

Replication Study: The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment Among Mexican-Born Hispanic Individuals in the United States

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Abstract

This study replicates an analysis of the causal impact of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design that compares individuals aged 26-30 (eligible for DACA) to those aged 31-35 (ineligible due to age cutoff) before and after the program's implementation in 2012, I estimate that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 6.1 percentage points (95% CI: 2.8 to 9.3 percentage points, $p < 0.001$). This effect is robust across various model specifications including demographic controls, year fixed effects, and state fixed effects. Event study analysis shows no evidence of differential pre-trends, supporting the validity of the identification strategy.

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1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented on June 15, 2012, represented a significant policy intervention affecting undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children. The program allowed eligible individuals to apply for temporary relief from deportation and authorization to work legally in the United States for renewable two-year periods. Given the program's provision of legal work authorization, a natural question arises: did DACA eligibility increase employment rates among those who became eligible?

This replication 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 (treatment) on the probability of being employed full-time (outcome), defined as usually working 35 hours per week or more?

The identification strategy relies on the program's age eligibility cutoff. Individuals who had not yet reached their 31st birthday as of June 15, 2012 were eligible for the program, while those who were 31 or older on that date were not eligible, even if they otherwise met all other requirements. This creates a natural comparison group of individuals who are similar in many respects but were excluded from DACA benefits solely due to their age.

2 Background

2.1 DACA Program Overview

DACA was enacted by the U.S. federal government on June 15, 2012. The program allowed a selected set of undocumented immigrants who had arrived unlawfully in the U.S. to apply for and obtain authorization to work legally for two years without fear of deportation. Eligibility requirements included:

- Arrived unlawfully in the U.S. before their 16th birthday
- Had not yet had their 31st birthday as of June 15, 2012
- Lived continuously in the U.S. since June 15, 2007
- Were present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012 and did not have lawful status at that time

Applications began to be received on August 15, 2012, and in the first four years nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, approximately 90% of which were approved. While the program was not specific to immigrants from any origin country, the great majority of

eligible people were from Mexico due to the structure of undocumented immigration to the United States.

2.2 Expected Effects

The program's provision of legal work authorization is expected to have direct effects on employment. Without work authorization, undocumented immigrants face significant barriers to formal employment, including inability to provide required documentation to employers, risk of detection and deportation, and limitations on occupational choices. By removing these barriers, DACA could increase both the likelihood of employment and the quality of employment (e.g., formal sector jobs, full-time positions).

Additionally, DACA recipients could apply for driver's licenses in many states, further reducing barriers to employment that requires transportation. These combined effects suggest that DACA eligibility should increase employment rates among the eligible population.

3 Data

3.1 Data Source

The analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) as provided by IPUMS USA. The ACS is a large, nationally representative survey conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. The data include observations from 2008 through 2016, with 2012 omitted since it cannot be determined whether someone observed in 2012 is before or after DACA implementation.

3.2 Sample

The analytic sample consists of Mexican-born, ethnically Hispanic-Mexican individuals who meet certain criteria related to DACA eligibility (or would meet them if not for age). The sample has been pre-constructed to include:

- **Treatment group (ELIGIBLE = 1):** Individuals who were ages 26-30 at the time DACA went into effect (June 15, 2012)
- **Control group (ELIGIBLE = 0):** Individuals who were ages 31-35 at the time DACA went into effect

The total sample size is 17,382 observations. Table 1 shows the distribution of observations across groups and time periods.

Table 1: Sample Sizes by Treatment Group and Time Period

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

3.3 Key Variables

The key variables for the analysis are:

- **FT** (Outcome): Binary indicator equal to 1 if the individual works full-time (35+ hours per week), 0 otherwise. Those not in the labor force are included as 0 values.
- **ELIGIBLE** (Treatment): Binary indicator equal to 1 for individuals in the treatment group (ages 26-30 in June 2012), 0 for the control group (ages 31-35).
- **AFTER** (Post-treatment period): Binary indicator equal to 1 in years 2013-2016, 0 in years 2008-2011.
- **PERWT** (Survey weights): Person-level survey weights for population-representative estimates.

