The Kids Aren't Alright – But They Could Be: The Impact of Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) on Children

By Manuel Pastor, Jared Sanchez, and Vanessa Carter
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Introduction

In November 2014, Barack Obama announced several executive actions to make progress in mending our broken immigration system. One part of his effort centered on broadening the requirements to be part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that was announced in 2012 and has provided some relief to so-called “DREAMERs” brought to this country at an early age; our estimates, similar to those of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), suggest that nearly 290,000 additional immigrants might benefit from this program expansion.

The second major part of the President’s executive action was more significant in terms of its numerical and political impact. This aspect, known as Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), would allow undocumented individuals who have been in the country for five years, are the parents of U.S.-citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs), and meet certain other criteria to apply for deferrals of deportation and work permits for a period of three years.

The numbers here are much larger: according to our estimates, 3.7 million adults are likely to be the beneficiaries of this action. That is a sizeable share of the undocumented population in the U.S., although advocates have also noted that approximately half of the undocumented population has been left out of the initiatives and have continued to call for additional protections.¹

The political response to these initiatives has been striking, particularly in our own state of California. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, for example, “A solid majority (69%) [of adults in the state] support President Obama’s executive action, while 30 percent are opposed.” (PPIC 2014). The action has also been quite popular nationwide with Latinos: 89 percent of Latino voters support Obama’s action, a finding the polling firm which generated the results notes is the most unified they have ever found in years of testing Latino public opinion; indeed, 75 percent of Latino Republicans are also in support (Barreto 2014).

Yet elected officials in some states have adopted an aggressive stance against these deportation relief programs, even filing suit in Federal Court. Despite demonstrated legal precedent, a Texas judge issued an injunction in February that has temporarily held up implementation of both the DACA expansion and DAPA.²³ Immigrant advocates are undeterred and many experts are predicting that the challenge will eventually be overruled and the programs will be implemented (Hennessy-Fiske 2015).

Sometimes lost in the current debate is the impact DAPA will have on the children of those who receive relief. In some ways, this is understandable: DACA, after all, includes “childhood” in its title, is aimed at immigrants who arrived to the U.S. as children and so is generally thought of as impacting the young. However, the current expansion of that program (which consists of lifting an age cap and shifting restrictions on the year of arrival) primarily affects adults: of the nearly 290,000 extra beneficiaries from the expansion of DACA, about three-fourths benefit from the extension of the age requirement to those older than 30. In short, the DACA expansion mostly affects older individuals.

By contrast, the impact on children from DAPA – a program technically aimed at parents – is actually more numerically significant: we estimate that there are 6.3 million children who live in a household with a DAPA eligible mom or dad, and of that, 5.5 million are U.S. citizens. And the key question, particularly with DAPA implementation temporarily stalled is, what impact will this have on those children?

This brief offers a closer look at the DAPA children, with a special focus on California, the state with the largest number of DAPA-eligible parents – and children of DAPA-eligible parents. We consider first the age distribution and nativity of the children of DAPA-eligible parents and here make one simple point: there are potential electoral impacts for those who support or oppose DAPA and related efforts. We then turn to the economic and other impacts and here the message is equally straightforward: DAPA could bring a significant improvement to the lives of families, enhancing earning by parents and learning by children.
DAPA is About Family – and Families Vote

As the President’s executive actions have made clear, undocumented immigrants are intimately connected to the lives and livelihood of documented immigrants and citizens. Indeed, 4.3 million of the nation’s undocumented immigrants are the parents of U.S. citizen or Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) children and, of those, approximately 3.7 million have lived in the country long enough to qualify under the DAPA program.

Another (and we think equally interesting) way to look at this is from the point of view of the children themselves. As noted above, there are 6.3 million individuals who live in a household with their DAPA eligible mom or dad; while some of those individuals are themselves undocumented (reflecting the mixed status of many families), 86 percent (or 5.5 million) of them are U.S. citizens.

What may be poorly understood is that not all of these children are minors – and so some are able to vote. DAPA is written such that it is undocumented parents of U.S. citizen or LPR children who will be eligible to apply for a deferral of deportation and a work permit. Sixteen percent of all the children in DAPA families are 18 years old or older; the share of U.S. citizen children who are 18 years or older is less, at 11 percent, likely reflecting the fact that older children in mixed-status families are more likely to have migrated with their parents while the younger children are more likely to be U.S.-born.

Still, that 11 percent totals up to nearly 600,000 children of DAPA parents who currently have the right to vote. If we include those who are younger and will age into voting by 2020 – that is, over the course of the next Presidential term during which the DAPA program would have to be renewed, assuming that comprehensive immigration reform does not take its place – we are talking 1.7 million U.S.-born citizens who will be able to express their electoral views about leaders and decisions that could improve or worsen the lives of their parents and families.

