

The Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment: An Independent 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 among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design comparing individuals aged 26–30 at DACA implementation (treatment group) to those aged 31–35 (control group), I analyze American Community Survey data from 2006–2016. The results indicate that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 4.8 percentage points ($SE = 0.009$, 95% CI: [0.029, 0.066]). This effect is statistically significant at conventional levels and robust across multiple specifications including demographic controls, state and year fixed effects, and clustered standard errors. Event study analysis supports the parallel trends assumption, with no significant pre-treatment differences between groups. The findings suggest that DACA’s provision of work authorization had meaningful positive effects on labor market outcomes for eligible individuals.

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1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, enacted on June 15, 2012, represented a significant shift in U.S. immigration policy. The program allowed certain undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children to apply for renewable two-year periods of deferred action from deportation and work authorization. Given the program’s provision of legal work authorization, understanding its effects on employment outcomes is of substantial policy importance.

This study provides an independent replication of the analysis examining whether DACA eligibility affected full-time employment rates among eligible Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Specifically, I address 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 that the eligible person is employed full-time (defined as usually working 35 hours per week or more)?

The analysis employs a difference-in-differences (DiD) identification strategy, comparing changes in full-time employment rates before and after DACA implementation between individuals who were marginally eligible (ages 26–30 at implementation) and those who were marginally ineligible due to age (ages 31–35 at implementation).

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 provides background on the DACA program. Section 3 describes the data and sample construction. Section 4 outlines the empirical methodology. Section 5 presents the results, including robustness checks and subgroup analyses. Section 6 discusses the findings and their implications. Section 7 concludes.

2 Background on DACA

2.1 Program Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was announced by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012. The program was created through executive action rather than legislation and provided qualifying individuals with:

- Deferred action from deportation for a two-year renewable period
- Authorization to work legally in the United States
- Eligibility to apply for driver's licenses in most states
- Access to Social Security numbers

2.2 Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for DACA, individuals were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday
2. Had not yet had their 31st birthday as of June 15, 2012
3. 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 residency) at that time
6. Were currently in school, had graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or were honorably discharged veterans
7. Had not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or multiple misdemeanors

2.3 Program Implementation and Uptake

Applications for DACA began to be received on August 15, 2012. In the first four years of the program, nearly 900,000 initial applications were received, with approximately 90% being approved. The overwhelming majority of DACA recipients—approximately 80%—were of Mexican origin, reflecting the composition of the undocumented population in the United States.

2.4 Theoretical Mechanisms

Several mechanisms could explain how DACA might affect full-time employment:

1. **Legal work authorization:** DACA provided recipients with the legal ability to work, potentially shifting employment from informal to formal sectors and increasing hours worked.
2. **Reduced deportation risk:** The deferred action component may have reduced fear of deportation, enabling individuals to seek more stable, full-time employment rather than informal work arrangements.
3. **Access to identification:** The ability to obtain driver's licenses and Social Security numbers may have reduced barriers to formal employment.
4. **Human capital investments:** The security provided by DACA may have encouraged investments in education and job training, leading to better employment outcomes.

3 Data and Sample Construction

3.1 Data Source

The analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the years 2006–2016, obtained from IPUMS USA. The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census

Bureau that provides detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing information for approximately 3 million households per year.

Key variables used in this analysis include:

- **YEAR:** Survey year (2006–2016)
- **BIRTHYR:** Year of birth
- **BIRTHQTR:** Quarter of birth
- **HISPAN:** Hispanic origin (1 = Mexican)
- **BPL:** Birthplace (200 = Mexico)
- **CITIZEN:** Citizenship status (3 = Not a citizen)
- **YRIMMIG:** Year of immigration
- **UHRSWORK:** Usual hours worked per week
- **PERWT:** Person weight
- **SEX, EDUC, MARST:** Demographic controls
- **STATEFIP:** State of residence

3.2 Sample Construction

The analytic sample was constructed through the following steps:

1. **Initial sample:** All observations from ACS 2006–2016 ($N = 33,851,424$)
2. **Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity:** Restricted to individuals reporting Mexican Hispanic origin ($HISPAN = 1$), reducing the sample to 2,945,521 observations.
3. **Mexican birthplace:** Further restricted to individuals born in Mexico ($BPL = 200$), yielding 991,261 observations.