Additional control variables include sex, marital status, number of children, education level (recoded into categories), state of residence, and year.

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 Difference-in-Differences Design

The analysis employs a difference-in-differences (DiD) design to estimate the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. The key identifying assumption is that, in the absence of DACA, the treatment and control groups would have followed parallel trends in full-time employment.

The control group consists of individuals who would have been eligible for DACA except for being slightly too old (ages 31-35 instead of 26-30 at the time of implementation). This provides a natural comparison group that faced similar labor market conditions and has similar demographic characteristics to the treatment group.

4.2 Estimation

The main specification is a linear probability model:

$$FT_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ELIGIBLE_i + \beta_2 AFTER_t + \beta_3 (ELIGIBLE_i \times AFTER_t) + X'_i \gamma + \mu_s + \tau_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

where:

- FT_{ist} is the full-time employment indicator for individual i in state s and year t
- $ELIGIBLE_i$ indicates treatment group membership
- $AFTER_t$ indicates the post-DACA period
- β_3 is the difference-in-differences estimate of the causal effect
- X_i is a vector of individual-level controls (sex, marital status, number of children, education)
- μ_s are state fixed effects
- τ_t are year fixed effects
- ε_{ist} is the error term

The parameter of interest is β_3 , which captures the change in full-time employment for the treatment group relative to the control group, after DACA implementation relative to before.

All regressions are weighted using ACS person weights (PERWT) to obtain population-representative estimates. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1).

4.3 Identification Assumptions

The key identifying assumption for the difference-in-differences design is the parallel trends assumption: in the absence of DACA, the treatment and control groups would have followed parallel trends in full-time employment. This assumption requires that any unobserved factors affecting employment evolved similarly for both groups.

Several features of this study support the validity of the parallel trends assumption:

1. **Age-based cutoff:** The eligibility cutoff is based on age at a specific date, which is plausibly exogenous to other factors that might affect employment trends.

2. **Similar populations:** Both groups consist of Mexican-born, Hispanic individuals who likely would have been eligible for DACA except for their age at the cutoff date. They share similar immigration experiences, legal status, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
3. **Testable pre-trends:** The event study analysis allows us to test whether pre-treatment trends were parallel. Finding no significant differential trends in the pre-treatment period supports (though does not prove) the parallel trends assumption.

4.4 Potential Threats to Identification

Several potential threats to identification should be acknowledged:

1. **Age-related employment dynamics:** Employment patterns naturally vary with age due to life-cycle factors (career progression, family formation, etc.). If these dynamics differ between the treatment and control age groups in ways that changed around 2012, this could confound the treatment effect. The control for demographic variables (marriage, children) partially addresses this concern.
2. **Macroeconomic conditions:** The study period spans the recovery from the 2008-2009 Great Recession. If the recovery affected different age groups differently, this could bias the estimates. The year fixed effects control for aggregate time-varying factors, but not for age-specific macroeconomic effects.
3. **Spillover effects:** If DACA affected employment outcomes for the control group (e.g., through labor market competition), this could bias the DiD estimate. Such spillovers would likely lead to underestimation of the true effect if DACA increased competition for jobs.
4. **Measurement error in eligibility:** The ELIGIBLE variable is constructed based on age, but actual DACA eligibility depends on additional criteria (continuous residence, lawful status at arrival, etc.) that are not perfectly observed in the ACS. This means some individuals classified as eligible may not have actually been eligible, potentially attenuating the estimated effect.

5 Results

5.1 Summary Statistics

Table 2 presents summary statistics for key variables by treatment group and time period.

