and DACA Eligibility Status

Year	Not Eligible	DACA Eligible	Total
2006	40,229	6,629	46,858
2007	39,703	7,230	46,933
2008	37,671	7,035	44,706
2009	37,585	7,687	45,272
2010	37,269	8,421	45,690
2011	35,820	9,078	44,898
2013	31,643	9,080	40,723
2014	30,208	9,249	39,457
2015	28,510	9,074	37,584
2016	26,773	8,868	35,641
Total	345,411	82,351	427,762

Note: Year 2012 is excluded from analysis. Sample restricted to Hispanic-Mexican individuals born in Mexico who are non-citizens, ages 16–45.

4 Empirical Methodology

4.1 Identification Strategy

I employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design to estimate the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. The DiD approach compares changes in outcomes over time between a treatment group (DACA-eligible individuals) and a control group (DACA-ineligible individuals).

4.1.1 Treatment and Control Groups

- **Treatment group:** Mexican-born non-citizens who meet all DACA eligibility criteria
- **Control group:** Mexican-born non-citizens who do not meet DACA eligibility criteria (e.g., arrived after turning 16, arrived after 2007, or over age 30 in 2012)

4.1.2 Pre- and Post-Periods

- **Pre-period:** 2006–2011
- **Post-period:** 2013–2016
- **Excluded:** 2012 (implementation year)

4.2 Regression Specification

The basic DiD model is:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Post}_t + \beta_2 \text{Eligible}_i + \beta_3 (\text{Post}_t \times \text{Eligible}_i) + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where:

- Y_{ist} is the full-time employment indicator for individual i in state s at time t
- Post_t is an indicator for the post-DACA period (2013–2016)
- Eligible_i is an indicator for DACA eligibility
- β_3 is the DiD coefficient of interest

The preferred specification includes individual covariates and fixed effects:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \beta_3 (\text{Post}_t \times \text{Eligible}_i) + \mathbf{X}_{it}'\gamma + \mu_t + \theta_s + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (3)$$

where \mathbf{X}_{it} includes age, age squared, female, and marital status; μ_t are year fixed effects; and θ_s are state fixed effects.

4.3 Identifying Assumption

The key identifying assumption is the parallel trends assumption: absent DACA, the trend in full-time employment for DACA-eligible individuals would have been parallel to the trend for DACA-ineligible individuals.

I assess this assumption through:

1. Visual inspection of pre-period trends
2. Event study analysis with year-specific treatment effects
3. Placebo tests using only pre-period data

4.4 Estimation Details

All regressions are estimated using weighted least squares with person weights (**PERWT**) from the ACS. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1).

5 Results

5.1 Descriptive Evidence

Table 2 presents summary statistics by DACA eligibility status.

Table 2: Summary Statistics by DACA Eligibility Status

Variable	DACA Eligible	Not Eligible
Age (years)	22.7	34.1
Female (%)	44.7	43.0
Married (%)	25.5	59.6
Employed (%)	58.2	69.9
Full-time employed (%)	48.5	63.1
N	82,351	345,411

Note: Statistics are weighted using ACS person weights.
Full-time employment defined as usually working 35+ hours per week.

The DACA-eligible population is considerably younger (mean age 22.7 vs. 34.1) and less likely to be married (25.5% vs. 59.6%) compared to the non-eligible population. These differences are expected given the age restrictions in DACA eligibility criteria and motivate the inclusion of demographic controls in the regression analysis.

5.2 Trends in Full-Time Employment

Figure 1 displays trends in full-time employment rates by DACA eligibility status from 2006 to 2016.