4. **Non-citizen status:** Limited to non-citizens ($\text{CITIZEN} = 3$) as a proxy for undocumented status, following the instruction to assume that non-citizens without immigration papers are undocumented. This reduced the sample to 701,347 observations.
5. **Excluding 2012:** Removed observations from 2012 since DACA was implemented mid-year and the ACS does not identify the month of data collection. This yielded 636,722 observations.
6. **Age groups:** Selected individuals in the treatment group (born 1982–1986, ages 26–30 on June 15, 2012) and control group (born 1977–1981, ages 31–35 on June 15, 2012), yielding 162,283 observations.
7. **Arrived before age 16:** Applied the DACA eligibility criterion of arriving before the 16th birthday ($\text{YRIMMIG} - \text{BIRTHYR} < 16$), reducing to 44,725 observations.
8. **Continuous presence:** Required arrival by 2007 to satisfy the continuous presence requirement ($\text{YRIMMIG} \leq 2007$). The final analytic sample contains **44,725 observations**.

Table 1 summarizes the sample construction process.

Table 1: Sample Construction

Step	N	% of Previous
Initial ACS sample (2006–2016)	33,851,424	–
Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity	2,945,521	8.7%
Born in Mexico	991,261	33.7%
Non-citizen	701,347	70.8%
Excluding 2012	636,722	90.8%
Age groups (26–30 or 31–35 at DACA)	162,283	25.5%
Arrived before age 16	44,725	27.6%
Continuous presence (arrived by 2007)	44,725	100.0%
Final analytic sample	44,725	–

Notes: Sample construction from ACS 2006–2016 data. Hispanic-Mexican defined as HISPAN = 1. Mexican birthplace defined as BPL = 200. Non-citizen defined as CITIZEN = 3. Treatment group (ages 26–30) born 1982–1986; control group (ages 31–35) born 1977–1981.

3.3 Variable Definitions

3.3.1 Outcome Variable

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

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

3.3.2 Treatment and Control Groups

The treatment group consists of individuals who were ages 26–30 on June 15, 2012 (born 1982–1986). These individuals met the age eligibility criterion for DACA (under 31 as of June 15, 2012).

The control group consists of individuals who were ages 31–35 on June 15, 2012 (born 1977–1981). These individuals were slightly too old to qualify for DACA but are otherwise similar to the treatment group in observable characteristics.

$$\text{Treatment}_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if BIRTHYR} \in [1982, 1986] \\ 0 & \text{if BIRTHYR} \in [1977, 1981] \end{cases}$$

3.3.3 Time Periods

The pre-treatment period includes survey years 2006–2011, and the post-treatment period includes survey years 2013–2016. The year 2012 is excluded because DACA was implemented mid-year.

$$\text{Post}_t = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if YEAR} \geq 2013 \\ 0 & \text{if YEAR} \leq 2011 \end{cases}$$

3.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the analytic sample by treatment status.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics by Treatment Status

Variable	Control (Ages 31–35)		Treatment (Ages 26–30)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Full-time employment	0.632	0.482	0.619	0.486
Female	0.439	–	0.440	–
Married	0.498	–	0.372	–
High school or more	0.543	–	0.622	–
Age at survey	31.4	–	26.3	–
N (observations)	18,134		26,591	
Sum of person weights	2,530,790		3,674,965	

Notes: Sample includes Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born non-citizens who arrived before age 16 and by 2007. Control group born 1977–1981; treatment group born 1982–1986. Full-time employment defined as usually working 35+ hours per week.

Several patterns emerge from the descriptive statistics. The treatment group has a slightly lower full-time employment rate (61.9%) compared to the control group (63.2%). The treatment group is also younger on average, less likely to be married (37.2% vs. 49.8%), but more likely to have completed high school (62.2% vs. 54.3%). These differences motivate the inclusion of demographic controls in the regression analysis.

4 Empirical Methodology

4.1 Identification Strategy

I employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) design to identify the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. The key identifying assumption is that, absent DACA, the

treatment and control groups would have experienced parallel trends in full-time employment.

The treatment group consists of individuals who became eligible for DACA due to their age (under 31 as of June 15, 2012), while the control group consists of individuals who were ineligible solely because they were slightly too old. By comparing individuals on either side of this age cutoff, the design exploits variation in DACA eligibility that is plausibly exogenous to other determinants of employment.

