

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

Replication Study

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Abstract

This study examines the causal impact of eligibility for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment probability among ethnically Hispanic-Mexican individuals born in Mexico. Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2006–2016 and a difference-in-differences identification strategy, I compare employment outcomes between DACA-eligible and non-eligible Mexican immigrants before and after the program’s implementation in 2012. The preferred specification, which includes demographic controls along with year and state fixed effects, estimates that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.0 percentage points (95% CI: 1.2–2.8 pp, $p < 0.001$). This effect represents a 4.1% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean of 45.4% among the treatment group. Results are robust to alternative sample restrictions and pass placebo tests, though event study analysis reveals some pre-trends that warrant cautious interpretation. These findings suggest that DACA provided meaningful labor market benefits to eligible immigrants through legal work authorization.

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1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, announced by President Barack Obama on June 15, 2012, represents one of the most significant immigration policy changes affecting undocumented immigrants in the United States in recent decades. The program offered eligible undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children the opportunity to apply for temporary relief from deportation and work authorization valid for two years, renewable upon application.

This study investigates the causal effect of DACA eligibility on employment outcomes, specifically focusing on full-time employment (defined as usually working 35 or more hours per week). The research question is: *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 that the eligible person is employed full-time?*

The identification strategy exploits the fact that DACA eligibility was determined by specific age and residency criteria that created quasi-experimental variation in treatment status. By comparing employment changes between DACA-eligible and non-eligible individuals before and after the program's implementation, I can estimate the causal effect of eligibility under the parallel trends assumption.

The analysis focuses on the Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican population for several reasons. First, the vast majority of DACA-eligible individuals are of Mexican origin due to the structure of undocumented immigration to the United States. Second, restricting the sample to a more homogeneous population helps ensure that the treatment and control groups are more comparable in terms of unobservable characteristics.

The main findings indicate that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.0 percentage points, representing a 4.1% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean. This effect is statistically significant at conventional levels and is robust to various specification checks, including alternative sample restrictions and placebo

tests.

2 Background on DACA

2.1 Program Overview

DACA was announced on June 15, 2012, and applications began to be received on August 15, 2012. The program was not enacted through legislation but rather through executive action by the Department of Homeland Security. Under DACA, eligible individuals could apply for and receive:

- Deferred action status (temporary relief from deportation) for two years
- Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) permitting legal work
- The ability to obtain Social Security numbers
- Eligibility for driver's licenses in most states

In the first four years of the program, nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, with approximately 90% approved. Recipients could reapply for renewal after the initial two-year period.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for DACA, individuals had to meet the following criteria:

1. Were under age 31 as of June 15, 2012 (born on or after June 16, 1981)
2. Came to the United States before their 16th birthday
3. 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. Were currently in school, had graduated or obtained a GED, or were honorably discharged from the military

7. Had not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors

2.3 Expected Effects on Employment

There are several mechanisms through which DACA could affect employment outcomes:

Work Authorization: Prior to DACA, undocumented immigrants faced legal barriers to formal employment. DACA provided legal work authorization, potentially enabling recipients to transition from informal to formal employment and access better job opportunities.

Reduced Fear of Deportation: The temporary relief from deportation may have increased labor supply by reducing the perceived risk of working and interacting with authorities.

Complementary Benefits: Access to driver's licenses and Social Security numbers could facilitate job search, commuting, and formal employment arrangements.

Human Capital Investment: The temporary security provided by DACA may have encouraged investments in education and training that could improve employment prospects.

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-scale, nationally representative survey conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. I use the one-year ACS samples from 2006 through 2016, excluding three-year and five-year pooled samples to avoid double-counting respondents.

The ACS provides detailed information on demographic characteristics, immigration status, and labor market outcomes. Importantly, it includes variables necessary to approxi-

mate DACA eligibility, including year of immigration, age, birthplace, and citizenship status.

3.2 Key Variables

3.2.1 Outcome Variable

The primary outcome is **full-time employment**, defined as usually working 35 or more hours per week. This is constructed from the UHRSWORK variable in the ACS, which reports usual hours worked per week. The outcome is coded as 1 if $\text{UHRSWORK} \geq 35$ and 0 otherwise.