Some might assume that because so many undocumented and DAPA-eligible individuals are in California, such an aggregate number is impressive – but couldn’t possibly swing key elections. In Florida, however, the number of U.S. citizen kids of DAPA-eligible parent who will be able to vote by 2020 amounts to 70 percent of the margin by which President Obama won that state in 2012; in North Carolina, another important swing state that narrowly went for Republican Mitt Romney in 2012, the U.S. citizen kids of potential DAPA beneficiaries, amounts to a third of that margin of victory.

Those who oppose DAPA and the expansion of DACA may want to take into account how those future voters – who will simply age in to become part of the electorate – will feel if their parents remain in an immigration limbo brought about by the recent judicial decision or by Congressional attempts to roll back the President’s executive actions. There are, in short, long-term political costs to resisting the implementation of DAPA / DACA – and as we argue below, there are also economic costs in terms of income gains and improvements in child welfare that will go unrealized unless we are able to move forward with the program.

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We turn now to a closer examination of one state: California. The Golden State has the highest number of DAPA-eligibles, over 1.1 million. This is unsurprising since we have both the largest share of the undocumented and a significant share of mixed-status households: for example, most non-citizens (74%) in California live in households that also have citizens (California Immigrant Policy Center 2014). Moreover, one recent estimate suggests that 19 percent of minor children in the state have at least one parent who is undocumented – and more than eighty percent of those children are U.S. citizens (Marcelli and Pastor 2015).

These intimate connections mean that when an undocumented person gains some kind of status, there are related economic, civic and even educational impacts on documented immigrants and the U.S.-born. And so it would be with California where there are almost 1.6 million minor children of potential DAPA recipients, amounting to 30 percent of all the minor children in the U.S. who would be impacted by their parents receiving DAPA (see the state rankings in the table).

Note that this is a very large share of all the minor children that have at least one undocumented parent; that makes sense since by requiring a minimum of five years in the U.S., one is focusing on that part of the undocumented population that has had the most time to form families. Note also that not all of the children in DAPA families are U.S. citizens or LPR; for example, in California, 93 percent of these minor children are U.S. citizens, primarily because DAPA families may also include children with another immigration status.

Finally, there are another 300,000 children of DAPA parents in California who are young adults – between the ages of 18 and 25 – who will also likely benefit if their parents do better. In short, we are looking at a young population in DAPA households that is part of the future of our state and our nation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th># of DAPA Minor Children</th>
<th>% of All Minor Children in State</th>
<th>Share of Those That are Citizens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1,590,551</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>996,474</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>279,579</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>230,760</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>203,353</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>186,199</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>167,356</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>162,475</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>125,864</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>124,343</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>99,754</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>96,728</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>75,494</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>74,435</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>66,935</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
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Source: CSII estimates of the pooled 2011-2013 American Community Survey
Parents Earn

So what would DAPA implementation mean for family earnings in the state with the most children of DAPA-eligible residents: California? At the national level, the Presidents’ Council of Economic Advisors (Executive Office of the President, Council of Economic Advisors 2014) estimates that DAPA workers will see a 6 to 10 percent rise in average wages. The Center for American Progress (CAP) found an 8.5 percent increase in the earnings for those moving from the informal to the formal labor market (Oakford 2014) – in part because they will now be able to find jobs that match their skills and have a larger incentive to make investments in U.S.-specific job training (see Pastor and Scoggins 2012 for more).

Using CAP’s 8.5 percent wage gain for individual DAPA workers (comfortably in the middle of the estimates by the Council of Economic Advisors), our estimates suggest that DAPA families in California will see their total earnings increase by around $1.6 billion. With more income in the household due to DAPA implementation, over 40,000 children could be lifted above the official poverty line. We also know that one of the single largest factors impacting student learning and future performance is parent’s socioeconomic status; for that reason, DAPA seems like the sort of anti-poverty and pro-child measure that should rally politicians from across the political spectrum.

Children Learn

Another factor that can impact learning is stress. Yoshikawa’s *Immigrants Raising Citizens* (2011) documents the strain that the threat of deportation and isolation puts on the nation’s mixed-status families. Deportation results in children going to the foster care system, single parents struggling to make ends meet, and children struggling at school, among other things (Chaudry et al. 2010; Dreby 2012; Satinsky et al. 2013; Yoshikawa 2011). More recent research reinforces the idea that worries about parents being deported causes stress for children, layering inequalities on top of each other (Dreby 2015).