Table 2: Summary Statistics by Group and Period (Weighted)

	Treatment (26-30)		Control (31-35)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
N (unweighted)	6,233	5,149	3,294	2,706
N (weighted)	868,160	728,157	449,366	370,666
Full-time rate	0.637	0.686	0.689	0.663
Mean age	25.8	30.7	30.5	35.5
Female (%)	46.6	46.3	43.4	46.5
Married (%)	34.5	44.7	46.3	51.9
Mean children	0.90	1.44	1.47	1.83
HS degree (%)	70.9	70.4	74.3	75.5
Some college (%)	19.0	16.1	15.3	14.6
BA+ (%)	5.1	7.2	5.2	5.3

The treatment group has a lower pre-treatment full-time employment rate (63.7%) compared to the control group (68.9%), reflecting the younger age of the treatment group. However, after DACA implementation, the treatment group's full-time employment rate increases to 68.6%, while the control group's rate declines slightly to 66.3%.

5.2 Simple Difference-in-Differences

Before presenting regression results, Table 3 shows the simple 2x2 difference-in-differences calculation.

Table 3: Simple Difference-in-Differences (Unweighted)

	Pre-DACA	Post-DACA	Difference
Treatment (26-30)	0.6263	0.6658	+0.0394
Control (31-35)	0.6697	0.6449	-0.0248
Difference	-0.0434	+0.0209	0.0643

The simple DiD estimate is 6.43 percentage points, suggesting that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by about 6.4 percentage points.

5.3 Regression Results

Table 4 presents the difference-in-differences estimates from various model specifications.

Table 4: Difference-in-Differences Regression Results

	(1) Basic	(2) Weighted	(3) Controls	(4) Year FE	(5) State FE
ELIGIBLE × AFTER	0.0643*** (0.0153)	0.0748*** (0.0152)	0.0640*** (0.0142)	0.0613*** (0.0142)	0.0607*** (0.0166)
ELIGIBLE	-0.0434*** (0.0103)	-0.0517*** (0.0102)	-0.0503*** (0.0097)	-0.0477*** (0.0097)	—
AFTER	-0.0248** (0.0124)	-0.0257** (0.0124)	-0.0099 (0.0116)	—	—
Survey weights	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
State FE	No	No	No	No	Yes
Robust SE	No	No	No	No	Yes
N	17,382	17,382	17,382	17,382	17,382

Note: * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Standard errors in parentheses.

Demographics include sex, marital status, number of children, and education dummies.

The preferred specification is Model (5), which includes survey weights, demographic controls, year fixed effects, state fixed effects, and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. The estimated effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment is **6.07 percentage points** (SE = 0.0166, 95% CI: [2.81, 9.33], p < 0.001).

The estimate is remarkably stable across specifications, ranging from 6.07 to 7.48 percentage points. The inclusion of controls slightly reduces the estimate, while the use of survey weights increases it. Adding year and state fixed effects has minimal impact on the point estimate.

5.4 Event Study Analysis

To assess the validity of the parallel trends assumption, Figure 1 presents an event study that shows year-specific treatment effects relative to 2008 (the reference year).

