

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

Independent Replication Study

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Abstract

This study examines the causal effect of eligibility for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using American Community Survey data from 2006–2016 and a difference-in-differences research design, I compare employment outcomes between DACA-eligible individuals and a control group of Mexican-born non-citizens who were ineligible due to age restrictions. The results indicate that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.1 percentage points ($SE = 0.0036$, 95% CI: [0.014, 0.028]). This effect is statistically significant and robust across multiple specifications. The findings suggest that providing work authorization to undocumented young adults has meaningful positive effects on their labor market outcomes.

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

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1 Introduction

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented on June 15, 2012, represented a significant shift in U.S. immigration policy. The program allowed qualifying undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children to apply for temporary protection from deportation and receive work authorization for a renewable two-year period. Since its implementation, DACA has affected hundreds of thousands of individuals, with nearly 900,000 initial applications received in its first four years and approximately 90% approval rates.

This study addresses the following research question: *Among ethnically Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals living in the United States, what was the causal impact of eligibility for DACA on the probability of full-time employment?* Full-time employment is defined as usually working 35 hours per week or more.

The policy context provides a natural setting for causal inference. DACA eligibility was determined by a set of specific criteria that created sharp distinctions between individuals who were otherwise similar in many respects. Most importantly, the age requirement—individuals had to be under 31 as of June 15, 2012—created a natural comparison group of slightly older individuals who were otherwise similar but ineligible for the program.

Understanding the employment effects of DACA is important for several reasons. First, work authorization is a central component of the program, making employment outcomes a direct measure of policy effectiveness. Second, employment outcomes have implications for the broader economic contributions of DACA recipients. Third, evidence on DACA’s effects informs ongoing policy debates about immigration reform and pathways to legal status.

2 Background and Policy Context

2.1 The DACA Program

DACA was announced by the Department of Homeland Security on June 15, 2012. The program provides qualifying individuals with deferred action status, which temporarily protects them from deportation, and work authorization through an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The initial authorization period is two years, after which recipients can apply for renewal.

To qualify for DACA, individuals must 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. Lived continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012 and at the time of application
5. Did not have lawful immigration status on June 15, 2012
6. Were currently in school, had graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, had obtained a GED, or were an honorably discharged veteran
7. Had not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors

The program began accepting applications on August 15, 2012. Due to the overwhelming Mexican origin of undocumented immigrants in the United States, the vast majority of DACA recipients are from Mexico.

2.2 Theoretical Mechanisms

DACA eligibility could affect employment through several channels:

Direct work authorization: The most direct mechanism is the provision of legal work authorization. Without DACA, undocumented individuals face significant barriers to formal employment, including the inability to complete I-9 employment verification forms. Work authorization removes these barriers and allows recipients to seek employment in the formal sector.

Reduced employer discrimination: Even when undocumented workers find employment, they may face discrimination due to their status. Work authorization may reduce such discrimination and improve job quality, including the probability of full-time work.

Access to driver's licenses: In many states, DACA recipients became eligible to obtain driver's licenses, which facilitates commuting and expands the geographic scope of job search.

Reduced fear of deportation: The psychological burden of potential deportation may affect job search behavior and employment decisions. DACA provides a degree of security that may encourage more active labor market participation.

3 Data

3.1 Data Source

This analysis uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) as provided by IPUMS USA. The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that provides

detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing information. The ACS is a repeated cross-section, not a panel dataset, meaning different individuals are surveyed each year.

I use the one-year ACS files from 2006 through 2016, which provide annual observations during both the pre-DACA and post-DACA periods. The year 2012 is excluded from the analysis because DACA was implemented mid-year (June 15, 2012), and the ACS does not record the month of interview, making it impossible to distinguish pre- and post-implementation observations within that year.

3.2 Sample Selection

The analysis focuses on individuals who meet the following criteria:

- **Hispanic-Mexican ethnicity:** HISPAN = 1 (Mexican origin)
- **Born in Mexico:** BPL = 200 (birthplace is Mexico)
- **Working age:** Ages 18–64
- **Non-citizen:** CITIZEN = 3 (not a citizen)
- **Valid immigration information:** Has recorded year of immigration (YRIMMIG > 0)

These restrictions yield an analysis sample focused on the population most likely to be affected by DACA while ensuring we have the necessary information to determine eligibility status.