The constant threat of family destabilization will send ripples to a child’s second home: school. There are currently over 1.1 million students in California’s K-12 schools that have parents eligible for DAPA. There are also almost 125,000 children of DAPA parents enrolled in our colleges (this includes that slightly older non-minor cohort). These children are benefitting from the states’ investment in education – and we can maximize their and our potential by reducing the insecurity of their parents, while boosting the security and educational achievement of our state’s future workers, voters and leaders.
Conclusion

Can the nation afford to roll back DAPA? The economic and social consequences are real. DAPA is not just beneficial for those parents who are eligible – although there are also strong arguments about why incorporating immigrant adults is good for both immigrants and the nation’s economy (e.g., Lynch and Oakford 2013; Pastor and Scoggins 2012). DAPA also provides an opportunity to tangibly lift children out of poverty, to create stability within a system that threatens to break-up their families, and to boost child learning by bringing parents and families some relief.

The political consequences are also real. For those bent on reversing the President’s actions, it is important to remember that by 2020, these children will make up 1.7 million voters in the nation who will have memories of how particular political leaders treated their loved ones in a critical moment of transition in our immigration policy.

Fortunately, California seems to be realizing that an investment in stabilizing the situation of parents is also an investment in the children. Already, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has developed a resolution that forms a task force to determine how the county can assist immigrants eligible for the planned expansion of deferred action programs (Linthicum and Sewell 2015).

With the largest number of children who stand to benefit – and with a public that is overwhelmingly sympathetic to the President’s actions – the state as a whole should be prepared to act to support parents and families through the implementation of DAPA when the federal injunction is lifted. This could include collaborations between state agencies, foundations, community groups and civic leaders to make residents aware of the program and to promote sign-ups, as well as identifying funding allocations in the state’s budget to take an intentional approach to integrating immigrants in our state.

In our view, immigration reform may not be immediate but it is inevitable. It simply makes too much sense to change a broken system that leaves too many people in the shadows, too many businesses without desired workers, and too many children growing up in uncertain conditions. Bad politics will eventually give way to good policy – and successfully implementing DAPA and the extension of DACA in the meantime is a down payment on the gains that a more comprehensive immigration reform will bring.
Methodology

To get at the DAPA- and DACA-eligible populations, we need to first estimate the undocumented population overall. This is always a tricky exercise: it involves a series of assumptions and probabilities that must be combined to derive defensible numbers. Fortunately, the state of the art has evolved in this arena in previous years and researchers have become increasingly clear about their methods, allowing for other researchers to replicate and modify approaches.

In this exercise, we adopted an increasingly common strategy that involved first determining who among the non-citizen population is least likely to be undocumented due to a series of conditions and then sorting the remainder into documented and undocumented based on a series of probability estimates (and also a random factor explained below). The technique was applied to a pooled 2011-2013 version of the American Community Survey (ACS); the actual data used came from annual ACS surveys provided by IPUMS-USA, with “self-pooling” into a single sample done by the authors (Ruggles et al. 2010).

We start by assuming that the aggregate total of undocumented adults in the U.S. in 2012 (the median year of our sample) was similar to that reported in the most recent estimate from the Office of Immigration Statistics (Rytina 2013). We then take every non-citizen, non-Cuban foreign-born respondent in the ACS sample and assign to each of these respondents an initial documentation status based on certain characteristics. For example, we assumed that any non-citizen non-Cuban immigrant with military experience is a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR). Other characteristics that led a respondent into LPR status included whether or not the respondent worked for the public sector; had an occupation (such as police officer) that required documents; received social security or disability payments; or was a household head or spouse in a household receiving food stamps but did not have a child in the house (who could have been the legal source of the assistance). We also placed in the LPR category those who immigrated as adults and were currently enrolled in higher education on the grounds that they were likely student visa holders. We also placed respondents in the LPR category if they received Medicare, Veterans Affair Care, or Indian Health Services. We did not assume that reporting Medicaid was sufficient to designate one as documented (as does Warren (2014)) because the question asked is ambiguous and could be interpreted as asking about any kind of public health assistance such as emergency care at the hospital.

That initial assignment left us with an undocumented population that was significantly larger than it should have been given OIS estimates. To assign the rest, we first determined their probability of being undocumented using a technique similar to that in Capps, et al. (2013). Following the very clear directions kindly provided by those authors, we started with Wave 2 of the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) in which respondents offered answers with regard to whether they had LPR status upon arrival and whether they had ever achieved it later; those who answered no were considered to be undocumented. To move these responses over to the American Community Survey, Capps, et al. (2013) use a multiple imputation strategy to populate “missing” answers for the ACS (which are basically all the answers). We instead utilize a logistic regression strategy in which the probability of being undocumented is determined by an equation in which the right-hand side variables include gender, age, years since arrival, education levels, marital status (whether never married and if married, whether married to a U.S.-born citizen), several dummy variables for broad region, and several interactive terms to allow for coefficients to vary for different region-of-origin groups.