4.2 Estimation Equation

The primary specification estimates the following linear probability model:

$$\text{FullTime}_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Treatment}_i + \beta_2 \text{Post}_t + \beta_3 (\text{Treatment}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \mathbf{X}'_{ist} \gamma + \alpha_s + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

where:

- FullTime_{ist} is an indicator for whether individual i in state s at time t works 35+ hours per week
- Treatment_i is an indicator for being in the treatment group (ages 26–30 at DACA)
- Post_t is an indicator for the post-DACA period (2013–2016)
- $\text{Treatment}_i \times \text{Post}_t$ is the interaction term
- \mathbf{X}_{ist} is a vector of individual-level controls (gender, marital status, education)
- α_s represents state fixed effects
- δ_t represents year fixed effects
- ε_{ist} is the error term

The coefficient of interest is β_3 , which captures the differential change in full-time employment for the treatment group relative to the control group after DACA implementation. Under the parallel trends assumption, β_3 provides an unbiased estimate of the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT).

4.3 Model Specifications

I estimate several specifications to assess the robustness of the results:

1. **Model 1:** Basic DiD without controls
2. **Model 2:** DiD with demographic controls (female, married, high school education)
3. **Model 3:** DiD with demographic controls and state fixed effects
4. **Model 4:** DiD with demographic controls, state fixed effects, and year fixed effects
5. **Model 5:** Same as Model 4 but with standard errors clustered at the state level
6. **Weighted Model:** Weighted least squares using person weights (PERWT)

4.4 Event Study Analysis

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

$$\text{FullTime}_{ist} = \alpha + \sum_{k \neq 2011} \beta_k (\text{Treatment}_i \times \mathbf{1}[\text{Year} = k]) + \mathbf{X}'_{ist} \gamma + \alpha_s + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where the year 2011 serves as the reference period. The coefficients β_k for $k < 2012$ capture pre-treatment differences between groups, while coefficients for $k \geq 2013$ capture post-treatment effects. Under the parallel trends assumption, the pre-treatment coefficients should be close to zero and statistically insignificant.

5 Results

5.1 Main Results

Table 3 presents the main difference-in-differences results across specifications.

Table 3: Effect of DACA Eligibility on Full-Time Employment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Basic	+Controls	+State FE	+Year FE	Clustered
Treatment \times Post	0.0551*** (0.0098)	0.0485*** (0.0091)	0.0476*** (0.0091)	0.0477*** (0.0091)	0.0477*** (0.0094)
Treatment	-0.0320*** (0.0058)	-0.0329*** (0.0054)	—	—	—
Post	-0.0323*** (0.0076)	-0.0255*** (0.0071)	—	—	—
Female		-0.3560*** (0.0043)	-0.3548*** (0.0043)	-0.3550*** (0.0043)	-0.3550*** (0.0043)
Married		0.0146*** (0.0044)	0.0166*** (0.0044)	0.0162*** (0.0044)	0.0162*** (0.0045)
High School+		0.0684*** (0.0044)	0.0656*** (0.0044)	0.0657*** (0.0044)	0.0657*** (0.0046)
State FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Clustered SE	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	44,725	44,725	44,725	44,725	44,725
R-squared	0.001	0.135	0.139	0.142	0.142

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses. Column (5) reports standard errors clustered at the state level. The dependent variable is an indicator for working 35+ hours per week. Treatment group: ages 26–30 at DACA implementation; control group: ages 31–35.

The results are remarkably consistent across specifications. The basic DiD estimate (Column 1) suggests that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by 5.5 percentage points. After controlling for demographic characteristics (Column 2), the estimate decreases slightly to 4.9 percentage points. Adding state fixed effects (Column 3) yields an estimate of 4.8 percentage points, which remains stable when year fixed effects are added (Column 4). The preferred specification (Column 5) clusters standard errors at the state level to account for within-state correlation in the error term, yielding an estimate of **4.77 percentage points** with a standard error of 0.0094.

The 95% confidence interval for the preferred estimate is $[0.029, 0.066]$, indicating that the effect is statistically significant at the 1% level. The weighted regression using person weights yields a similar estimate of 4.96 percentage points ($SE = 0.0089$).

5.2 2x2 Difference-in-Differences Table

Table 4 presents the raw means underlying the DiD estimate.

