

The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment Among Mexican-Born Hispanic Non-Citizens: A Difference-in-Differences Analysis

Independent Replication Study

January 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 individuals born in Mexico and residing in the United States. Using American Community Survey data from 2006-2016 and a difference-in-differences identification strategy, I find that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 1.7 percentage points (95% CI: [0.6, 2.9]) among eligible non-citizen Mexican immigrants. This effect is statistically significant and robust to various specification checks. The findings suggest that DACA's provision of work authorization and temporary protection from deportation facilitated increased formal labor market participation among eligible individuals.

Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Background	5
2.1	The DACA Program	5
2.2	Theoretical Mechanisms	6
3	Data	6
3.1	Data Source	6
3.2	Sample Construction	7
3.3	Variable Definitions	7
3.3.1	Treatment Variable: DACA Eligibility	7
3.3.2	Outcome Variable: Full-Time Employment	8
3.3.3	Control Variables	8
3.4	Descriptive Statistics	9
4	Empirical Strategy	10
4.1	Difference-in-Differences Design	10
4.2	Regression Specification	10
4.3	Standard Errors	11
4.4	Identifying Assumption	11
5	Results	12
5.1	Main Results	12
5.2	Magnitude Interpretation	13
5.3	Effects by Year	13
6	Robustness Checks and Sensitivity Analysis	14
6.1	Alternative Outcomes	14

6.2	Alternative Samples	15
6.3	Placebo Test	15
6.4	Event Study Analysis	16
7	Discussion	17
7.1	Summary of Findings	17
7.2	Mechanisms	17
7.3	Limitations	18
7.4	Policy Implications	19
8	Conclusion	19

1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented on June 15, 2012, represented a significant policy shift in United States immigration enforcement. The program granted temporary work authorization and relief from deportation to qualifying undocumented immigrants who had arrived in the United States as children. Given the program’s provision of legal work authorization, understanding its labor market effects is crucial for evaluating immigration policy and its economic implications.

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 full-time employment, defined as usually working 35 hours per week or more? The analysis focuses on employment outcomes in the years 2013-2016, following DACA’s implementation.

The identification strategy exploits variation in DACA eligibility based on the program’s specific requirements. Eligible individuals had to have arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday, been under 31 years of age as of June 15, 2012, and maintained continuous residence in the country since June 15, 2007. By comparing changes in full-time employment between eligible and ineligible non-citizen Mexican immigrants before and after DACA’s implementation, this difference-in-differences approach provides a credible estimate of the program’s causal effect.

The main finding indicates that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by 1.72 percentage points. This represents a meaningful effect—approximately a 3.4% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean of 50.3% among the eligible group. The effect grows over time, with larger impacts observed in 2015 and 2016 compared to earlier post-treatment years, consistent with increasing program enrollment and the accumulation of benefits from legal work authorization.

2 Background

2.1 The DACA Program

DACA was announced by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012, and applications began being accepted on August 15, 2012. The program was not enacted through legislation but rather through executive action, making use of prosecutorial discretion in immigration enforcement.

To qualify for DACA, applicants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday
2. Had not yet reached their 31st birthday as of June 15, 2012
3. Had lived continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012
5. Did not have lawful immigration status (citizenship or legal permanent residency) as of June 15, 2012
6. Met certain educational or military service requirements
7. Had not been convicted of certain crimes

Upon approval, DACA recipients received a two-year grant of deferred action (renewable) and became eligible for work authorization through an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). This work authorization allowed recipients to obtain Social Security numbers and legally work in the formal labor market.

In the first four years of the program, nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, with approximately 90% approved. While the program was nationality-neutral, the demographic composition of undocumented immigration to the United States meant that the majority of eligible individuals were of Mexican origin.

2.2 Theoretical Mechanisms

DACA could affect employment outcomes through several channels. First, the provision of legal work authorization removes barriers to formal employment. Prior to DACA, undocumented immigrants could only work in the informal economy or using fraudulent documents, limiting their job opportunities and bargaining power.

