FIRST-TIME STUDENT RETENTION REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2024

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides retention data for first-time undergraduate students at Arizona's public universities. Retention rates serve as an important leading indicator of progress toward degree completion and a key measure of overall university success. Retention rates are defined as the percentage of first-time students who return to the same institution for a second fall semester.

This report provides retention rate data for each institution, disaggregated by key categories of analysis such as attendance and residency status, academic program, gender and race/ethnicity. Throughout this report, there are exhibits where specific data points have been omitted either because data for prior years was not previously surveyed, or because the data needed to be redacted to maintain student privacy in instances where cross tabulations resulted in five or fewer students.

ABOUT THE ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS

The Arizona Board of Regents is committed to ensuring access for qualified residents of Arizona to undergraduate and graduate institutions; promoting the discovery, application, and dissemination of new knowledge; extending the benefits of university activities to Arizona's citizens outside the university; and maximizing the benefits derived from the state's investment in education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First-time undergraduate student retention is tracked by the board as it is a key indicator of student success and overall university success. Students typically confront the most changes and challenges during their first year; thus, the rate of students returning for their second year is an important metric.

Fiscal year 2024 covers the 2023-2024 academic year, and thus the data in this report details the fall 2023 percentage of returning undergraduates who were first-time students at the same institution in fall 2022.

Academic preparation for students entering a university is a primary indicator of future academic success. However, once in college, academic performance is not the primary reason that students don't return – they leave for a range of personal, family and financial reasons.[1]

Arizona's public universities employ extensive success programs and support systems to help students address challenges and complete their degrees. There are negative consequences for the individual, university and state of Arizona when a student is unable to continue their education. Student attrition leads to diminished lifetime incomes, higher financial and reputational costs to institutions, and lower returns on state investment.[2] Student retention is essential to meeting Arizona's educational attainment goals and the development of a 21st-century workforce.

KEY OUTCOMES BY UNIVERSITY

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

- ASU enrolled 14,810 first-time, full-time, on-campus students at a retention rate of 85.3% in fiscal year 2024. This is 1.2 percentage points below ASU's enterprise metric goal. The 0.1 percentage point marginal retention decrease from 85.4% in 2023 is an essentially flat year-over-year trend.
- Arizona resident on-campus students were retained at 86.8% and non-resident on-campus students at 82.3%, a 4.5 percentage point difference.
- The 2,882 first-time online students represent 16.1% of all first-time students at ASU – they are all part-time with a 50.2% retention rate. That rate has been essentially flat over the last four years.
- The highest retention rates by field of degree program are in computer and information sciences, natural resources and conservation, engineering, mathematics and statistics, and legal professions and studies.

[1]Johnson, N. 2012. The Institutional Costs of Student Attrition. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, Delta Cost Project. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536126

[2]Ibid.

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

- NAU enrolled 5,406 first-time, full-time, on-campus students at a retention rate of 72.7% in fiscal year 2024. This is 2.7 percentage points below NAU's enterprise metric goal. The retention rate declined from 76.1% in 2023, a 3.4 percentage point annual decrease.

- Arizona resident on-campus students were retained at 73% and non-resident on-campus students at 67.8%, a 5.2 percentage point difference.