3.3 Variable Construction

3.3.1 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 (usual hours worked per week):

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

3.3.2 Treatment Variable: DACA Eligibility

I construct a measure of DACA eligibility based on the observable criteria in the ACS data. An individual is classified as DACA-eligible if they meet all of the following conditions:

1. **Non-citizen:** CITIZEN = 3

2. **Arrived before age 16:** $(YRIMMIG - BIRTHYR) < 16$
3. **Under 31 on June 15, 2012:** $BIRTHYR \geq 1982$ (conservative criterion)
4. **Continuous presence since 2007:** $YRIMMIG \leq 2007$

Several notes on these criteria:

- Since the ACS provides only year of birth (not month and day), I use birth year ≥ 1982 as a conservative threshold to ensure individuals were definitely under 31 on June 15, 2012.
- The ACS cannot distinguish between documented and undocumented non-citizens. Following the instructions, I assume that any non-citizen who has not received immigration papers is undocumented for DACA purposes.
- The education and criminal history requirements cannot be verified in the ACS data. To the extent that some DACA-eligible individuals did not meet these requirements, this would bias the estimates toward zero (attenuation bias).

3.3.3 Control Variables

The analysis includes the following demographic controls:

- Age and age squared (AGE, AGE^2)
- Female indicator ($SEX = 2$)
- Married indicator ($MARST \in \{1, 2\}$)
- High school education or more ($EDUC \geq 6$)

3.4 Sample Sizes

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

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 Difference-in-Differences Design

I employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design to estimate the causal effect of DACA eligibility on full-time employment. The basic DiD framework compares changes in

Table 1: Sample Sizes by Year and DACA Eligibility Status

Year	Control	DACA Eligible	Total
<i>Pre-DACA Period</i>			
2006	50,220	4,894	55,114
2007	50,611	5,543	56,154
2008	48,687	5,637	54,324
2009	49,534	6,210	55,744
2010	50,234	7,006	57,240
2011	50,340	7,577	57,917
<i>Post-DACA Period</i>			
2013	46,150	7,977	54,127
2014	45,371	8,182	53,553
2015	44,110	8,157	52,267
2016	43,113	8,061	51,174
Total	478,370	69,244	547,614

Notes: Sample restricted to Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born non-citizens ages 18–64 with valid immigration year. Year 2012 excluded due to mid-year DACA implementation.

outcomes over time between a treatment group (DACA-eligible individuals) and a control group (DACA-ineligible individuals).

The control group consists of Mexican-born non-citizens who were not eligible for DACA, primarily because they were too old (born before 1982). This group provides a plausible counterfactual because they faced similar labor market conditions and immigration status as the treatment group but were not affected by DACA.

4.2 Estimation Equation

The main specification is:

$$\text{FullTime}_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Eligible}_i + \beta_2 \text{Post}_t + \beta_3 (\text{Eligible}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + X_i' \gamma + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where:

- FullTime_{ist} is an indicator for full-time employment for individual i in state s at time t
- Eligible_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 controls (age, age², female, married, high school education)
- δ_t are 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 DACA-eligible individuals relative to the control group after DACA implementation.

4.3 Identification Assumptions

The key identifying assumption for the DiD estimator 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 cannot be directly tested, but I examine pre-treatment trends to assess its plausibility.

Additional assumptions include:

- **No anticipation:** Individuals did not change their employment behavior in anticipation of DACA before its announcement.
- **No spillovers:** DACA did not affect the employment outcomes of the control group. This could be violated if, for example, DACA-eligible workers competed with control group workers for jobs.
- **Stable composition:** The composition of treatment and control groups did not change differentially over time due to selective migration or other factors.

4.4 Standard Errors

Standard errors are clustered at the state level to account for potential correlation in outcomes within states. This is appropriate given that labor market conditions and state-level policies may create within-state correlation in employment outcomes. The sample includes observations from all 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

4.5 Weights

All regressions use ACS person weights (PERWT) to produce population-representative estimates. The weights account for the complex survey design of the ACS.

5 Results

5.1 Summary Statistics

Table 2 presents summary statistics for the pre-DACA period (2006–2011), comparing DACA-eligible individuals to the control group.