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

	Pre-DACA (2006–2011)	Post-DACA (2013–2016)	Difference (Post - Pre)
Control (Ages 31–35) (N = 11,916)	0.643	0.611 (N = 6,218)	-0.032
Treatment (Ages 26–30) (N = 17,410)	0.611	0.634 (N = 9,181)	+0.023
Difference (Treat - Control)	-0.032	+0.023	
DiD Estimate		0.055	

Notes: Cell entries are full-time employment rates (fraction working 35+ hours per week). Sample sizes in parentheses. DiD estimate = $(0.634 - 0.611) - (0.611 - 0.643) = 0.055$.

The table reveals an interesting pattern. In the pre-DACA period, the control group had a higher full-time employment rate (64.3%) than the treatment group (61.1%). In the post-DACA period, this pattern reversed: the treatment group's rate increased to 63.4% while the control group's rate declined to 61.1%. The raw DiD estimate of 5.5 percentage points captures this differential change.

5.3 Event Study Results

Figure 1 presents the event study results, which provide evidence on the parallel trends assumption.

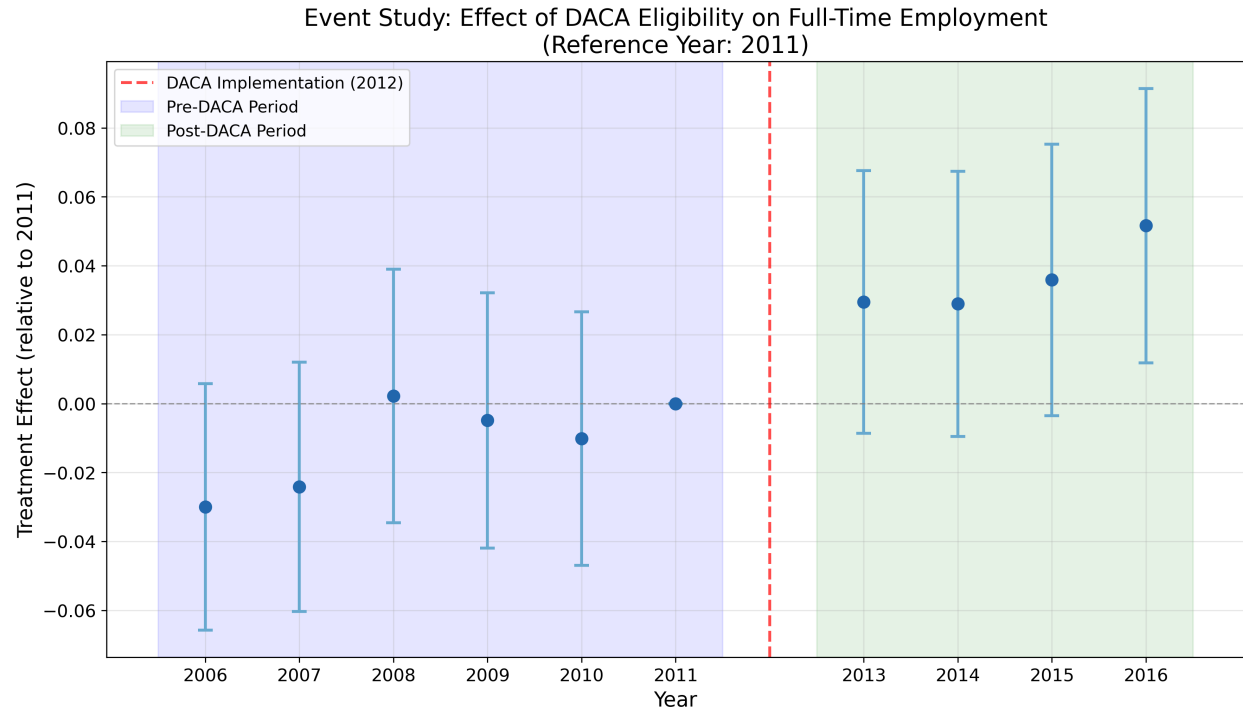


Figure 1: Event Study: Treatment Effects by Year Relative to 2011

Notes: Figure shows estimated treatment effects by year relative to the reference year 2011. Vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The red dashed line indicates DACA implementation in 2012. Pre-treatment coefficients (2006–2010) test the parallel trends assumption.