Second, the temporary protection from deportation reduces the risk associated with employment and may encourage individuals to seek more stable, full-time positions rather than informal or part-time work that provides greater flexibility for potential relocation.

Third, DACA recipients became eligible to obtain driver's licenses in many states, potentially expanding their geographic job search area and improving their ability to commute to work.

Fourth, the reduction in uncertainty about immigration status may lead to increased human capital investment, job searching, and labor force attachment, all of which could increase full-time 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 a large, nationally representative survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects detailed demographic, social, and economic information from approximately 3.5 million households annually.

The sample includes one-year ACS files from 2006 through 2016. This time frame provides six years of pre-treatment data (2006-2011) and four years of post-treatment data (2013-2016). The year 2012 is excluded from the main analysis because the ACS does not specify the month of data collection, making it impossible to distinguish observations collected before

and after DACA’s implementation on June 15, 2012.

3.2 Sample Construction

The analysis focuses on Hispanic-Mexican individuals born in Mexico, as specified in the research question. This restriction is implemented using the HISPAN variable (Hispanic origin) set equal to 1 (Mexican) and the BPL variable (birthplace) set equal to 200 (Mexico). From the full ACS sample of approximately 33.8 million observations, this restriction yields 991,261 observations.

To construct a meaningful comparison between DACA-eligible and DACA-ineligible individuals, I further restrict the sample as follows:

- **Age:** 18 to 40 years old. This range ensures adequate overlap in age distributions between treatment and control groups while focusing on prime working-age adults.
- **Citizenship:** Non-citizens only (CITIZEN = 3). This creates a cleaner comparison by excluding naturalized citizens and citizens born abroad to American parents, who differ systematically in their labor market characteristics.

The final analytical sample contains 374,548 observations.

3.3 Variable Definitions

3.3.1 Treatment Variable: DACA Eligibility

DACA eligibility is constructed using the following criteria, approximating the program’s actual requirements as closely as possible given data limitations:

1. **Arrived before 16th birthday:** Calculated as year of immigration (YRIMMIG) minus birth year (BIRTHYR) less than 16.

2. **Under 31 as of June 15, 2012:** Birth year 1982 or later, or birth year 1981 with birth quarter 3 or 4 (July-December). This conservative coding ensures individuals are definitively under 31 as of June 15, 2012.
3. **Present since June 15, 2007:** Year of immigration is 2007 or earlier ($YRIMMIG \leq 2007$).
4. **Not a citizen:** $CITIZEN = 3$ (“Not a citizen”).

An individual is coded as DACA-eligible if all four criteria are met. Among the analytical sample of non-citizen Mexican-born Hispanics aged 18-40, 79,359 observations (21.2%) are classified as DACA-eligible.

3.3.2 Outcome Variable: Full-Time Employment

Full-time employment is defined as usually working 35 hours or more per week. This is operationalized using the UHRSWORK variable (usual hours worked per week), coded as:

$$\text{Fulltime} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if UHRSWORK} \geq 35 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

This follows the standard Bureau of Labor Statistics definition of full-time employment as 35 or more hours per week.

3.3.3 Control Variables

The analysis includes the following control variables:

- **Age** and **Age squared:** To capture nonlinear life-cycle patterns in employment
- **Female:** Indicator for female ($SEX = 2$)
- **Married:** Indicator for married with spouse present ($MARST = 1$)

- **Education:** Categorical variable for educational attainment (EDUC)
- **Year fixed effects:** Indicators for survey year
- **State fixed effects:** Indicators for state of residence (STATEFIP)

3.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents summary statistics for the analytical sample, separately by DACA eligibility status and time period.

Table 1: Summary Statistics by Treatment Status and Period

Variable	DACA Eligible		DACA Ineligible		Difference	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Full-time employment	0.503	0.547	0.610	0.589	-0.107	-0.042
Any employment	0.587	0.664	0.663	0.668	-0.076	-0.005
Age	22.2	25.3	31.6	33.1	-9.4	-7.8
Female	0.442	0.459	0.442	0.455	0.000	0.004
Married	0.209	0.327	0.531	0.593	-0.322	-0.266
Education	5.21	5.54	4.25	4.35	0.96	1.19
N	46,260	33,099	211,554	83,635		

Notes: Pre-period includes 2006-2011; post-period includes 2013-2016. Sample restricted to non-citizen Mexican-born Hispanics aged 18-40.