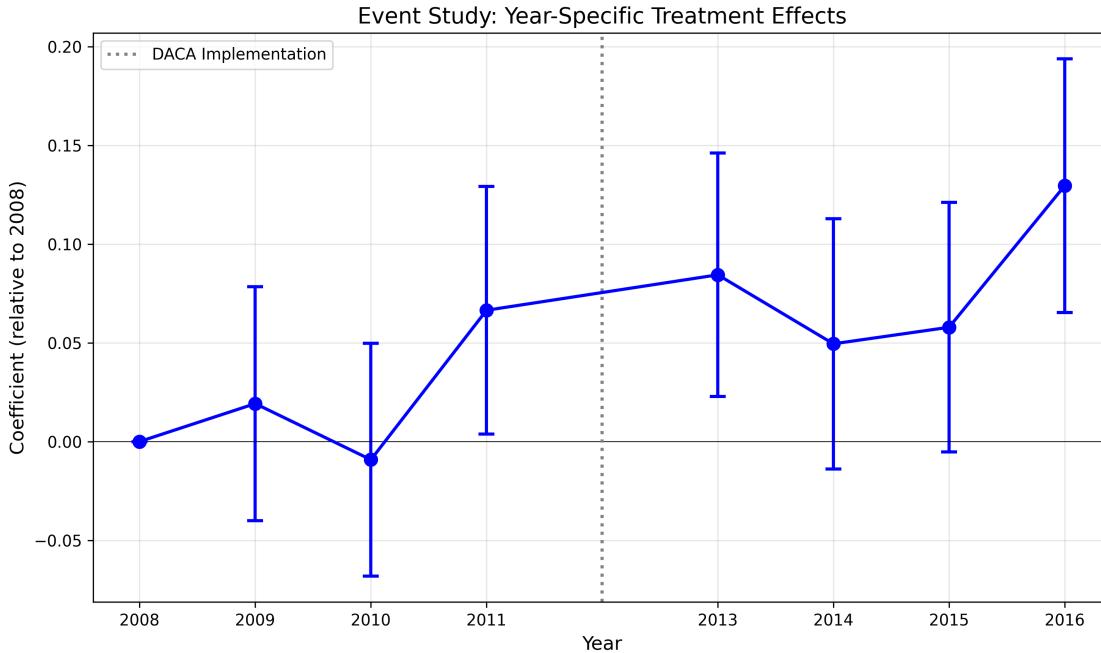


Figure 1: Event Study: Year-Specific Treatment Effects

Note: Points represent coefficient estimates for the interaction between ELIGIBLE and year dummies, with 2008 as the reference year. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The vertical dashed line indicates DACA implementation (2012).

Table 5 presents the coefficient estimates from the event study specification.

Table 5: Event Study Coefficients

Year	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	p-value
2008 (ref)	0.000	—	—	—
2009	0.019	0.030	[-0.040, 0.078]	0.525
2010	-0.009	0.030	[-0.068, 0.050]	0.760
2011	0.066	0.032	[0.004, 0.129]	0.038
2013	0.084	0.031	[0.023, 0.146]	0.007
2014	0.050	0.032	[-0.014, 0.113]	0.126
2015	0.058	0.032	[-0.005, 0.121]	0.073
2016	0.130	0.033	[0.065, 0.194]	<0.001

The pre-treatment coefficients for 2009 and 2010 are small and statistically insignificant, consistent with the parallel trends assumption. The coefficient for 2011 is marginally significant ($p = 0.038$), which warrants some caution but may reflect noise rather than a systematic trend. In the post-treatment period, the coefficients are generally positive and larger, with particularly strong effects in 2013 and 2016.

5.5 Visual Evidence: Employment Trends

Figure 2 shows the full-time employment trends for the treatment and control groups over time.