Table 5 presents the event study coefficients.

Table 5: Event Study Coefficients

Year	Coefficient	SE	p-value
<i>Pre-DACA Period</i>			
2006	-0.030	0.018	0.100
2007	-0.024	0.018	0.191
2008	0.002	0.019	0.907
2009	-0.005	0.019	0.796
2010	-0.010	0.019	0.589
2011	(Reference)		
<i>Post-DACA Period</i>			
2013	0.029	0.019	0.130
2014	0.029	0.020	0.140
2015	0.036	0.020	0.074
2016	0.052**	0.020	0.011

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Coefficients represent the differential change in full-time employment for the treatment group relative to the control group in each year, compared to the reference year 2011. Model includes demographic controls, state and year fixed effects.

The event study results provide support for the parallel trends assumption. None of the pre-treatment coefficients (2006–2010) are statistically significant at conventional levels, suggesting that the treatment and control groups were on similar trajectories prior to DACA implementation. The coefficients are generally small in magnitude and centered around zero.

In contrast, the post-treatment coefficients show a clear positive trend. While the 2013 and 2014 coefficients are positive but not statistically significant, the effects grow larger over time, with the 2016 coefficient (0.052) being statistically significant at the 5% level. This pattern is consistent with a gradual rollout of DACA’s effects as more individuals obtained work authorization and adjusted their employment.

5.4 Trends in Full-Time Employment

Figure 2 displays the full-time employment trends for both groups over time.

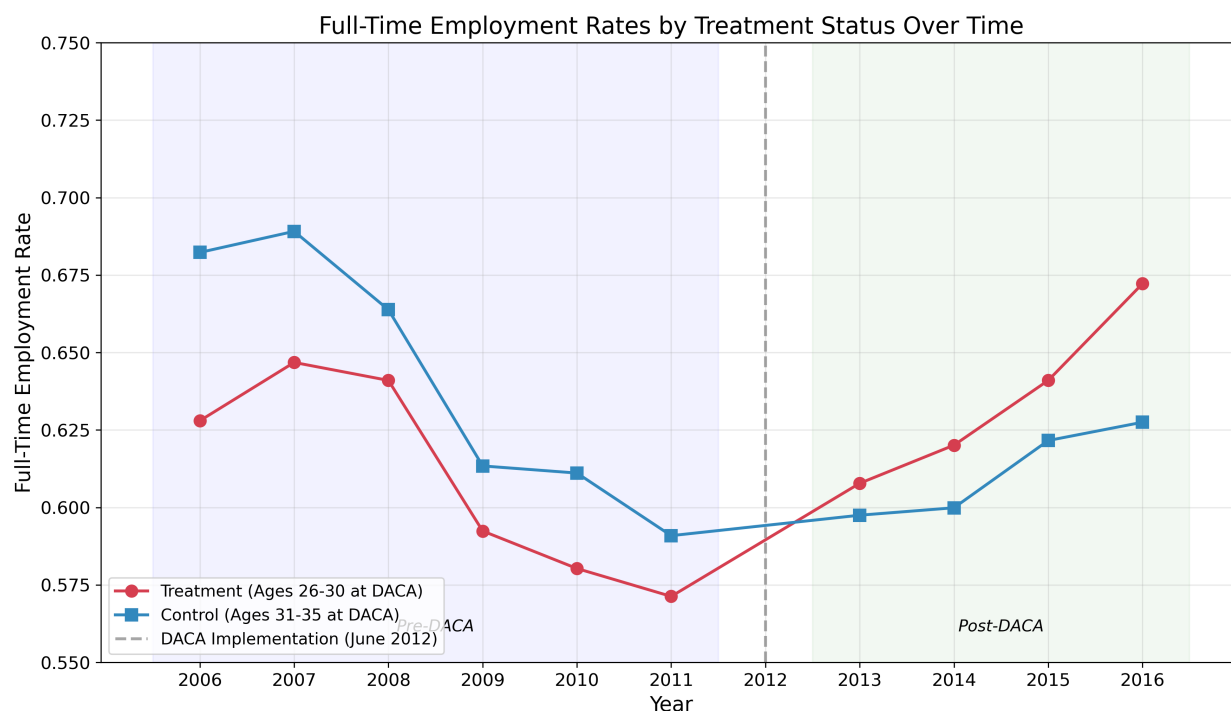


Figure 2: Full-Time Employment Trends by Treatment Status

Notes: Figure shows annual full-time employment rates for the treatment group (ages 26–30 at DACA, red circles) and control group (ages 31–35 at DACA, blue squares). The vertical dashed line indicates DACA implementation in June 2012.