Several patterns emerge from the descriptive statistics. First, DACA-eligible individuals are substantially younger on average (22.2 years pre-treatment vs. 31.6 years for ineligible), reflecting the age requirement for eligibility. Second, eligible individuals have higher average education levels (5.21 vs. 4.25 on the IPUMS education scale), consistent with the “childhood arrival” criterion capturing individuals who received more of their education in the United States.

Third, and most relevant for the analysis, full-time employment rates are lower among eligible individuals in the pre-period (50.3% vs. 61.0%), partly reflecting their younger age. However, the gap narrows substantially in the post-period (54.7% vs. 58.9%), suggesting

a relative improvement for the eligible group—the pattern that the difference-in-differences analysis will formally test.

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 Difference-in-Differences Design

The causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment is estimated using a difference-in-differences (DiD) framework. This approach compares the change in outcomes over time between a treatment group (DACA-eligible individuals) and a control group (DACA-ineligible individuals).

The basic DiD estimator is:

$$\hat{\delta}_{DiD} = (\bar{Y}_{T,post} - \bar{Y}_{T,pre}) - (\bar{Y}_{C,post} - \bar{Y}_{C,pre})$$

where $\bar{Y}_{T,post}$ is the mean outcome for the treatment group in the post-period, and so on. This estimator removes both time-invariant differences between groups and common time trends affecting both groups.

4.2 Regression Specification

The analysis estimates several regression specifications of increasing complexity. The baseline model is:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Treat}_i + \beta_2 \text{Post}_t + \beta_3 (\text{Treat}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ist} is the full-time employment indicator for individual i in state s and year t , Treat_i indicates DACA eligibility, Post_t indicates the post-treatment period (2013-2016), and β_3 is the DiD estimate of the DACA effect.

The preferred specification adds demographic controls, year fixed effects, and state fixed effects:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_1 \text{Treat}_i + \beta_3 (\text{Treat}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \mathbf{X}'_{ist} \gamma + \alpha_t + \mu_s + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where \mathbf{X}_{ist} is a vector of control variables (age, age squared, female, married), α_t are year fixed effects, and μ_s are state fixed effects. The year fixed effects absorb the Post indicator, and state fixed effects control for time-invariant state-level factors.

4.3 Standard Errors

Standard errors are clustered at the state level to account for potential within-state correlation in outcomes. This is standard practice in policy evaluations where treatment may have state-level components and where outcomes of individuals within the same state may be correlated through local labor market conditions.

4.4 Identifying Assumption

The key identifying assumption for the DiD design is the parallel trends assumption: in the absence of DACA, the treatment and control groups would have experienced the same trends in full-time employment over time.

This assumption cannot be directly tested, but its plausibility can be assessed by examining pre-treatment trends. If the treatment and control groups exhibited similar trends in the pre-period, it is more credible that they would have continued on parallel paths absent the treatment.

The event study analysis presented in Section 6 examines this assumption by estimating year-specific treatment effects and testing whether pre-treatment coefficients are close to zero.

5 Results

5.1 Main Results

Table 2 presents the main regression results for the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment.

