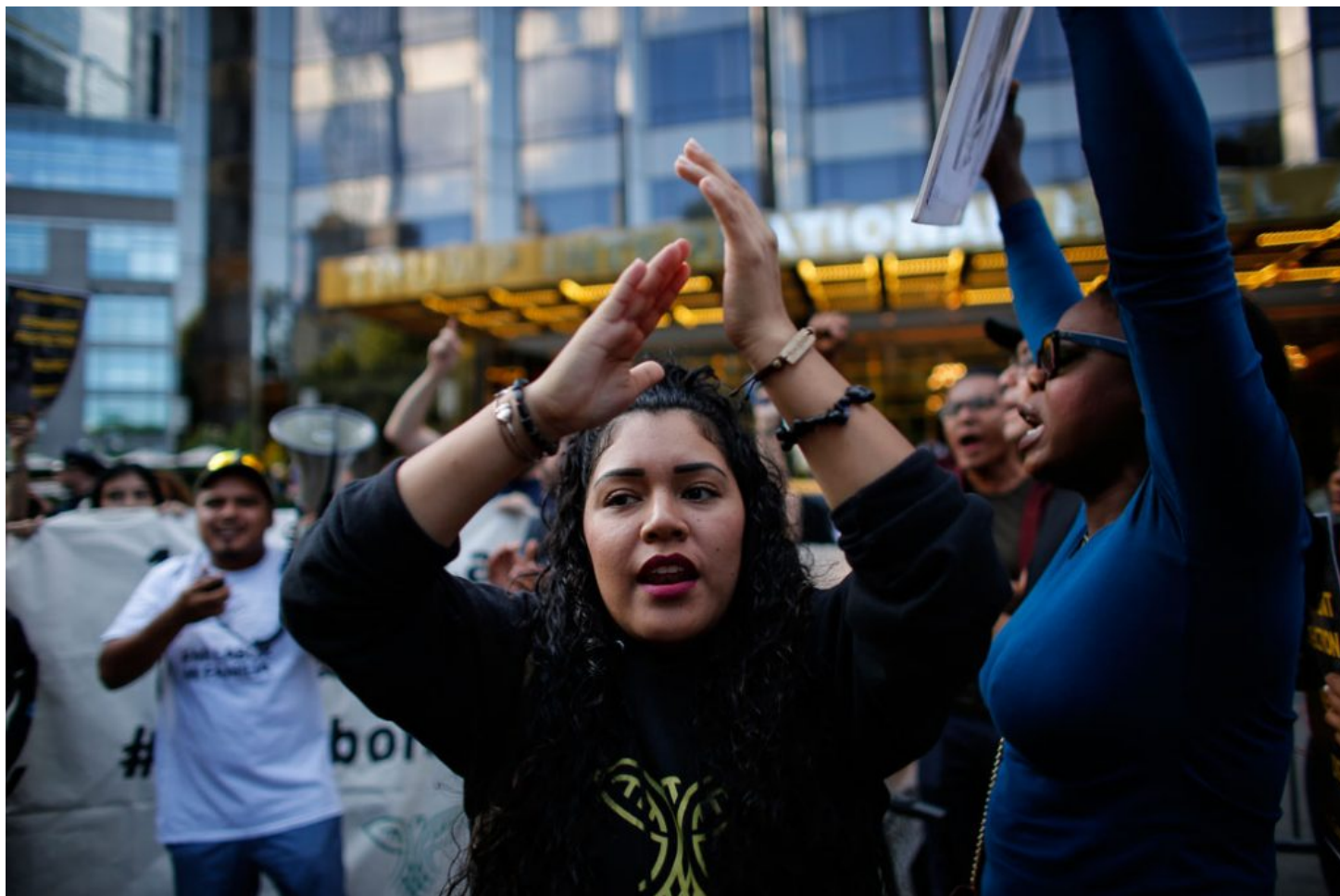




IMMIGRATION

DACA Recipients' Livelihoods, Families, and Sense of Security Are at Stake This November

By [Tom K. Wong](#), [Sanaa Abrar](#), [Claudia Flores](#), [Tom Jawetz](#), [Ignacia Rodriguez Kmec](#), [Greisa Martinez Rosas](#), [Holly Straut-Eppsteiner](#), and [Philip E. Wolgin](#) | Posted on September 19, 2019, 5:00 am



Getty/Corbis News/VIEWpress/Kena Betancur

A woman takes part in a New York City march against President Trump's decision to end DACA, September 2017.