The coefficients from that regression were then applied to the observations in the pooled ACS and the combination of conditions and probabilities can actually get one very close to the correct number and composition of the undocumented, using the weighted average of the probability as the cut-off. To get a better fit, we then took advantage of the fact that the OIS offers a breakdown of the top 10 nations of origin of the undocumented (Rytina 2013). Adjusting for age to look at adults, we took all non-citizen non-Cuban adult residents who had not been assigned to documentation by the conditions and sorted them in order of the probability of being undocumented, using a random number assigned to all respondents to break ties where a large group of respondents shared the same probability. We then sorted over to the LPR column until we arrived at the right number of undocumented residents from these different sending countries (accounting for an undercount explained below); this is known as applying country controls (Warren 2014).

For the remaining countries, we used a two-year average from 2009 and 2010 for the Brazilian undocumented (their number fell recently and so the count was not in the most recent OIS reports); other studies have shown that unauthorized Brazilians are a very large share of the non-citizen Brazilian immigrant population and we did not want to miss this nuance (Marcelli et al. 2009). For the rest of the unauthorized population, the easiest approach would be to assume that all nations of origin have exactly the same share of undocumented residents by comparing the remaining OIS numbers to the non-citizen non-Cuban immigrant numbers in the ACS. However, that is clearly not the case and we investigated the next 20 largest countries sending immigrants, taking advantage of several bits of knowledge in the field, including an estimate of undocumented Canadians that was generated by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in 2008 and other work that suggests that the share of undocumented is surprisingly low in the Dominican community (Marcelli et al. 2009). For other countries, we use available information on similar countries in their hemisphere (either from the overall data or from the information in the SIPP data) to target a percent undocumented and hence number undocumented. At the end of the targeting and assignment process, we have a total number of adult undocumented residents that is close to the OIS totals.
Better put, it is close to that number assuming a degree of undercount. There is a widely shared assumption that the undocumented are undercounted by around 10 percent in the decennial census (see Marcelli and Ong 2002) and more in other samples. To account for this, we had initially set the targets below the target adult numbers (nation-by-nation) so that when we reweighted all of those observations up, we would arrive at a more likely number. Warren and Warren 2013 contend, reasonably enough, that the undercount might be as high as 20 percent in recent years because the ACS is perceived as a more voluntary survey by respondents than is the Census. To implement this procedure, we stuck closer to the earlier research and set the undercount assumption for adults at 12.5 percent.

This general approach is similar to approaches used by other researchers (Bachmeier, Van Hook, and Bean 2014; Batalova, Hooker, and Capps 2014). One issue with our particular method is that assigning a break based on probability estimates tends to steer us to generate an undocumented population that is younger and slightly more male than in other samples (because they have the highest probabilities). This is because we have strict cut-offs based on assigned probabilities when in fact some adults with exactly the same characteristics may or may not be undocumented; in order to reduce this bias, we introduce a random reassignment of ten percent of the undocumented adults from one category to another (excluding those we classified as documented based on conditions such as military service), an approach in keeping with that of Warren (2014).

On the child side, we assign minor children as undocumented if one of their two parents is undocumented. Adding that to the adults, we came up with a total of 11,310,000 undocumented immigrants, just below the 11,400,000 estimated by the MPI and the 11,430,000 estimated by the Office of Immigration Statistics and above the 11.2 million estimated by Pew (Passel and Cohn 2014).

With all this in place, we make some minor adjustments to weights to better fit to data on state totals, and then assign parent relationships using the information provided by IPUMS. Our resulting numbers for California are lower than those from MPI but closer than MPI’s to those from OIS and Pew.

Given the alignment in terms of the harder part – estimating the total of undocumented residents – it is unsurprising that our U.S. totals for DAPA-eligible parents are quite close to those of MPI: We both project roughly 3.7 million DAPA-eligible parents and about 290,000 individuals who will be newly eligible for DACA given the shifts in the requirements. Our numbers for California are similarly close – and the assignment in the IPUMS version of the ACS allows us to further refine calculations and look at the children of the DAPA-eligible, the topic of this brief.

The rest of the calculations are generally more straightforward (for example, age structure and those children enrolled in school). For the income gains, we applied the estimated gains to only earned income and then summarized across families; naturally, families with only one DAPA-eligible parent received percentage increases in family income that were lower than those with two such parents. We then compared the income shifts to poverty thresholds to calculate how many children would emerge from poverty. Our estimates are considerably lower than others, for example Hinojosa-Ojeda (2015) and so gains could be larger than we are projecting. Finally, it is important to realize that all of these estimates are preliminary and may change slightly as we continue to implement improvements in our estimation techniques.

Endnotes

1 See, e.g., http://sfappeal.com/2014/11/protestors-call-for-immigration-policies-to-protect-marginalized-communities/


3 See http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2015/01/14/3611263/lawsuit-challenging-obamas-immigration-policy-will-be-heard-by-worst-possible-judge-for-immigrants/
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