Table 2: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

	(1) Basic DiD	(2) + Controls	(3) + Year/State FE	(4) Weighted
Treat \times Post	0.0648*** (0.0046)	0.0287*** (0.0058)	0.0172*** (0.0060)	0.0284*** (0.0057)
Treat	-0.1063*** (0.0057)	0.0175** (0.0072)	0.0117 (0.0077)	0.0172** (0.0071)
Post	-0.0210*** (0.0036)	-0.0157*** (0.0038)		-0.0163*** (0.0038)
Age, Age ²	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Female, Married	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Year FE	No	No	Yes	No
State FE	No	No	Yes	No
Weights	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	374,548	374,548	374,548	374,548
R-squared	0.007	0.065	0.074	0.065
Pre-treatment mean (Treated)	0.503			

Notes: Standard errors clustered at the state level in parentheses. Sample includes non-citizen Mexican-born Hispanics aged 18-40 from 2006-2011 and 2013-2016. Full-time employment defined as usually working ≥ 35 hours/week. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Column (1) shows the basic DiD estimate without controls. The coefficient on Treat \times Post is 0.0648, indicating that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by 6.48 percentage points. However, this estimate likely captures compositional differences between treatment and control groups that change over time, particularly related to age.

Column (2) adds demographic controls including age (linear and squared), gender, marital

status, and education. The estimate drops to 0.0287, suggesting that much of the raw DiD difference is explained by demographic factors. This is expected given the substantial age difference between groups.

Column (3) presents the preferred specification with year and state fixed effects. The estimate of 0.0172 ($SE = 0.0060$) indicates that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by 1.72 percentage points. This effect is statistically significant at the 1% level, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.55, 2.89] percentage points.

Column (4) uses ACS person weights to produce population-representative estimates. The weighted estimate of 0.0284 is similar to the unweighted specification with controls, and both are somewhat larger than the fixed effects specification.

5.2 Magnitude Interpretation

The preferred estimate of 1.72 percentage points represents a meaningful economic effect. Relative to the pre-treatment full-time employment rate of 50.3% among DACA-eligible individuals, this represents a 3.4% increase in the likelihood of full-time employment.

To put this in context, there were approximately 1.5-1.8 million DACA-eligible individuals in the United States during this period. A 1.72 percentage point increase in full-time employment would translate to roughly 26,000-31,000 additional individuals working full-time as a result of the program.

5.3 Effects by Year

Table 3 shows the treatment effect separately for each post-treatment year.

Table 3: Treatment Effects by Post-Treatment Year

Year	Coefficient	Standard Error
2013	-0.0007	(0.0046)
2014	0.0134	(0.0093)
2015	0.0272***	(0.0089)
2016	0.0310***	(0.0064)

Notes: Each coefficient represents the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment in that specific year, relative to the pre-treatment period. Controls include age, age squared, female, married, and year fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at state level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results show a clear pattern of increasing effects over time. In 2013, the first full year after DACA implementation, the effect is essentially zero (-0.0007). By 2015 and 2016, the effects grow to 2.72 and 3.10 percentage points, respectively, both statistically significant.

This temporal pattern is consistent with the dynamics of DACA enrollment. Applications were only accepted starting in August 2012, and processing took several months. Many eligible individuals did not immediately apply, and the benefits of work authorization (better job matching, employer verification, formal employment) would accumulate over time. The larger effects in later years likely reflect both higher enrollment rates and the accumulation of labor market benefits.

6 Robustness Checks and Sensitivity Analysis

6.1 Alternative Outcomes

Table 4 Panel A examines alternative outcome measures. Using any employment (rather than full-time employment) as the outcome, the DiD estimate is 0.0421, approximately twice as large as the full-time effect. This suggests DACA not only increased full-time employment

but also increased employment at the extensive margin.

Table 4: Robustness Checks

Specification	Coefficient	SE
Panel A: Alternative Outcomes		
Any employment	0.0421***	(0.0075)
Panel B: Alternative Samples		
Ages 18-35 only	0.0279***	(0.0060)
Males only	0.0133***	(0.0049)
Females only	0.0437***	(0.0096)
Panel C: Placebo Test		
2009 as fake treatment	-0.0051	(0.0039)

Notes: All specifications include controls for age, age squared, female (except gender subsamples), married, and education fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at state level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Placebo test uses pre-treatment data only (2006-2011) with 2009 as the fake treatment year.

6.2 Alternative Samples

Panel B examines the robustness to different sample restrictions. Restricting to ages 18-35 (closer to the DACA age requirements) yields an estimate of 0.0279, somewhat larger than the main estimate, suggesting the effect is concentrated among younger individuals.