3.2.2 Treatment Variable

DACA eligibility is constructed based on the following criteria, operationalized using ACS variables:

1. **Non-citizen status:** CITIZEN = 3 (“Not a citizen”). Following the research instructions, I assume that anyone who is not a citizen and who has not received immigration papers is undocumented for DACA purposes.
2. **Arrived before age 16:** Age at immigration ($\text{YRIMMIG} - \text{BIRTHYR}$) < 16 .
3. **Under age 31 as of June 15, 2012:** $\text{BIRTHYR} \geq 1982$, or ($\text{BIRTHYR} = 1981$ and $\text{BIRTHQTR} \in \{3, 4\}$). This conservative approach ensures individuals were definitely under 31 by June 2012.
4. **In the U.S. since June 15, 2007:** $\text{YRIMMIG} \leq 2007$ and $\text{YRIMMIG} > 0$.

An individual is classified as DACA-eligible (treated = 1) if all four conditions are satisfied.

3.2.3 Control Variables

The analysis includes the following control variables:

- Age and age squared (AGE, AGE²)

- Gender (female indicator based on SEX)
- Marital status (married indicator based on MARST)
- Education categories: less than high school (reference), high school graduate, some college, college or higher (based on EDUC)
- Year fixed effects
- State fixed effects (based on STATEFIP)

3.3 Sample Selection

The analysis sample is constructed as follows:

1. Start with all observations from ACS 2006–2016
2. Restrict to Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity (HISPAN = 1)
3. Restrict to Mexico-born (BPL = 200)
4. Restrict to working-age population (ages 16–64)
5. Exclude 2012 (transition year when DACA was announced mid-year)

Table 1 presents the sample construction.

Table 1: Sample Construction

Sample Restriction	Observations
Hispanic-Mexican, Mexico-born (all ages, all years)	991,261
After restricting to ages 16–64	851,090
After excluding 2012	771,888

3.4 Summary Statistics

Table 2 presents summary statistics for the treatment and control groups.

Table 2: Summary Statistics by Treatment Status

Variable	DACA-Eligible		Non-Eligible	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Full-time employed	0.485	0.500	0.631	0.483
Age	22.7	4.5	40.0	10.9
Female	0.447	0.497	0.453	0.498
Married	0.255	0.436	0.636	0.481
Less than high school	0.423	0.494	0.535	0.499
High school	0.418	0.493	0.314	0.464
Some college	0.138	0.345	0.095	0.294
College or higher	0.020	0.140	0.056	0.230
N (unweighted)	82,351		689,537	

Notes: Statistics are weighted using ACS person weights (PERWT). The sample includes Hispanic-Mexican, Mexico-born individuals ages 16–64 from ACS years 2006–2011 and 2013–2016.

Several patterns emerge from Table 2. First, the DACA-eligible group is substantially younger (mean age 22.7 vs. 40.0), which is expected given the age eligibility requirements. Second, the treatment group has lower full-time employment rates (48.5% vs. 63.1%) in the pooled sample. Third, the groups differ in education and marital status, with the treatment group having higher education levels and lower marriage rates, likely reflecting age differences.

3.5 Sample Sizes by Group and Period

Table 3 shows the distribution of observations across treatment groups and time periods.

Table 3: Sample Sizes by Treatment Status and Period

	Pre-DACA (2006–2011)	Post-DACA (2013–2016)	Total
Non-eligible	418,621	270,916	689,537
DACA-eligible	46,080	36,271	82,351
Total	464,701	307,187	771,888

Notes: Unweighted observation counts.

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 Identification Strategy

I employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach to estimate the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. The identifying assumption is that, in the absence of DACA, the change in full-time employment would have been the same for DACA-eligible and non-eligible individuals (the parallel trends assumption).

The treatment group consists of individuals who meet the DACA eligibility criteria defined in Section 3.2.2. The control group consists of Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria—typically because they arrived after age 16, were too old as of June 2012, or arrived after June 2007.

The pre-treatment period includes ACS years 2006–2011. The post-treatment period includes ACS years 2013–2016. I exclude 2012 because DACA was announced in mid-June 2012 and the ACS does not identify the month of interview, making it impossible to distinguish pre- and post-treatment observations within that year.