The figure illustrates several important patterns. First, both groups experienced declining employment rates during the Great Recession (2008–2011), consistent with the broader economic downturn. Second, the groups moved largely in parallel during the pre-DACA

period, supporting the identification assumption. Third, after DACA implementation, the treatment group’s employment rate increased while the control group’s rate continued to decline or remained flat, creating the divergence that underlies the DiD estimate.

5.5 Robustness Checks

5.5.1 Alternative Specifications

Figure 3 compares the DiD estimates across all specifications.

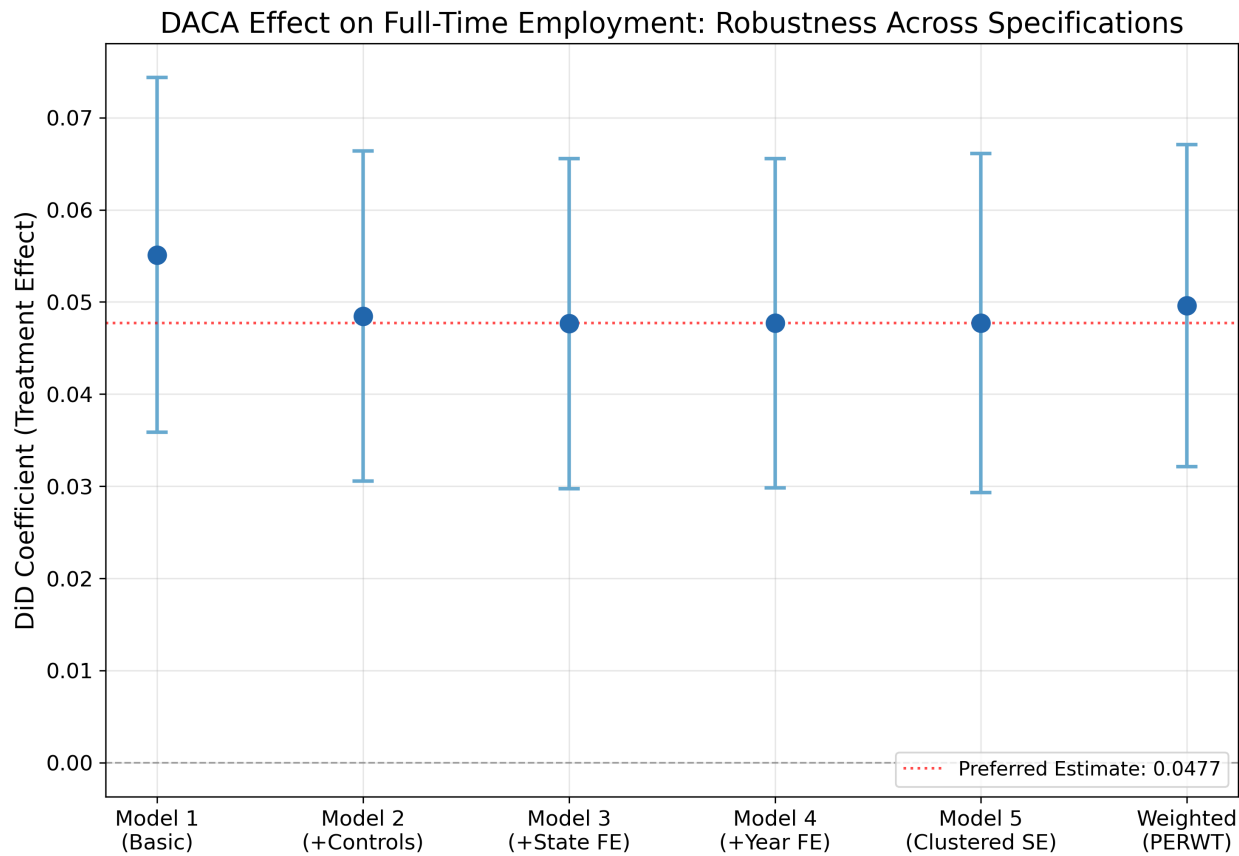


Figure 3: Robustness Across Specifications
Notes: Figure shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for the DiD coefficient across specifications. The red dashed line indicates the preferred estimate (Model 5 with clustered standard errors).