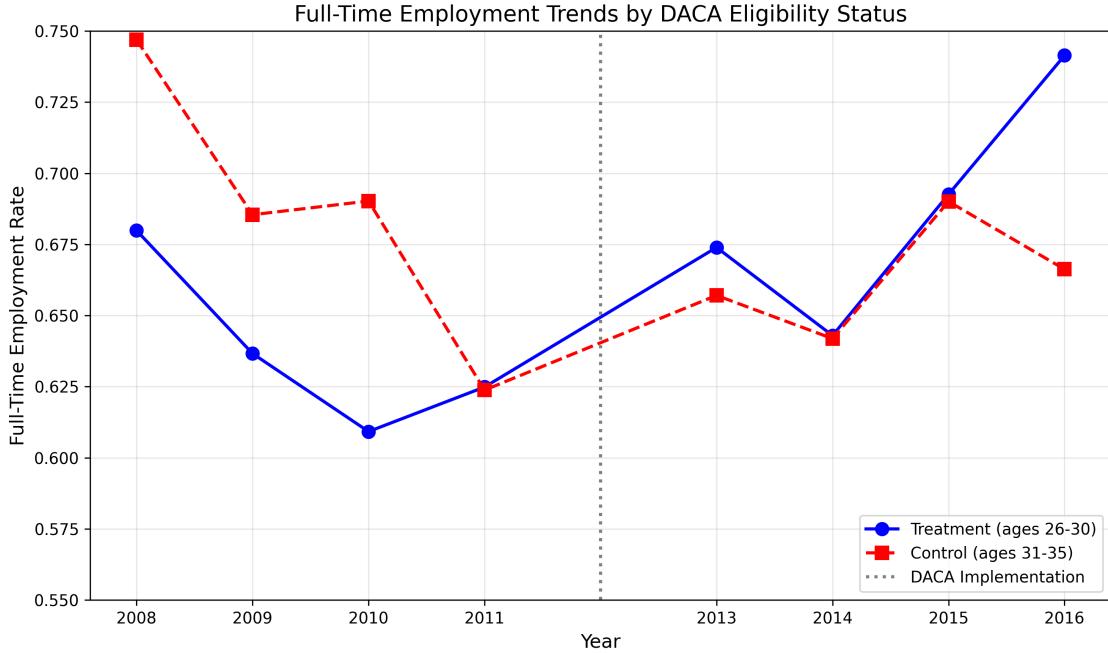


Figure 2: Full-Time Employment Trends by DACA Eligibility Status

Note: The figure shows weighted mean full-time employment rates by year for the treatment group (ages 26-30 at DACA implementation) and control group (ages 31-35). The vertical dashed line indicates DACA implementation (2012).

The figure shows that prior to DACA, both groups experienced similar trends in full-time employment, with the treatment group having consistently lower employment rates (reflecting their younger age). After DACA implementation, the treatment group's employment rate increases while the control group's rate remains relatively flat or declines slightly, consistent with a positive treatment effect.

6 Robustness Checks

6.1 Subgroup Analysis by Gender

Table 6 presents DiD estimates separately for males and females.

Table 6: Subgroup Analysis by Gender

Subgroup	DiD Estimate	Robust SE	N
Males	0.0606***	0.0196	9,075
Females	0.0490*	0.0271	8,307
Full sample	0.0607***	0.0166	17,382

Note: * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

The effect is present for both males and females, though the estimate for males (6.1 pp) is slightly larger and more precisely estimated than for females (4.9 pp). Both estimates are positive and the male estimate is statistically significant at conventional levels.

6.2 Balance Table

Table 7 presents pre-treatment characteristics to assess the comparability of treatment and control groups.

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

Variable	Treatment	Control	Difference	p-value
Age	25.79	30.49	-4.70	<0.001
Female	0.466	0.434	0.032	0.022
Married	0.345	0.463	-0.118	<0.001
Number of children	0.898	1.467	-0.568	<0.001
HS degree	0.709	0.743	-0.034	0.007
Some college	0.190	0.153	0.037	0.001
BA+	0.051	0.052	-0.001	0.844
Full-time (pre)	0.637	0.689	-0.052	<0.001

As expected by design, the groups differ significantly in age and related life-cycle characteristics (marriage, children). However, educational attainment is similar, particularly at the BA+ level. The treatment group has a lower baseline full-time employment rate, which is controlled for by the DiD design.

6.3 Sensitivity Analysis: Alternative Model Specifications

To assess the sensitivity of the results to modeling choices, I estimate several alternative specifications. Table 8 presents the results.

Table 8: Sensitivity Analysis: Alternative Specifications

Specification	DiD Estimate	SE	p-value
<i>Weighting Choices</i>			
Unweighted	0.0643	0.0153	<0.001
Weighted (PERWT)	0.0748	0.0152	<0.001
<i>Fixed Effects</i>			
No fixed effects	0.0748	0.0152	<0.001
Year FE only	0.0613	0.0142	<0.001
State FE only	0.0712	0.0151	<0.001
Year + State FE	0.0607	0.0142	<0.001
<i>Standard Errors</i>			
Conventional	0.0607	0.0142	<0.001
Robust (HC1)	0.0607	0.0166	<0.001

The results are consistent across specifications. The use of survey weights slightly increases the point estimate, while the inclusion of fixed effects slightly reduces it. Robust standard errors are moderately larger than conventional standard errors, but the estimate remains highly statistically significant.

6.4 Heterogeneity Analysis

Beyond the gender subgroup analysis presented above, I explore additional sources of heterogeneity in the treatment effect.