4.2 Econometric Specification

The main specification is:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Treated}_i + \beta_2 \text{Post}_t + \gamma (\text{Treated}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + X_i' \delta + \mu_s + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

where:

- Y_{ist} is an indicator for full-time employment for individual i in state s at time t
- Treated_i is an indicator for DACA eligibility
- Post_t is an indicator for the post-DACA period (2013–2016)
- X_i is a vector of individual-level controls (age, age squared, female, married, education)

dummies)

- μ_s are state fixed effects
- λ_t are year fixed effects
- ε_{ist} is the error term

The parameter of interest is γ , which captures the differential change in full-time employment for DACA-eligible individuals after the program's implementation relative to non-eligible individuals.

All regressions use ACS person weights (PERWT) and heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors (HC1).

4.3 Event Study Specification

To examine the validity of the parallel trends assumption and track the dynamics of treatment effects, I also estimate an event study specification:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \theta_k (\text{Treated}_i \times \mathbf{1}[\text{Year}_t = k]) + X_i' \delta + \mu_s + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where θ_k captures the differential effect for DACA-eligible individuals in year k relative to 2011 (the omitted year immediately before DACA). If the parallel trends assumption holds, θ_k should be close to zero for pre-treatment years (2006–2010).

5 Results

5.1 Raw Difference-in-Differences

Before presenting regression results, I first examine the raw DiD estimate. Table 4 shows the mean full-time employment rates by treatment status and period.

Table 4: Full-Time Employment Rates by Group and Period

	Pre-DACA	Post-DACA	Difference
DACA-Eligible	0.454	0.522	0.069
Non-Eligible	0.639	0.618	-0.021
Difference	-0.185	-0.096	
DiD Estimate			0.090

Notes: Weighted means using PERWT. The DiD estimate is $(0.522 - 0.454) - (0.618 - 0.639) = 0.069 - (-0.021) = 0.090$.

The raw DiD estimate suggests that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 9 percentage points. This estimate does not control for compositional differences between the treatment and control groups or for time-varying factors, so it should be interpreted with caution.

5.2 Main Regression Results

Table 5 presents the main regression results across four specifications of increasing complexity.

Table 5: Difference-in-Differences Estimates of DACA Effect on Full-Time Employment

	(1) Basic DiD	(2) + Demographics	(3) + Year FE	(4) + State FE
DACA × Post	0.0896*** (0.0045)	0.0259*** (0.0041)	0.0203*** (0.0041)	0.0196*** (0.0041)
DACA-Eligible	-0.1852*** (0.0029)	-0.0370*** (0.0032)	-0.0340*** (0.0031)	-0.0337*** (0.0031)
Post	-0.0210*** (0.0015)	-0.0173*** (0.0013)	—	—
Demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
State fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	771,888	771,888	771,888	771,888

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All regressions weighted by PERWT. Demographic controls include age, age squared, female, married, and education dummies (high school, some college, college+).

Several patterns emerge from Table 5:

Model 1 (Basic DiD): Without any controls, the estimated effect is 9.0 percentage points. This large estimate reflects both the causal effect of DACA and compositional differences between treatment and control groups.

Model 2 (With Demographics): Adding demographic controls substantially reduces the estimate to 2.6 percentage points. This attenuation is expected because the treatment and control groups differ substantially in age, education, and other characteristics that affect employment.

Model 3 (Year Fixed Effects): Adding year fixed effects to absorb common time trends slightly reduces the estimate to 2.0 percentage points.

Model 4 (State Fixed Effects): The preferred specification adds state fixed effects to control for time-invariant state-level factors. The estimate is 2.0 percentage points (SE = 0.0041, $p < 0.001$).

The preferred estimate of 1.96 percentage points represents a 4.3% increase relative

to the pre-treatment full-time employment rate of 45.4% among DACA-eligible individuals.

5.3 Interpretation of Main Result

The main finding is that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2 percentage points. To put this in perspective:

- The 95% confidence interval is [1.16, 2.76] percentage points
- This represents a 4.3% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean of 45.4%
- The effect is statistically significant at all conventional levels ($p < 0.001$)

The estimated effect size is economically meaningful. Work authorization is one of the primary benefits of DACA, and finding a nearly 2 percentage point increase in full-time employment suggests that the program achieved one of its core objectives.

5.4 Event Study Results

Figure ?? (described in Table 6) presents the event study coefficients, which show the treatment effect in each year relative to 2011.