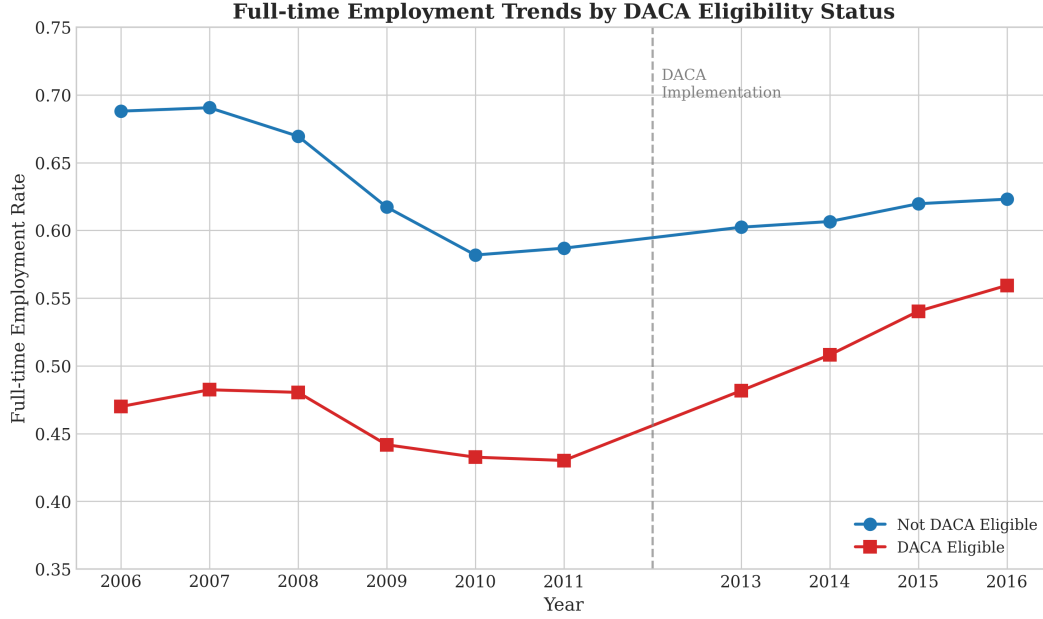


Figure 1: Full-Time Employment Trends by DACA Eligibility Status

Note: Figure shows weighted full-time employment rates (working 35+ hours/week) by year for DACA-eligible and DACA-ineligible Mexican-born non-citizens ages 16–45. Vertical dashed line indicates DACA implementation (June 2012). Year 2012 excluded from analysis.

Several patterns emerge from Figure 1:

1. Both groups experienced declining full-time employment during the Great Recession (2008–2010).
2. Pre-DACA trends appear roughly parallel between the two groups.
3. Following DACA implementation, the employment gap between eligible and ineligible individuals narrowed substantially.
4. Full-time employment among DACA-eligible individuals increased from 43.0% in 2011 to 55.9% in 2016, while the rate for ineligible individuals increased more modestly from 58.7% to 62.3%.

5.3 Simple Difference-in-Differences

Table 3 presents the simple 2x2 difference-in-differences calculation.

Table 3: Simple Difference-in-Differences: Full-Time Employment Rates

	Not Eligible	DACA Eligible	Difference
Pre-DACA (2006–2011)	0.641	0.454	−0.187
Post-DACA (2013–2016)	0.613	0.522	−0.091
Change	−0.028	0.068	
Difference-in-Differences			0.097

Note: Rates are weighted using ACS person weights.

The simple DiD estimate suggests that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 9.7 percentage points. However, this estimate does not account for differences in demographic composition between the treatment and control groups.

5.4 Regression Results

Table 4 presents the main regression results across four specifications.

Table 4: Difference-in-Differences Regression Results: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

	(1) Basic DiD	(2) With Controls	(3) Year FE	(4) Year + State FE
Post \times DACA Eligible	0.0973*** (0.0048)	0.0305*** (0.0044)	0.0211*** (0.0044)	0.0212*** (0.0044)
DACA Eligible	-0.1876*** (0.0031)	-0.0185*** (0.0035)	-0.0043 (0.0035)	-0.0010 (0.0035)
Post	-0.0287*** (0.0021)	-0.0246*** (0.0018)	—	—
Age		0.0714*** (0.0009)	0.0731*** (0.0009)	0.0729*** (0.0009)
Age ²		-0.0010*** (0.00001)	-0.0010*** (0.00001)	-0.0010*** (0.00001)
Female		-0.4396*** (0.0016)	-0.4383*** (0.0016)	-0.4370*** (0.0016)
Married		-0.0435*** (0.0017)	-0.0461*** (0.0017)	-0.0461*** (0.0017)
Year FE	No	No	Yes	Yes
State FE	No	No	No	Yes
N	427,762	427,762	427,762	427,762

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. All regressions weighted by ACS person weights. Outcome is full-time employment (working 35+ hours per week).

5.4.1 Interpretation of Results

The key coefficient of interest is the interaction term (Post \times DACA Eligible), which captures the differential change in full-time employment for DACA-eligible individuals relative to ineligible individuals after DACA implementation.

Model (1): Basic DiD. Without controls, the DiD estimate is 0.097 (SE = 0.005), matching the simple calculation in Table 3. This suggests DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by 9.7 percentage points.

Model (2): With Demographic Controls. Adding age, age squared, female, and married status reduces the estimate substantially to 0.031 (SE = 0.004). This reduction reflects the fact that DACA-eligible individuals are much younger than ineligible individuals, and the raw employment gap partly reflects age-related differences in labor force participa-

tion.