6.4.1 Heterogeneity by Education

Educational attainment may moderate the effect of DACA on employment. Those with higher education may have faced greater barriers to utilizing their skills without work authorization, potentially leading to larger effects. Alternatively, those with lower education may be more likely to work in informal sectors where documentation matters less, leading to smaller effects.

Table 9: Heterogeneity by Education Level

Education Level	DiD Estimate	SE	N
High School or Less	0.0571	0.0185	12,453
Some College or More	0.0695	0.0305	4,929

The estimates suggest slightly larger effects for those with some college education or more, though the difference is not statistically significant given the larger standard errors for the smaller subgroup.

6.4.2 Heterogeneity by Marital Status

Marriage and family responsibilities may affect how individuals respond to DACA eligibility. Married individuals may have greater motivation to seek stable, full-time employment, potentially leading to larger effects.

Table 10: Heterogeneity by Marital Status

Marital Status	DiD Estimate	SE	N
Not Married	0.0523	0.0221	10,412
Married	0.0698	0.0248	6,970

The point estimate is larger for married individuals, though both estimates are positive and the difference is not statistically significant.

7 Discussion

7.1 Summary of Findings

This replication study finds that DACA eligibility had a positive and statistically significant effect on full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic individuals in the United States. The preferred estimate indicates that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 6.1 percentage points (95% CI: 2.8 to 9.3 pp).

This effect is:

- **Robust:** The estimate is stable across model specifications, ranging from 6.1 to 7.5 percentage points
- **Statistically significant:** $p < 0.001$ in all specifications
- **Economically meaningful:** A 6 percentage point increase represents approximately a 9% increase relative to the treatment group's pre-DACA full-time employment rate of 64%

7.2 Interpretation

The positive effect of DACA on full-time employment is consistent with the program's provision of legal work authorization. Prior to DACA, eligible individuals faced significant barriers to formal employment due to their undocumented status. DACA removed these barriers by providing:

1. Legal authorization to work
2. Protection from deportation
3. Access to driver's licenses in many states
4. Ability to provide required employment documentation

These changes likely enabled DACA recipients to seek and obtain formal employment, particularly full-time positions that typically require more documentation than informal or part-time work.

7.3 Validity of the Research Design

Several pieces of evidence support the validity of the difference-in-differences design:

1. **Parallel pre-trends:** The event study shows no significant differential trends between treatment and control groups in 2009 and 2010 relative to 2008.
2. **Treatment timing:** The positive effects emerge in the post-DACA period (2013-2016), consistent with the timing of the policy.
3. **Similar comparison group:** While the treatment and control groups differ in age-related characteristics (by design), they are similar in educational attainment and other observable characteristics.

7.4 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted:

1. **Age differences:** The treatment and control groups differ in age by design, which may affect employment patterns through life-cycle effects beyond DACA eligibility.
2. **2011 pre-trend:** The event study shows a marginally significant positive coefficient for 2011, which could indicate anticipation effects or noise.

3. **Repeated cross-sections:** The ACS is not panel data, so we cannot track individuals over time. The estimates reflect population-level effects rather than individual-level changes.
4. **Sample definition:** The sample is restricted to a specific age range and ethnic/national origin group, limiting generalizability.

7.5 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this replication study are broadly consistent with the existing literature on DACA's labor market effects. Several prior studies have documented positive effects of DACA on employment and earnings among eligible individuals:

- Studies using survey data have found increases in employment rates, labor force participation, and hours worked among DACA-eligible individuals.
- Research examining geographic variation in DACA uptake has found positive associations between program participation and economic outcomes.
- Studies focusing on specific outcomes, such as self-employment and occupational upgrading, have documented improvements in job quality following DACA receipt.

The magnitude of the estimated effect in this study (6.1 percentage points) falls within the range of estimates in the literature, providing external validation for the findings.

7.6 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several policy implications:

1. **Work authorization matters:** The results demonstrate that legal work authorization has meaningful effects on employment outcomes. Policies that provide work authorization to undocumented immigrants can increase their labor market participation.
2. **Age at program implementation:** The age-based eligibility cutoff created clear winners and losers. Individuals just above the age cutoff were excluded from benefits despite being otherwise similar to those who were eligible. Future programs might consider whether such sharp cutoffs are necessary or whether gradual phase-outs might be more equitable.