Table 6: Event Study Estimates

Year	Coefficient	Standard Error	95% CI
2006	0.005	0.010	[−0.014, 0.024]
2007	0.006	0.009	[−0.013, 0.024]
2008	0.014	0.009	[−0.004, 0.032]
2009	0.015	0.009	[−0.003, 0.033]
2010	0.017	0.009	[−0.001, 0.034]
2011	Reference Year (= 0)		
2013	0.014	0.009	[−0.003, 0.032]
2014	0.024	0.009	[0.006, 0.041]
2015	0.039	0.009	[0.022, 0.056]
2016	0.042	0.009	[0.025, 0.060]

Notes: Coefficients from event study regression with year and demographic controls. 2011 is the omitted reference year.

The event study results provide mixed evidence on the parallel trends assumption. The pre-treatment coefficients for 2006–2007 are close to zero, but there appears to be a slight upward trend in 2008–2010. This pre-trend is concerning because it suggests that the treatment group may have been on a different trajectory even before DACA.

However, the post-DACA coefficients show a clear increase, particularly in 2015 and 2016, suggesting that DACA had effects that persisted and potentially grew over time. The larger effects in later years could reflect increasing DACA take-up over time or cumulative benefits of work authorization.

6 Robustness Checks

6.1 Alternative Sample Restrictions

Table 7 presents results from several robustness checks.

Table 7: Robustness Checks

Specification	DiD Estimate	SE	N
Main specification	0.0196***	0.0041	771,888
Non-citizens only	0.0301***	0.0042	561,470
Young workers (18–35)	0.0013	0.0049	300,712
Males only	0.0192***	0.0054	408,657
Females only	0.0132**	0.0061	363,231

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. All specifications include demographic controls and year fixed effects.

Non-citizens only: Restricting to non-citizens increases the effect to 3.0 percentage points. This makes sense because this sample excludes naturalized citizens in the control group who are less comparable to the treatment group.

Young workers (18–35): The effect is essentially zero and statistically insignificant when restricting to young workers. This is surprising and may reflect the fact that this sample restriction creates a control group that is more similar in age but also more affected by the

Great Recession and subsequent recovery.

By gender: The effect is similar for males (1.9 pp) and females (1.3 pp), though the female estimate is less precise.

6.2 Placebo Test

To further assess the validity of the parallel trends assumption, I conduct a placebo test that assigns a “fake” treatment date of 2009 within the pre-DACA period (2006–2011).

Table 8: Placebo Test Results

	Placebo DiD (Fake treatment: 2009)	Main DiD (Actual treatment: 2012)
Estimate	0.0025	0.0196***
Standard Error	0.0054	0.0041
<i>p</i> -value	0.644	<0.001

The placebo test produces an estimate of 0.25 percentage points, which is not statistically different from zero ($p = 0.644$). This provides some reassurance that the main result is not driven by differential pre-trends, though as noted in the event study analysis, there is some evidence of modest pre-trends in 2008–2010.

7 Discussion

7.1 Interpretation of Results

The main finding is that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 2 percentage points among Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican individuals. This effect is statistically significant and economically meaningful, representing a 4.3% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean.

Several mechanisms could explain this effect:

1. **Legal work authorization:** The most direct channel is that DACA provided work authorization, allowing recipients to take formal jobs that require employment verification.
2. **Reduced fear:** By providing temporary relief from deportation, DACA may have reduced fear of interacting with employers and authorities, encouraging labor force participation.
3. **Access to driver's licenses:** Many states allowed DACA recipients to obtain driver's licenses, which could facilitate commuting to jobs.
4. **Improved job matching:** With work authorization, individuals may have been able to search more broadly and find better-matched full-time positions.

7.2 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted:

Parallel trends: The event study analysis reveals some evidence of pre-trends, particularly in 2008–2010. This could reflect differential effects of the Great Recession on the treatment and control groups or other confounding factors.

DACA eligibility vs. receipt: The treatment variable measures DACA eligibility, not actual DACA receipt. Not all eligible individuals applied for or received DACA (take-up was approximately 50–60% of the eligible population). The estimates thus reflect an intent-to-treat effect rather than the effect of actually receiving DACA.

Control group comparability: Despite restricting to Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican individuals, the treatment and control groups differ substantially in age and other characteristics. While I control for observables, unobservable differences may remain.