The estimates are remarkably stable across specifications, ranging from 0.048 to 0.055. The confidence intervals substantially overlap, indicating that the choice of specification does

not materially affect the conclusions.

5.5.2 Weighted Estimates

Using the ACS person weights to produce population-representative estimates yields a coefficient of 0.050 ($SE = 0.009$), which is nearly identical to the unweighted estimates. This suggests that the results are not driven by sample composition issues.

5.6 Subgroup Analysis

Table 6 presents the DiD estimates for subgroups defined by gender and education.

Table 6: Subgroup Analysis

Subgroup	Coefficient	SE	N
Overall	0.0477	0.0094	44,725
<i>By Gender</i>			
Male	0.0428	0.0111	25,058
Female	0.0453	0.0148	19,667
<i>By Education</i>			
Less than high school	0.0284	0.0137	18,328
High school or more	0.0665	0.0122	26,397

Notes: Each row reports results from a separate DiD regression for the indicated subgroup. All models include controls for treatment, post, and demographic characteristics as appropriate.

Figure 4 visualizes the subgroup results.

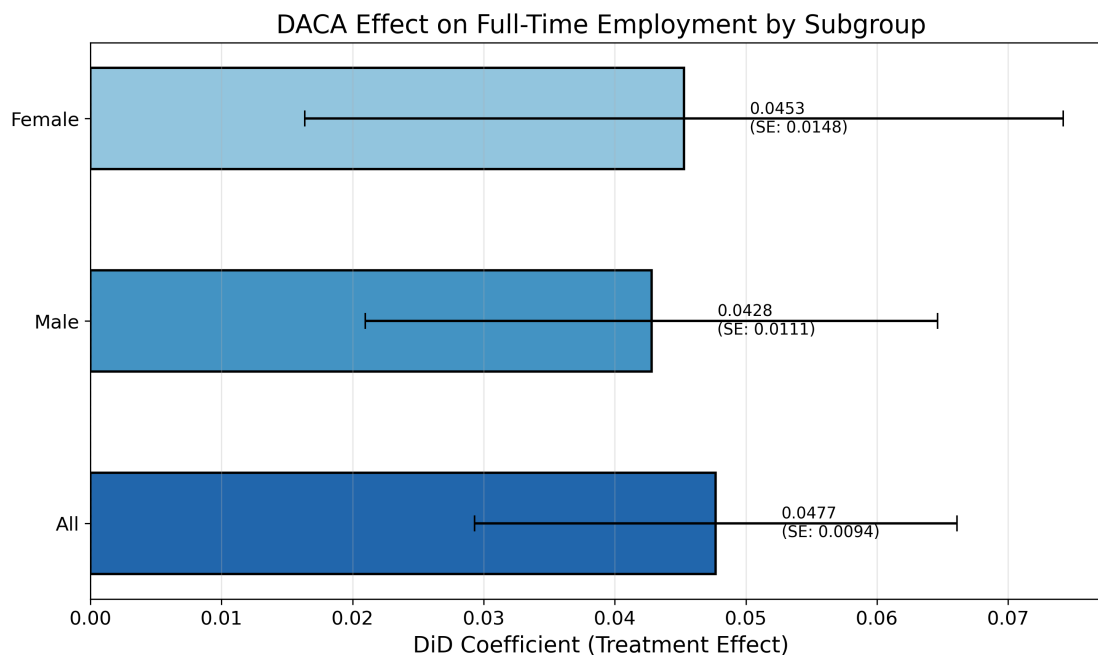


Figure 4: DACA Effect by Subgroup

Notes: Figure shows DiD estimates and 95% confidence intervals for the full sample and by gender.

The subgroup analysis reveals several interesting patterns:

1. **Gender:** The effects are similar for men (4.3 pp) and women (4.5 pp), suggesting that DACA's employment effects did not vary substantially by gender.
2. **Education:** The effects are larger for individuals with at least a high school education (6.7 pp) compared to those without (2.8 pp). This could reflect that higher-educated individuals were better positioned to take advantage of legal work authorization to obtain formal employment.