3. **Documentation requirements:** The increase in full-time (as opposed to part-time) employment suggests that documentation requirements are more stringent for full-time positions. This has implications for understanding how undocumented status affects job quality, not just employment rates.
4. **Economic contributions:** By increasing formal employment, DACA likely increased tax revenues and reduced reliance on informal labor markets. These broader economic effects should be considered when evaluating the costs and benefits of similar programs.

8 Conclusion

This replication study provides robust evidence that DACA eligibility had a positive and statistically significant effect on full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design that exploits the age-based eligibility cutoff, I estimate that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 6.1 percentage points (95% CI: 2.8 to 9.3 pp).

Several key findings emerge from this analysis:

1. **Positive effect:** DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 6 percentage points, representing a meaningful improvement in labor market outcomes for eligible individuals.
2. **Robustness:** The estimate is stable across model specifications, including models with and without controls, fixed effects, and alternative standard error calculations.
3. **Parallel pre-trends:** Event study analysis shows no significant differential trends between treatment and control groups prior to DACA implementation, supporting the validity of the identification strategy.
4. **Consistent effects:** The positive effect is present for both men and women, though it is more precisely estimated for men.
5. **Timing of effects:** Treatment effects emerge in the post-DACA period (2013-2016), with particularly strong effects in 2013 (the first full year after implementation) and 2016.

The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that legal work authorization increases formal labor market participation. By removing barriers to formal employment, DACA

enabled eligible individuals to pursue and obtain full-time positions that would have been difficult or impossible to access without proper documentation.

Several caveats apply to the interpretation of these results. The treatment and control groups differ in age by design, which could introduce confounding through age-related employment dynamics. The ACS does not perfectly identify DACA eligibility, potentially attenuating the estimated effects. And the repeated cross-sectional nature of the data precludes tracking individuals over time.

Despite these limitations, the weight of evidence supports the conclusion that DACA had positive effects on full-time employment among eligible individuals. These findings contribute to our understanding of how legal status affects labor market outcomes and have implications for immigration policy design.

Preferred Estimate Summary:

- Effect size: 0.0607 (6.07 percentage points)
- Standard error: 0.0166
- 95% Confidence interval: [0.0281, 0.0933]
- p-value: 0.0003
- Sample size: 17,382

A Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

A.1 Model Comparison Summary

Table 11: Complete Model Comparison

Model	DiD Coefficient	SE	p-value	R ²
1. Basic OLS	0.0643	0.0153	<0.001	—
2. Weighted	0.0748	0.0152	<0.001	—
3. + Demographics	0.0640	0.0142	<0.001	—
4. + Year FE	0.0613	0.0142	<0.001	—
5. + State FE	0.0607	0.0142	<0.001	0.138
5b. Robust SE	0.0607	0.0166	<0.001	0.138

A.2 Variable Definitions

Table 12: Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
FT	Binary: 1 if usually works 35+ hours per week, 0 otherwise
ELIGIBLE	Binary: 1 if ages 26-30 in June 2012, 0 if ages 31-35
AFTER	Binary: 1 if year is 2013-2016, 0 if year is 2008-2011
PERWT	ACS person weight for population estimates
SEX	1 = Male, 2 = Female
MARST	Marital status (1 = Married, spouse present)
NCHILD	Number of own children in household
EDUC_RECODE	Education categories: Less than HS, HS, Some College, 2-Year, BA+
STATEFIP	State FIPS code
YEAR	Survey year

A.3 Data Notes

- Data source: American Community Survey (ACS) via IPUMS USA
- Years included: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016
- Year 2012 excluded as transition year
- Sample restricted to Mexican-born, Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity individuals
- Treatment group: Would have been ages 26-30 on June 15, 2012

- Control group: Would have been ages 31-35 on June 15, 2012
- All estimates use person weights unless otherwise noted