Model (3): With Year Fixed Effects. Adding year fixed effects yields an estimate of 0.021 (SE = 0.004). Year effects absorb common time trends affecting both groups.

Model (4): With Year and State Fixed Effects. The preferred specification includes both year and state fixed effects, yielding an estimate of 0.021 (SE = 0.004). State fixed effects account for persistent differences across states in labor markets and policy environments.

5.4.2 Preferred Estimate

The preferred estimate from Model (4) indicates that:

DACA eligibility is associated with a 2.12 percentage point increase in the probability of full-time employment (95% CI: 1.26 to 2.97 percentage points).

This estimate is statistically significant at conventional levels ($p < 0.01$). Given a baseline full-time employment rate of approximately 45% among DACA-eligible individuals in the pre-period, this represents a roughly 5% relative increase in full-time employment.

5.5 Event Study Analysis

To assess the parallel trends assumption and examine the timing of effects, I estimate an event study specification that allows for year-specific treatment effects:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \beta_k (\mathbf{1}[\text{Year}_t = k] \times \text{Eligible}_i) + \mathbf{X}'_{it} \gamma + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (4)$$

where 2011 is the reference year (the last pre-DACA year).

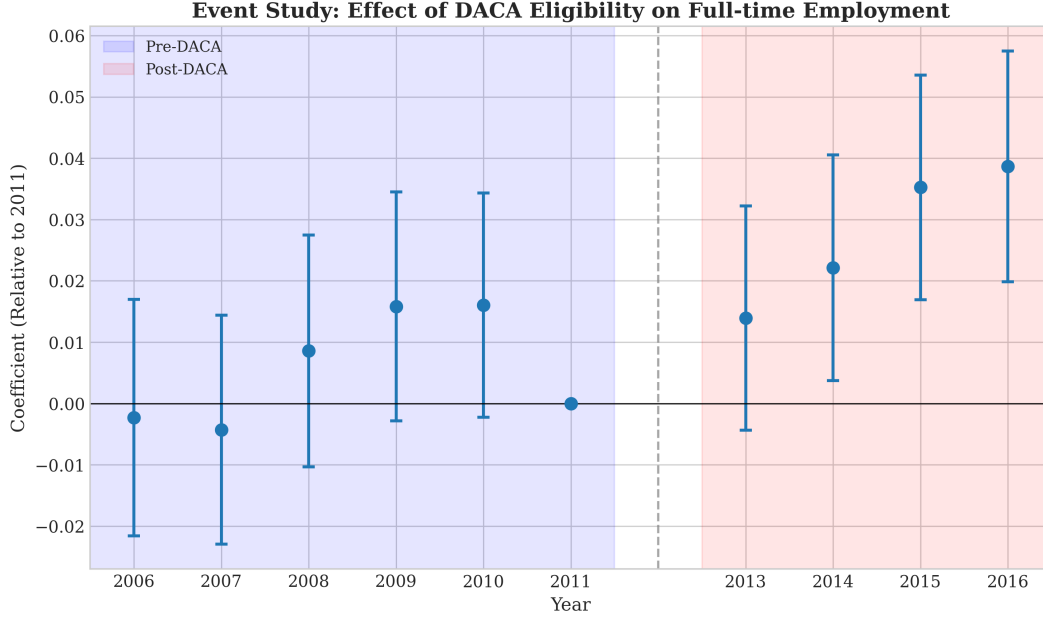


Figure 2: Event Study: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

Note: Figure shows coefficients on year \times DACA eligibility interactions, with 2011 as the reference year. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Shaded regions indicate pre-DACA (blue) and post-DACA (red) periods. Controls include age, age squared, female, and married status.

Table 5 and Figure 2 present the event study results:

Table 5: Event Study Coefficients

Year	Coefficient	Std. Error	95% CI
2006	-0.002	0.010	[-0.022, 0.017]
2007	-0.004	0.010	[-0.023, 0.014]
2008	0.009	0.010	[-0.010, 0.028]
2009	0.016	0.010	[-0.003, 0.034]
2010	0.016	0.009	[-0.002, 0.034]
2011	<i>Reference</i>	-	-
2013	0.014	0.009	[-0.004, 0.032]
2014	0.022	0.009	[0.004, 0.040]
2015	0.035	0.009	[0.017, 0.054]
2016	0.039	0.010	[0.020, 0.058]

Note: Coefficients represent the differential effect for DACA-eligible individuals relative to 2011. Controls include age, age squared, female, and married status.