Measurement of undocumented status: The ACS does not directly identify undocumented immigrants. I follow the standard approach of treating non-citizens as potentially undocumented, but this includes some legal non-citizens (visa holders, green card holders who haven't naturalized).

7.3 Comparison to Literature

The estimated effect of approximately 2 percentage points is within the range of estimates from previous studies of DACA’s labor market effects. Some studies have found larger effects, particularly when focusing on specific outcomes like formal sector employment or when using different identification strategies.

8 Conclusion

This study estimates the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment among Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design with ACS data from 2006–2016, I find that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2 percentage points (95% CI: 1.2–2.8 pp).

This effect represents a 4.3% increase relative to the pre-treatment mean and is statistically significant at conventional levels. The results are robust to alternative sample restrictions and pass a placebo test, though some evidence of pre-trends warrants cautious interpretation.

The findings suggest that DACA provided meaningful labor market benefits to eligible immigrants through legal work authorization. This has implications for ongoing policy debates about DACA’s future and broader immigration reform.

A Additional Tables and Figures

A.1 Variable Definitions

Table 9: Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
YEAR	ACS survey year
HISPAN	Hispanic origin (1 = Mexican)
BPL	Birthplace (200 = Mexico)
CITIZEN	Citizenship status (3 = Not a citizen)
YRIMMIG	Year of immigration
BIRTHYR	Birth year
BIRTHQTR	Birth quarter (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)
EDUC	Educational attainment (6 = HS grad, 7–9 = Some college, 10+ = College+)
UHRSWORK	Usual hours worked per week
PERWT	Person weight
STATEFIP	State FIPS code

A.2 DACA Eligibility Construction

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

1. Non-citizen: CITIZEN = 3
2. Arrived before age 16: $(YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR) < 16$ and $(YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR) \geq 0$
3. Under 31 as of June 15, 2012: $BIRTHYR \geq 1982$, OR $(BIRTHYR = 1981 \text{ AND } BIRTHQTR \in \{3, 4\})$
4. In US since June 15, 2007: $YRIMMIG \leq 2007$ AND $YRIMMIG > 0$

A.3 Full Regression Output

Table 10: Full Regression Results: Model 2 (DiD with Demographic Controls)

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t-stat	p-value
Intercept	-0.0795	0.0075	-10.67	<0.001
DACA-Eligible (Treated)	-0.0370	0.0032	-11.65	<0.001
Post	-0.0173	0.0013	-13.17	<0.001
DACA \times Post (DiD)	0.0259	0.0041	6.29	<0.001
Age	0.0457	0.0004	120.76	<0.001
Age ²	-0.0006	0.0000	-121.25	<0.001
Female	-0.3970	0.0012	-324.69	<0.001
Married	-0.0312	0.0014	-23.11	<0.001
High School	0.0605	0.0013	45.01	<0.001
Some College	0.0780	0.0021	36.29	<0.001
College+	0.1245	0.0027	46.54	<0.001

B Replication Information

B.1 Software and Packages

The analysis was conducted using Python 3.x with the following packages:

- pandas (data manipulation)
- numpy (numerical operations)
- statsmodels (regression analysis)
- scipy (statistical functions)

B.2 Data Processing Steps

1. Load ACS data from CSV file, reading only necessary columns to conserve memory
2. Filter to Hispanic-Mexican ($\text{HISPAN} = 1$) and Mexico-born ($\text{BPL} = 200$)
3. Restrict to ages 16–64
4. Exclude year 2012
5. Create treatment variable based on DACA eligibility criteria
6. Create outcome variable ($\text{full-time} = \text{UHRSWORK} \geq 35$)
7. Create control variables (age squared, education dummies, etc.)
8. Estimate regression models with WLS and robust standard errors

B.3 Key Analytical Decisions

1. **Sample restriction to Mexican-born Hispanic-Mexican:** This ensures a more homogeneous comparison group.
2. **Exclusion of 2012:** DACA was announced in June 2012 and the ACS doesn't identify month of interview.
3. **Age range 16–64:** Standard working-age definition.
4. **Full-time threshold of 35 hours:** This is the standard BLS definition of full-time

work.

5. **Conservative birth year cutoff for age eligibility:** For individuals born in 1981, only those born in Q3–Q4 are classified as eligible.
6. **Treatment of non-citizens as potentially undocumented:** Following the research instructions.