Table 2: Summary Statistics: Pre-Period (2006–2011)

Variable	DACA Eligible	Control
Full-time employment	0.520 (0.500)	0.628 (0.483)
Employed (any hours)	0.608 (0.488)	0.685 (0.465)
In labor force	0.700 (0.458)	0.746 (0.435)
Age	22.07 (3.82)	37.42 (10.23)
Female	0.442 (0.497)	0.428 (0.495)
Married	0.254 (0.435)	0.622 (0.485)
High school education+	0.620 (0.485)	0.399 (0.490)
Years in US	13.37 (5.01)	14.20 (7.95)
N (unweighted)	36,867	299,626

Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses. Sample weights applied for means. Sample restricted to Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born non-citizens ages 18–64.

Several patterns emerge from the summary statistics:

- DACA-eligible individuals have lower baseline rates of full-time employment (52.0% vs. 62.8%) and overall employment (60.8% vs. 68.5%).
- The treatment group is significantly younger (mean age 22 vs. 37), which is expected given the age-based eligibility criteria.
- DACA-eligible individuals are less likely to be married (25.4% vs. 62.2%), consistent with their younger age.

- DACA-eligible individuals have higher educational attainment (62.0% with at least high school vs. 39.9%), possibly reflecting the education requirement for DACA eligibility or generational differences.
- Years in the US are similar between groups (13.4 vs. 14.2 years).

These differences underscore the importance of controlling for demographic characteristics in the analysis and motivate the use of a DiD design that relies on within-group changes over time rather than cross-sectional comparisons.

5.2 Main Results

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

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

	(1) Simple DiD	(2) With Controls	(3) Year FE
DACA Eligible \times Post	0.0727*** (0.0036)	0.0299*** (0.0040)	0.0210*** (0.0036)
DACA Eligible	-0.1085*** (0.0040)	-0.0318*** (0.0050)	-0.0387*** (0.0047)
Post	-0.0247*** (0.0026)	-0.0154*** (0.0022)	—
Age		0.0332*** (0.0012)	0.0334*** (0.0012)
Age ²		-0.0004*** (0.0000)	-0.0004*** (0.0000)
Female		-0.4374*** (0.0154)	-0.4378*** (0.0154)
Married		-0.0364*** (0.0057)	-0.0359*** (0.0057)
High School+		0.0354*** (0.0037)	0.0353*** (0.0037)
Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes
Observations	547,614	547,614	547,614

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at state level in parentheses. All regressions weighted by person weights. Dependent variable is full-time employment ($\text{UHRSWORK} \geq 35$).

Column (1) presents the simple DiD specification without controls. The coefficient on the interaction term (DACA Eligible \times Post) is 0.0727, suggesting that DACA eligibility

increased full-time employment by 7.27 percentage points. However, this estimate likely confounds the treatment effect with differential trends associated with the demographic differences between groups.

Column (2) adds demographic controls. The DiD coefficient decreases to 0.0299 (2.99 percentage points), suggesting that much of the simple DiD estimate was driven by compositional differences rather than the treatment effect.

Column (3) presents the preferred specification with year fixed effects. The DiD coefficient is 0.0210 (2.10 percentage points) with a standard error of 0.0036. This estimate is statistically significant at the 1% level, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.014, 0.028].

Interpretation: The preferred estimate suggests that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.1 percentage points. Given a baseline full-time employment rate of 52.0% among DACA-eligible individuals in the pre-period, this represents a relative increase of about 4%.

5.3 Event Study Analysis

Figure ?? presents an event study analysis that examines the dynamics of the treatment effect over time. This analysis estimates separate treatment effects for each year relative to a reference year (2011, the year before DACA implementation).

The event study results (Table 4) reveal several important patterns:

Pre-trends: The pre-DACA coefficients (2006–2010) are relatively small and generally not statistically significant. While there is some fluctuation, none of the pre-period coefficients are significantly different from the 2011 reference year at conventional significance levels. This provides some support for the parallel trends assumption, though the fluctuation warrants cautious interpretation.

Post-DACA effects: The treatment effects become larger and more precisely estimated in the post-DACA period. The effect grows from 1.6 percentage points in 2013 to 4.4 percentage points in 2015–2016. This pattern of growing effects is consistent with gradual DACA take-up: applications were first accepted in August 2012, and it takes time for recipients to receive work authorization and translate it into employment changes.

6 Robustness Checks

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

Table 4: Event Study Coefficients: DACA Eligible \times Year (Reference: 2011)

Year	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Pre-DACA Period</i>		
2006	0.0115	(0.0122)
2007	0.0072	(0.0063)
2008	0.0186	(0.0133)
2009	0.0199	(0.0105)
2010	0.0178	(0.0152)
2011	0	(reference)
<i>Post-DACA Period</i>		
2013	0.0162*	(0.0091)
2014	0.0290**	(0.0123)
2015	0.0440***	(0.0121)
2016	0.0440***	(0.0107)

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at state level in parentheses. All regressions include demographic controls and are weighted by person weights.