Note: The survey results can be found [here](#). For more information on the survey, please contact [Tom K. Wong](#).

Since it was first announced on June 15, 2012, the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) (DACA) policy has provided temporary relief from deportation as well as work authorization to approximately [825,000 undocumented young people](#) across the country.

From August 14 to September 6, 2019, Tom K. Wong of the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California, San Diego; United We Dream; the National Immigration Law Center; and the Center for American Progress fielded a national survey to further analyze the experiences of DACA recipients. This study includes 1,105 DACA recipients in 40 states as well as the District of Columbia.

2019 marks the fifth consecutive year that the authors have surveyed DACA recipients. This research, [as with previous surveys](#), continues to show that DACA recipients are making significant contributions to the economy. In all, 96 percent of respondents are currently employed or enrolled in school.

Moreover, for the first time, the survey provides data about the widespread harms that DACA recipients could endure if they lost their status and faced potential deportation. A full 93 percent of respondents reported concerns about either their or their family's physical safety; ability to access health care or education; food security; or risk of homelessness if they were deported to their respective countries of birth. With the Supreme Court [set to hear](#) oral arguments on the legality of DACA's termination on November 12, these data make clear that the stakes could not be higher.

DACA's impact on employment

Work authorization has been critical in helping DACA recipients participate more fully in the labor force. The data show that 89 percent of respondents are currently employed. Among respondents ages 25 and older, the employment rate jumps to 91 percent.

After receiving DACA:

- 58 percent of respondents moved to a job with better pay.
- 48 percent of respondents moved to a job with better working conditions.
- 53 percent of respondents moved to a job that "better fits [their] education and training."

- 52 percent of respondents moved to a job that “better fits [their] long-term career goals.”
- 53 percent of respondents moved to a job with health insurance or other benefits.

The data also show that 6 percent of respondents started their own businesses after receiving DACA. Among respondents 25 years and older, this figure increases to 9 percent. As the authors have noted in previous surveys, DACA recipients are outpacing the general population in terms of [business creation](#). DACA business owners with full-time employees (48 percent of all DACA business owners), on average, employ 4 1/2 workers other than themselves.

Moreover, 17 percent have obtained professional licenses after receiving DACA. Among respondents 25 years and older, this figure increases to 20 percent.

DACA's impact on earnings

Several years of data, including this 2019 survey, make clear that DACA is having a positive and significant effect on wages. Respondents' average hourly wage increased by 86 percent since they received DACA, rising from \$10.46 per hour to \$19.45 per hour. And among respondents 25 years and older, the average hourly wage increased by 128 percent since receiving DACA. These higher wages are not just important for recipients and their families but also for [tax revenues](#) and economic growth at the local, state, and federal levels.

The data also show that respondents' average annual earnings come out to approximately \$42,000, and their median annual earnings total \$38,000. Among respondents 25 years and older, these figures are \$49,790 and \$44,583, respectively.

In addition, DACA has led to greater financial independence and security for recipients and their families.

- 79 percent of respondents reported that their increased earnings have “helped [them] become financially independent.”
- 79 percent reported that their increased earnings have “helped [their] family financially.”
- 25 percent reported that their increased earnings have “helped [them] take care of an elderly parent or relative.”

Specifically, among respondents currently in school, 80 percent reported that their increased earnings helped pay for tuition, and among respondents with children, 47 percent reported that

their increased earnings have helped to pay for child care expenses. Meanwhile, 47 percent of respondents reported that their increased earnings have helped pay for medical expenses, and 46 percent reported being able to move into better or improved housing.

DACA's impact on the economy

DACA recipients' purchasing power continues to increase. For example, 60 percent of respondents reported buying their first car after receiving DACA. These large purchases contribute to state revenue, as most states collect a percentage of the purchase price in sales tax, along with additional [registration and title fees](#). The added revenue for states comes in addition to the [safety benefits](#) of having more licensed and insured drivers on the roads.

The data also show that 14 percent of respondents purchased their first home after receiving DACA. Among respondents 25 years and older, this figure increases to 19 percent. The broader positive economic effects of home purchases include increased [job creation](#) and the infusion of [new spending](#) in local economies.

These effects come on top of the combined [\\$8.8 billion](#) in federal, state, and local taxes paid annually by households with DACA recipients.