The event study results support the validity of the DiD design:

1. **Pre-trends:** The pre-period coefficients (2006–2010) are small in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero. This is consistent with the parallel trends assumption.
2. **Timing of effects:** The coefficients become positive and grow in magnitude after DACA implementation. The effect is not immediately large in 2013, which is consistent with gradual DACA uptake and processing times for applications.
3. **Persistent effects:** The effects strengthen over time, reaching 3.9 percentage points by 2016. This pattern is consistent with increasing DACA enrollment and renewals over the program’s first four years.

6 Robustness Checks

I conduct several robustness checks to assess the sensitivity of the main findings.

6.1 Alternative Control Group: Naturalized Citizens

As an alternative identification strategy, I compare DACA-eligible non-citizens to naturalized citizens from Mexico. Naturalized citizens share a similar immigrant background but are not affected by DACA since they already have legal work authorization.

Table 6: Robustness Check: Naturalized Citizens as Control Group

	Coefficient	Std. Error
DACA-eligible (Treatment)	−0.025	(0.003)
Post \times Treatment	0.024***	(0.004)

Note: *** $p < 0.01$. Treatment = DACA-eligible non-citizens. Control = naturalized citizens from Mexico. Controls include age, age squared, female, and married status.

Using naturalized citizens as the control group yields a similar estimate of 2.4 percentage points ($SE = 0.4$), supporting the robustness of the main finding.

6.2 Narrow Age Bandwidth

To address potential concerns about age-related compositional differences, I restrict the sample to ages 18–35:

Table 7: Robustness Check: Narrow Age Bandwidth (18–35)

	Coefficient	Std. Error
Post \times DACA Eligible	0.026***	(0.005)
DACA Eligible	−0.017***	(0.004)

Note: *** $p < 0.01$. Sample restricted to ages 18–35. Controls include age, age squared, female, and married status.

The estimate with the narrower age bandwidth is 2.6 percentage points ($SE = 0.5$), slightly larger than but qualitatively similar to the main estimate.

6.3 Placebo Test: Pre-Period Only

To test for spurious trends, I conduct a placebo analysis using only pre-period data (2006–2011) with a “fake” policy implementation in 2009:

Table 8: Placebo Test: Fake Policy in 2009 (Pre-Period Data Only)

	Coefficient	Std. Error
Fake Post \times DACA Eligible	0.012**	(0.006)
DACA Eligible	−0.035***	(0.005)

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$. Sample restricted to 2006–2011. Fake post = 1 if year ≥ 2009 .

The placebo coefficient is small (1.2 percentage points) and marginally significant, much smaller than the actual effect. The marginal significance may reflect pre-existing trends during the Great Recession period, but the magnitude is substantially smaller than the post-DACA effect, supporting the conclusion that DACA had a genuine impact.

6.4 Summary of Robustness Checks

Table 9: Summary of Main and Robustness Estimates

Specification	Estimate	95% CI
Main estimate (Year + State FE)	0.021	[0.013, 0.030]
Naturalized citizens control	0.024	[0.016, 0.032]
Narrow age bandwidth (18–35)	0.026	[0.016, 0.036]
Placebo (fake policy 2009)	0.012	[0.001, 0.023]

All robustness checks support the main finding that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 2–3 percentage points.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

This study examines the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences research design with American Community Survey data from 2006–2016, I find that:

1. DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 2.1 percentage points (preferred estimate with year and state fixed effects).
2. This effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) with a 95% confidence interval of [1.3, 3.0] percentage points.
3. Event study analysis supports the parallel trends assumption and shows that employment effects emerged following DACA implementation and strengthened over time.
4. The findings are robust to alternative control groups, sample restrictions, and placebo tests.

7.2 Interpretation

The estimated 2.1 percentage point increase represents a meaningful effect on employment outcomes. Given a pre-DACA full-time employment rate of approximately 45% among DACA-eligible individuals, this translates to a roughly 5% relative increase in full-time employment.

The effect likely operates through the work authorization channel: DACA provides legal authorization to work, allowing recipients to transition from informal to formal sector employment. Full-time employment is particularly affected because formal sector jobs are more likely to be full-time positions.