6.1 Alternative Age Bandwidths

The main analysis includes all working-age adults (18–64), but the treatment and control groups differ substantially in age. Table 5 Panel A presents results restricting the sample to ages 20–40, which creates more overlap in age distributions. The DiD coefficient is 0.0138 (SE = 0.0051), which is smaller than the main estimate but remains statistically significant.

6.2 Gender-Specific Effects

Panel B of Table 5 presents separate estimates for men and women. Both groups show positive effects of DACA eligibility on full-time employment:

- Men: 0.0148 (SE = 0.0057)
- Women: 0.0198 (SE = 0.0063)

The point estimates suggest slightly larger effects for women, though the difference is not statistically significant.

6.3 Alternative Outcomes

Panel C examines alternative labor market outcomes:

- Employment (any hours): 0.0305 (SE = 0.0053)
- Labor force participation: 0.0278 (SE = 0.0059)

The effects on any employment and labor force participation are larger than the effect on full-time employment, suggesting that DACA affects both the extensive margin (whether to work) and the intensive margin (full-time vs. part-time).

Table 5: Robustness Checks

Specification	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Panel A: Age Restrictions</i>		
Ages 20–40 only	0.0138***	(0.0051)
<i>Panel B: By Gender</i>		
Men only	0.0148***	(0.0057)
Women only	0.0198***	(0.0063)
<i>Panel C: Alternative Outcomes</i>		
Employment (any hours)	0.0305***	(0.0053)
Labor force participation	0.0278***	(0.0059)

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. All specifications include year fixed effects and demographic controls (age, age², female, married, high school education). Standard errors clustered at state level. Sample weights applied.

6.4 Summary of Robustness Checks

The robustness checks consistently find positive and statistically significant effects of DACA eligibility on employment outcomes. While the magnitude varies somewhat across specifications (ranging from 0.014 to 0.031), all estimates are qualitatively consistent with the main finding that DACA increased full-time employment among eligible individuals.

7 Discussion

7.1 Interpretation of Results

The main finding of this study is that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.1 percentage points among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-

born individuals. This effect is economically meaningful: it represents about a 4% increase relative to the pre-DACA baseline employment rate of 52%.

Several mechanisms could explain this effect:

1. **Work authorization:** The most direct channel is that DACA provides legal work authorization, allowing recipients to work in the formal sector. This removes a significant barrier to employment.
2. **Job quality improvements:** Even among those who were previously employed, work authorization may enable transitions from informal or part-time work to formal full-time employment.
3. **Reduced labor market frictions:** Driver's licenses (available to DACA recipients in many states) and other benefits may reduce frictions in job search and commuting.

7.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results:

Measurement of DACA eligibility: The ACS does not directly identify DACA recipients, so I construct a measure of eligibility based on observable characteristics. This measure may misclassify some individuals (both false positives and false negatives), which would attenuate the estimated effects.

Undocumented status: The ACS cannot distinguish between documented and undocumented non-citizens. The analysis assumes that non-citizens without naturalization papers are undocumented, which may not always be accurate.

Education and criminal history requirements: DACA has education and criminal history requirements that cannot be verified in the ACS. Some individuals classified as eligible may not have qualified for these reasons.

Control group selection: The control group consists of older Mexican-born non-citizens who were ineligible due to the age requirement. These individuals may differ from the treatment group in ways beyond age that could affect employment trends.

Pre-trends: While the event study shows relatively stable pre-trends, there is some fluctuation in the pre-period coefficients. This introduces some uncertainty about the parallel trends assumption.

7.3 Comparison to Prior Research

While this study is not designed to replicate any specific prior study, the findings are broadly consistent with the existing literature on DACA's effects. Previous research has generally

found positive effects of DACA on various outcomes including employment, earnings, and educational attainment. The magnitude of my estimate (2.1 percentage points) is within the range of effects found in prior studies.

8 Conclusion

This study provides evidence that eligibility for the DACA program increased full-time employment among Hispanic-Mexican, Mexican-born individuals in the United States. Using a difference-in-differences design and American Community Survey data from 2006–2016, I find that DACA eligibility increased the probability of full-time employment by approximately 2.1 percentage points ($SE = 0.0036$, $p < 0.001$).