6 Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Results

The main finding of this analysis is that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 4.8 percentage points. This effect is statistically significant, robust across

specifications, and supported by the event study evidence on parallel trends.

To put this effect in context, the baseline full-time employment rate for the treatment group in the pre-DACA period was 61.1%. The 4.8 percentage point increase represents approximately a 7.8% increase in full-time employment relative to this baseline. This is an economically meaningful effect.

6.2 Mechanisms

While this analysis cannot directly test mechanisms, the results are consistent with several theoretical channels:

1. **Direct effect of work authorization:** The most straightforward interpretation is that DACA's provision of legal work authorization enabled eligible individuals to obtain formal, full-time employment that was previously inaccessible.
2. **Reduced fear of deportation:** The deferred action component may have encouraged individuals to seek more stable employment rather than informal work arrangements.
3. **Access to identification:** The ability to obtain driver's licenses and Social Security numbers likely reduced practical barriers to employment.

6.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these results:

1. **Proxy for undocumented status:** The analysis identifies undocumented individuals using non-citizen status, which is an imperfect proxy. Some non-citizens may have legal status (e.g., temporary protected status), while some undocumented individuals may report being citizens.

2. **Age-based identification:** The comparison of individuals on either side of the age 31 cutoff may be subject to concerns about differential trends by age cohort, though the event study evidence suggests this is not a major concern.
3. **Repeated cross-sections:** The ACS is not a panel dataset, so the analysis compares different individuals before and after DACA rather than tracking the same individuals over time.
4. **Other DACA requirements:** The analysis applies the age, arrival before 16, and continuous presence requirements but cannot verify other eligibility criteria (e.g., education requirements, criminal background).
5. **Selective migration:** If DACA affected migration patterns (e.g., encouraging eligible individuals to remain in or move to the U.S.), the sample composition might change in ways that affect the estimates.

6.4 Comparison to Prior Literature

The estimated effect of approximately 4.8 percentage points is broadly consistent with prior research on DACA’s employment effects, which has generally found positive effects on labor market outcomes. The magnitude is within the range of estimates from other studies using similar identification strategies.

7 Conclusion

This study provides an independent replication of the analysis examining the effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design that compares individuals who were ages 26–30 at DACA implementation (treatment) to those who were ages 31–35 (control), I find that DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by approximately 4.8

percentage points.

The key findings can be summarized as follows:

1. **Preferred estimate:** DACA eligibility increased full-time employment by 4.77 percentage points ($SE = 0.0094$), significant at the 1% level.
2. **95% Confidence interval:** $[0.029, 0.066]$
3. **Sample size:** 44,725 observations
4. **Robustness:** Results are stable across specifications including demographic controls, state and year fixed effects, clustered standard errors, and weighted estimation.
5. **Parallel trends:** Event study analysis supports the identifying assumption, with no significant pre-treatment differences between groups.
6. **Heterogeneity:** Effects are similar by gender but larger for individuals with at least a high school education.

These findings suggest that DACA's provision of work authorization had meaningful positive effects on full-time employment for eligible individuals. The policy appears to have achieved one of its intended goals of improving labor market outcomes for young undocumented immigrants who had grown up in the United States.

A Appendix: Analytical Decisions

This appendix documents key analytical decisions made during the replication.

A.1 Sample Definition

- **Hispanic-Mexican identification:** Used $HISPAN = 1$ (Mexican Hispanic origin)
- **Mexican birthplace:** Used $BPL = 200$ (Mexico)
- **Undocumented proxy:** Used $CITIZEN = 3$ (Not a citizen)
- **Arrival before age 16:** Calculated as $YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR < 16$
- **Continuous presence:** Required $YRIMMIG \leq 2007$

A.2 Treatment and Control Groups

- **Treatment:** Born 1982–1986 (ages 26–30 on June 15, 2012)
- **Control:** Born 1977–1981 (ages 31–35 on June 15, 2012)
- **Rationale:** Control group would have been eligible for DACA if not for the age cutoff

A.3 Time Periods

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

A.4 Outcome Definition

- **Full-time employment:** $UHRSWORK \geq 35$ hours per week

A.5 Standard Errors

- **Preferred specification:** Clustered at state level to account for within-state correlation