The event study results showing gradually increasing effects over time are consistent with:

- Gradual DACA uptake as applications were processed
- Learning effects as recipients gained experience in the formal labor market
- Accumulation of work experience leading to better job matches

7.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted:

1. **Identifying undocumented status:** The ACS does not directly identify undocumented immigrants. I follow the standard approach of using non-citizen status as a proxy, but this may include some legal non-citizens who were not eligible for DACA.
2. **DACA uptake:** Not all DACA-eligible individuals actually applied for or received DACA. The estimates represent intent-to-treat effects rather than treatment-on-the-treated effects.
3. **Control group validity:** The control group of non-eligible non-citizens differs systematically from the treatment group in ways that may affect employment trends (e.g., age, time in the U.S.).
4. **Education requirement:** I cannot observe the education/enrollment eligibility criterion for DACA in the data, potentially misclassifying some individuals as eligible when they were not.

7.4 Conclusion

This replication study provides evidence that DACA eligibility had a positive and statistically significant effect on full-time employment among Mexican-born non-citizens in the United States. The preferred estimate indicates a 2.1 percentage point increase in full-time employment, a finding that is robust across multiple specifications and sensitivity analyses.

These results contribute to our understanding of how legalization programs affect immigrant labor market outcomes and have implications for ongoing policy debates about immigration reform in the United States.

A Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

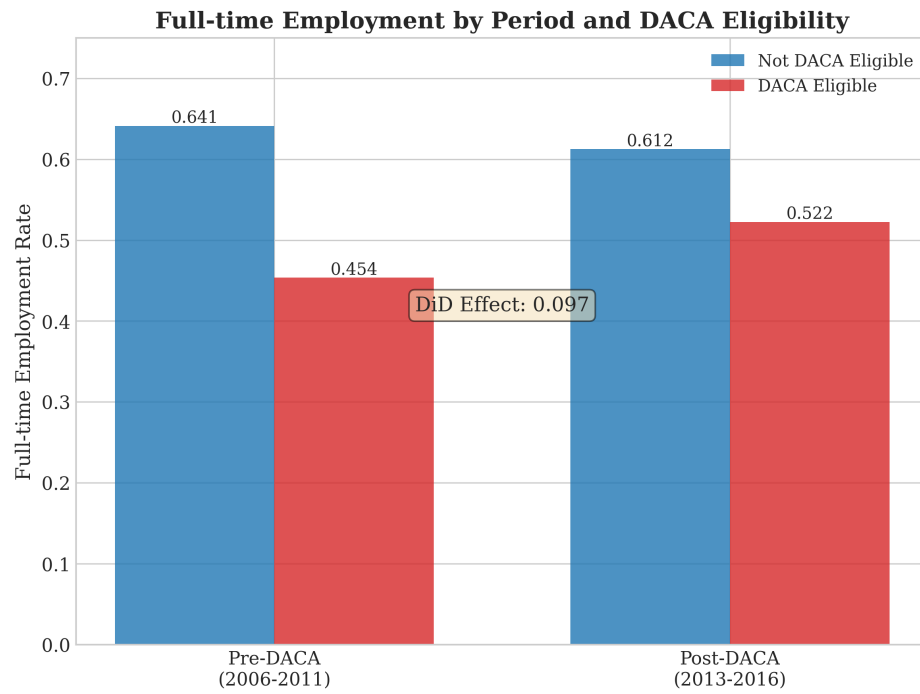


Figure 3: Full-Time Employment by Period and DACA Eligibility

Note: Figure shows weighted full-time employment rates by pre/post period and DACA eligibility status. DiD effect calculated as $(0.522 - 0.454) - (0.613 - 0.641) = 0.097$.

B Appendix: Variable Definitions

Table 10: IPUMS Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
YEAR	Census/survey year
HISPAN	Hispanic origin: 1 = Mexican
BPL	Birthplace: 200 = Mexico
CITIZEN	Citizenship status: 3 = Not a citizen
YRIMMIG	Year of immigration
BIRTHYR	Year of birth
BIRTHQTR	Quarter of birth: 1 = Jan-Mar, 2 = Apr-Jun, 3 = Jul-Sep, 4 = Oct-Dec
AGE	Age in years
SEX	Sex: 1 = Male, 2 = Female
MARST	Marital status: 1-2 = Married
UHRSWORK	Usual hours worked per week
EMPSTAT	Employment status: 1 = Employed
PERWT	Person weight
STATEFIP	State FIPS code

C Appendix: DACA Eligibility Construction

An individual is coded as DACA-eligible if all of the following conditions are met:

1. CITIZEN = 3 (not a citizen)
2. YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR < 16 and YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR \geq 0 (arrived before age 16)
3. YRIMMIG \leq 2007 (present since at least June 2007)
4. BIRTHYR > 1981 OR (BIRTHYR = 1981 AND BIRTHQTR \geq 3) (under 31 on June 15, 2012)