The effect is robust across multiple specifications, including alternative age restrictions, gender-specific analyses, and alternative outcome measures. Event study analysis shows that the effect grew over time as DACA take-up increased, with effects reaching 4.4 percentage points by 2015–2016.

These findings have implications for immigration policy. They suggest that providing work authorization to undocumented young adults can have meaningful positive effects on their labor market outcomes. This evidence is relevant to ongoing debates about DACA’s future and broader immigration reform.

8.1 Policy Implications

The positive employment effects documented in this study suggest several policy implications:

First, work authorization appears to be an effective tool for improving labor market outcomes among undocumented immigrants. The 2.1 percentage point increase in full-time employment represents a meaningful improvement in economic outcomes for DACA-eligible individuals and their families.

Second, the growing effects over time (from 1.6 percentage points in 2013 to 4.4 percentage points by 2015–2016) suggest that the full benefits of such programs may take time to materialize as individuals navigate the application process and adjust their labor market behavior.

Third, the positive effects on both the extensive margin (labor force participation) and intensive margin (full-time work) suggest that work authorization has broad effects across multiple dimensions of labor market engagement.

8.2 Directions for Future Research

Several avenues for future research could build on this analysis:

1. **Longer-term effects:** Extending the analysis beyond 2016 would allow examination of whether the positive employment effects persisted or grew over time.
2. **Wage effects:** Beyond employment, future research could examine effects on wages, earnings, and job quality measures.
3. **Educational outcomes:** DACA may have affected educational investments, which could have long-run effects on human capital and earnings.
4. **Spillover effects:** The analysis focuses on direct effects on DACA-eligible individuals, but there may be spillover effects on family members, employers, and local labor markets.
5. **Heterogeneity:** More detailed analysis of heterogeneous effects across states, industries, and demographic subgroups could provide additional policy-relevant insights.

9 Data and Code Availability

This analysis uses publicly available data from IPUMS USA (American Community Survey, 2006–2016). The analysis was conducted using Python with the pandas, numpy, and statsmodels libraries. The analysis code and this report were produced as part of an independent replication exercise.

Key IPUMS variables used:

- YEAR (census year)
- PERWT (person weight)
- HISPAN (Hispanic origin)
- BPL (birthplace)
- CITIZEN (citizenship status)
- YRIMMIG (year of immigration)
- BIRTHYR (birth year)
- UHRSWORK (usual hours worked per week)

- EMPSTAT (employment status)
- LABFORCE (labor force status)
- AGE, SEX, MARST, EDUC, STATEFIP

A Appendix: Additional Tables and Figures

A.1 Full Regression Output

Table 6 presents the complete regression output for the preferred specification.

Table 6: Full Regression Output: Preferred Specification

Variable	Coefficient (SE)
DACA Eligible \times Post	0.0210*** (0.0036)
DACA Eligible	-0.0387*** (0.0047)
Age	0.0334*** (0.0012)
Age ²	-0.0004*** (0.0000)
Female	-0.4378*** (0.0154)
Married	-0.0359*** (0.0057)
High School+	0.0353*** (0.0037)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes
State Clusters	51
Observations	547,614
R-squared	0.189

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Standard errors clustered at state level in
parentheses. Year fixed effects coefficients
not shown. Sample weights applied.

A.2 Sample Construction Details

A.3 Variable Definitions

Table 7: Sample Construction

Restriction	N
All ACS observations (2006–2016)	~35,000,000
Hispanic-Mexican, born in Mexico	991,261
Non-citizens	701,347
With valid immigration year	701,347
Working age (18–64)	616,573
Excluding 2012	547,614
Final analysis sample	547,614
DACA Eligible	69,244
Control	478,370

Table 8: Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
Full-time	Indicator for $\text{UHRSWORK} \geq 35$
Employed	Indicator for $\text{EMPSTAT} = 1$
In Labor Force	Indicator for $\text{LABFORCE} = 2$
DACA Eligible	Indicator for meeting all eligibility criteria: non-citizen, arrived before age 16, born ≥ 1982 , immigrated by 2007
Post	Indicator for $\text{YEAR} \geq 2013$
Female	Indicator for $\text{SEX} = 2$
Married	Indicator for $\text{MARST} \in \{1, 2\}$
High School+	Indicator for $\text{EDUC} \geq 6$