The effects differ substantially by gender. For males, the estimate is 0.0133; for females, it is 0.0437. The larger effect for women is consistent with previous research suggesting that DACA may have particularly enabled women to enter the formal labor market, potentially by providing access to jobs in sectors that require documentation.

6.3 Placebo Test

Panel C presents a placebo test using only pre-treatment data (2006-2011) and treating 2009 as a “fake” treatment year. If the parallel trends assumption holds, we would expect no effect

of the placebo treatment. The estimate of -0.0051 is small in magnitude and statistically insignificant ($p = 0.19$), providing support for the parallel trends assumption.

6.4 Event Study Analysis

Figure ?? and Table 5 present results from an event study specification that allows for time-varying treatment effects both before and after DACA implementation.

Table 5: Event Study Coefficients

Year	Coefficient	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
2006	0.0175	0.0063	0.0051	0.0299	0.005
2007	0.0113	0.0061	-0.0007	0.0232	0.065
2008	0.0180	0.0066	0.0051	0.0309	0.006
2009	0.0162	0.0066	0.0033	0.0291	0.013
2010	0.0083	0.0094	-0.0102	0.0268	0.378
2011			(Reference year)		
2012	-0.0056	0.0076	-0.0206	0.0094	0.465
2013	0.0078	0.0071	-0.0062	0.0218	0.272
2014	0.0218	0.0113	-0.0003	0.0439	0.053
2015	0.0356	0.0100	0.0159	0.0553	0.000
2016	0.0393	0.0081	0.0234	0.0552	0.000

Notes: Coefficients represent the interaction between DACA eligibility and year indicators, with 2011 as the reference year. Controls include age, age squared, female, and married. Standard errors clustered at state level.

The event study results reveal important patterns. First, the pre-treatment coefficients (2006-2010) are not uniformly zero—several are positive and statistically significant. This raises some concern about the parallel trends assumption, as it suggests the treatment group may have been on a different trajectory even before DACA.

However, several observations mitigate this concern:

1. The pre-treatment coefficients do not show a systematic trend toward the post-treatment effects. The coefficient for 2010 (immediately before treatment) is close to zero and insignificant.

2. The positive pre-treatment coefficients may reflect the Great Recession’s differential impact on the two groups, rather than a violation of parallel trends.
3. The post-treatment coefficients show a clear pattern of increasing effects over time (from near-zero in 2012-2013 to strongly significant in 2015-2016) that is distinct from the pre-treatment pattern.

The coefficient for 2012 (-0.0056) is essentially zero, as expected given that DACA was only partially in effect that year. The coefficients then increase monotonically through 2016, consistent with the growing take-up of the program.

7 Discussion

7.1 Summary of Findings

This analysis finds that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment among eligible non-citizen Mexican immigrants by approximately 1.7 percentage points. This effect:

- Is statistically significant at conventional levels
- Is robust to different specifications and control variables
- Grows over time, consistent with increasing program enrollment
- Is larger for women than for men
- Is supported by a placebo test showing no effect of a fake treatment

7.2 Mechanisms

The positive employment effect is consistent with several mechanisms through which DACA could affect labor market outcomes:

Work authorization: The most direct mechanism is that DACA provides legal work authorization, allowing recipients to work in the formal labor market. This opens up job opportunities in sectors and firms that require employment verification, which tend to offer more full-time positions.

Reduced labor market frictions: With work authorization, DACA recipients can more easily search for jobs, change employers, and negotiate better working conditions. This improved job matching likely leads to higher quality employment relationships, including full-time work.

Driver’s licenses: In many states, DACA recipients became eligible for driver’s licenses, expanding their commuting range and access to jobs in suburban locations that often offer full-time employment.

Human capital investment: The temporary protection from deportation may encourage individuals to invest more in job-specific human capital, making them more attractive candidates for full-time positions.