DACA's impact on education

Overall, 40 percent of respondents are currently in school, a large majority—83 percent—of whom are pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher. When it comes to educational attainment, 46 percent of respondents reported already having a bachelor's degree or higher. Importantly, among those who are currently in school, a robust 93 percent said that because of DACA, "[They] pursued educational opportunities that [they] previously could not."

Potential risks of deporting DACA recipients

As stated earlier, for the first time, the survey reveals DACA recipients' deep fears of return and the potential harms that they could face if they lost their protection and were deported. The results are stark:

- 80 percent reported, "In my country of birth, I would be concerned about the physical safety of myself and my family."
- 75 percent reported, "In my country of birth, I would be concerned about the quality of healthcare for myself and my family."

- 77 percent reported, “In my country of birth, I would be concerned about the quality of education for myself and my family.”
- 58 percent reported, “In my country of birth, I would be concerned about food insecurity for myself and my family.”
- 41 percent reported, “In my country of birth, I would be concerned about homelessness for myself and my family.”

Altogether, 93 percent of respondents reported concerns about either their or their family’s physical safety, health care, education, food security, or risk of homelessness in their respective countries of birth.

Strikingly, the average age of arrival to the United States among respondents is just 6.1 years old, and more than two-thirds—69 percent—reported not having any immediate family members who still live in their respective countries of birth. These findings make clear that deporting DACA recipients would not only mean sending them to countries they barely know, but it would also put their physical safety, well-being, and livelihood at serious risk.

Civic engagement of DACA recipients

Despite DACA’s uncertainty, the data continue to show tremendous resolve among DACA recipients and suggest that the program is associated with a greater sense of belonging. Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported that they have become more involved in their communities after receiving DACA. After their DACA application was approved, 67 percent reported, “I am no longer afraid of my immigration status,” and 67 percent reported, “I feel more like I belong in the U.S.” Nearly half of respondents reported that they have become more politically active since receiving DACA.

The uncertainty of life with DACA

The legal and political uncertainty surrounding DACA continues to weigh heavily on the minds of DACA recipients. For example, 56 percent of respondents reported that they think about either being detained in an immigration detention facility or deported from the United States at least once a day; and an even greater percentage, 69 percent, reported that they think about a family member being detained or deported at least once a day.

Fear of family separation is particularly strong among DACA recipients who are parents. Among those with children, 75 percent reported that they think about “being separated from [their] children

because of deportation” at least once a day, while 72 percent reported thinking about “not being able to see [their] children grow up because of deportation” at least once a day.

Conclusion

As the Supreme Court prepares to hear arguments on DACA’s termination on November 12, 2019, the implications for DACA recipients, their families, and the U.S. economy as a whole are clear. DACA has been a major success, evidenced by recipients’ gains in employment outcomes and educational attainment, increased sense of belonging and stability, and contributions to local communities and economies. But now, these gains are on the line. And as the data show, stripping recipients of protections would have potentially disastrous impacts on them and their families, including the [nearly 256,000 U.S. citizen children](#) who have a parent with DACA.

Tom K. Wong is associate professor of political science and founding director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California, San Diego, as well as a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Sanaa Abrar is advocacy director at United We Dream. Claudia Flores is the immigration campaign manager at the Center for American Progress. Tom Jawetz is vice president for Immigration Policy at the Center for American Progress. Ignacia Rodriguez Kmec is immigration policy advocate at the National Immigration Law Center. Greisa Martinez Rosas is deputy executive director at United We Dream. Holly Straut-Eppsteiner is research program manager at the National Immigration Law Center. Philip E. Wolgin is managing director for Immigration Policy at the Center for American Progress.

The authors would like to thank all those who took and shared the survey for their time and effort in helping to bring these stories to light.

Methodology

The questionnaire was administered to an online panel of DACA recipients recruited by the partner organizations. Several steps were taken to account for the known sources of bias that result from such online panels. To prevent ballot stuffing—one person submitting multiple responses—the authors did not offer an incentive to respondents for taking the questionnaire and used a state-of-the-art online survey platform that does not allow one IP address to submit multiple responses. To prevent spoiled ballots—people responding who are not undocumented—the authors used two validation tests for undocumented status. Multiple questions were asked about each respondent’s migratory history and DACA application history. These questions were asked at different parts of the questionnaire. When repeated, the questions were posed using different wording. If there was agreement in the answers such that there was consistency regarding the respondent’s migratory

history and DACA application history, the respondent was kept in the resulting pool of respondents. If not, the respondent was excluded.

Center for American Progress



© 2019 - Center for American Progress