The finding that effects are larger for women is consistent with previous research suggesting that documentation status may be a greater barrier for women in accessing formal employment, possibly due to occupational segregation in sectors with different documentation requirements.

7.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

Parallel trends: The event study analysis reveals some positive pre-treatment coefficients, suggesting possible violations of the parallel trends assumption. While these do not follow a systematic trend, they introduce uncertainty about the causal interpretation.

Eligibility measurement: DACA eligibility cannot be perfectly measured in the ACS. The citizenship variable does not distinguish between different types of non-citizens, and continuous residence requirements cannot be verified. Some individuals classified as eligible

may not have been, and vice versa. This measurement error likely attenuates the estimated effects.

Selection into treatment: Even among eligible individuals, not all applied for or received DACA. The analysis estimates the intent-to-treat effect of eligibility rather than the effect of actual DACA receipt. The effect on those who actually received DACA is likely larger.

General equilibrium effects: The analysis focuses on partial equilibrium effects on DACA-eligible individuals. General equilibrium effects on other workers (through competition in the labor market) or on employers are not captured.

7.4 Policy Implications

These findings have implications for immigration policy debates. The results suggest that providing work authorization to undocumented immigrants who arrived as children has positive effects on their formal labor market attachment. From an efficiency perspective, this likely means better job matching, higher productivity, and increased tax revenue.

However, the analysis is limited to employment outcomes and does not capture potential effects on wages, job quality, educational attainment, or well-being more broadly. A comprehensive evaluation of DACA would need to consider these additional dimensions.

8 Conclusion

This study examines the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic non-citizens in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences approach that compares DACA-eligible and ineligible individuals before and after the program's implementation, I find that eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 1.7 percentage points.

The effect is statistically significant, economically meaningful (representing a 3.4% in-

crease relative to pre-treatment levels), and grows over time as the program became more established. The findings are robust to various specification checks, though some pre-treatment differences in trends warrant caution in interpretation.

These results contribute to our understanding of how legal status and work authorization affect immigrant labor market outcomes. The positive effects on employment suggest that DACA achieved at least part of its intended purpose of enabling eligible individuals to participate more fully in the formal economy.

Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

Table 6: Sample Sizes by Year and Treatment Status

Year	DACA Ineligible	DACA Eligible	Total
2006	34,094	5,151	39,245
2007	33,214	5,792	39,006
2008	31,197	5,838	37,035
2009	30,362	6,420	36,782
2010	29,750	7,199	36,949
2011	27,733	7,848	35,581
2012	25,204	8,012	33,216
2013	23,331	8,173	31,504
2014	21,804	8,351	30,155
2015	20,163	8,338	28,501
2016	18,337	8,237	26,574
Total	295,189	79,359	374,548

Table 7: Full-Time Employment Rates by Group and Period

	Pre-Treatment (2006-2011)		Post-Treatment (2013-2016)	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
DACA Eligible	0.503	46,260	0.547	33,099
DACA Ineligible	0.610	211,554	0.589	83,635
Difference	-0.107		-0.042	
Difference-in-Differences: 0.065				

Table 8: DACA Eligibility Criteria Breakdown

Criterion	N Meeting Criterion	Percent
<i>Among Mexican-born Hispanics (N = 991,261):</i>		
Arrived before age 16	322,246	32.5%
Under 31 in 2012	274,149	27.7%
Present since 2007	937,519	94.6%
Not a citizen	701,347	70.8%
All criteria (DACA eligible)	133,120	13.4%

Notes: Calculations based on full sample of Mexican-born Hispanics in ACS 2006-2016 before age restrictions.

Table 9: Detailed Summary Statistics - Full Analytical Sample

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Full-time employed	374,548	0.586	0.493	0	1
Any employment	374,548	0.655	0.476	0	1
Age	374,548	30.39	6.25	18	40
Female	374,548	0.447	0.497	0	1
Married	374,548	0.487	0.500	0	1
Education	374,548	4.50	2.38	0	11
DACA eligible	374,548	0.212	0.409	0	1
Post-treatment	374,548	0.312	0.463	0	1

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