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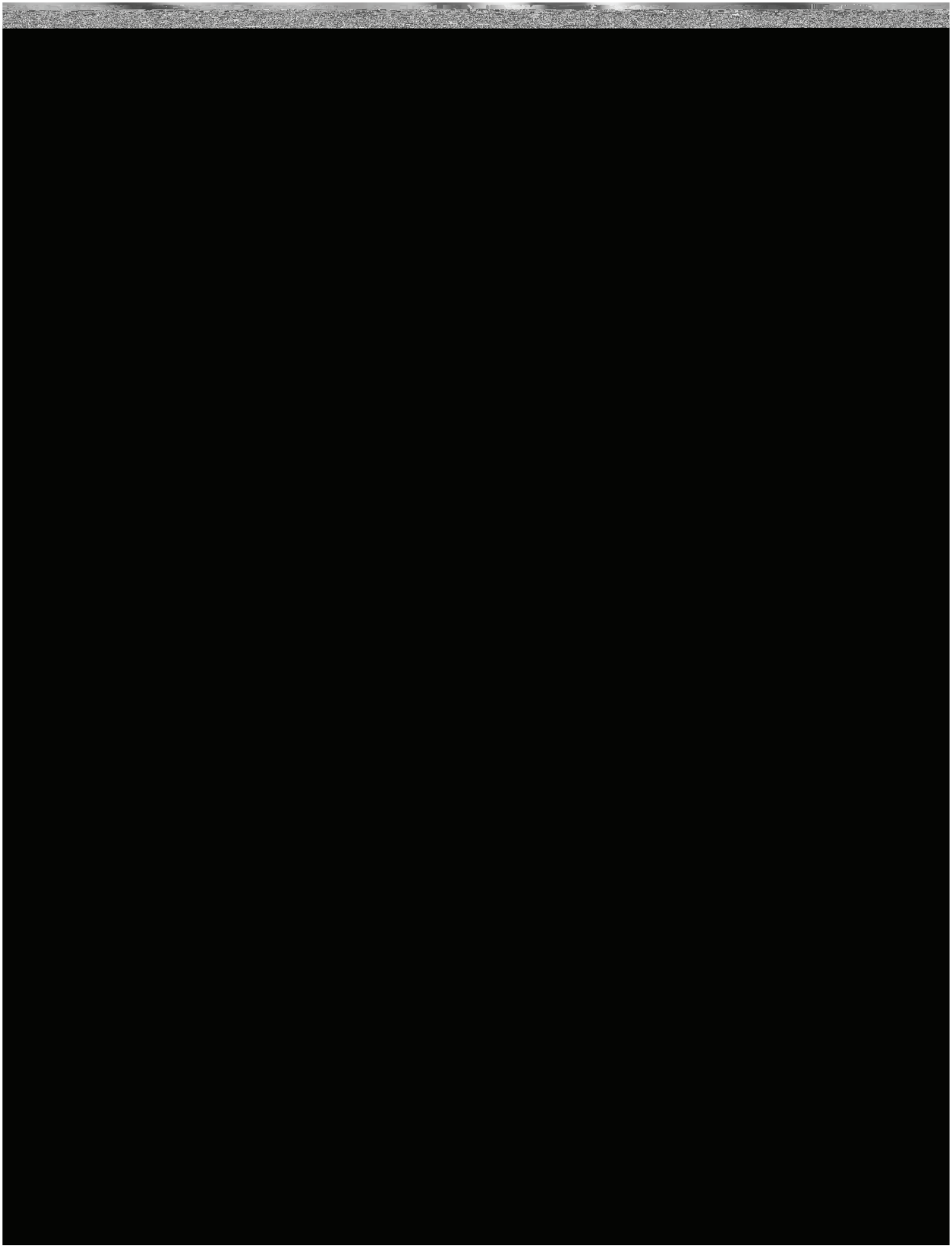
income students typically face more challenges to remaining in college such as spending more hours earning money while studying and meeting child or family care commitments.

- Online students are retained at lower rates than on-campus students. Fully online programs provide time flexibility that on-campus programs do not, thus are attractive to students with existing career and family commitments, which also correlate to a greater likelihood of needing to stop out of their education at some point. This characterization is supported by the relatively high proportion of part-time students and older students in online programs.

- There is, as is to be expected, considerable variance in retention rates across degree programs. At all three institutions, bachelor's degree retention rates in the 50 largest programs ranged from near 100% to under 60% depending on the program. It is important to note that student election of majors at admission is associated with factors that affect retention, such as high school GPA, Pell Grant eligibility, gender and race/ethnicity.

- Adult learners - students aged 22 and over - make a small share of all students, just over 6% at ASU and just over 1% at NAU and the U of A. They are retained at lower rates than traditional learners, aged 21 and under, in part because a larger proportion of adult learners choose the flexibility of attending part-time or via the online modality.

- Large variances in retention rates across racial and ethnic groups persist at all the universities. It is important to note that there are key factors that interact to influence retention in these student populations, including but not limited to Pell Grant eligibility, part-time vs. full-time attendance and instructional modality.



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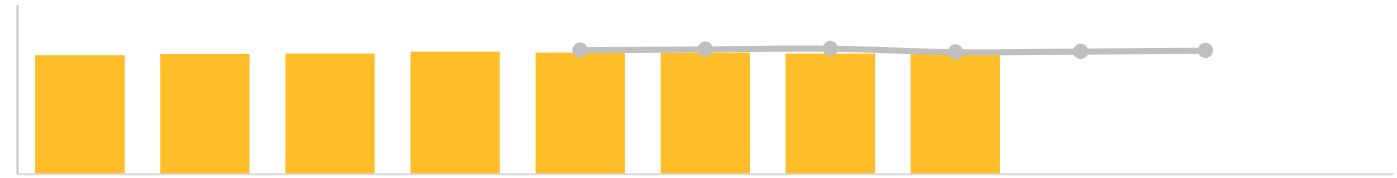

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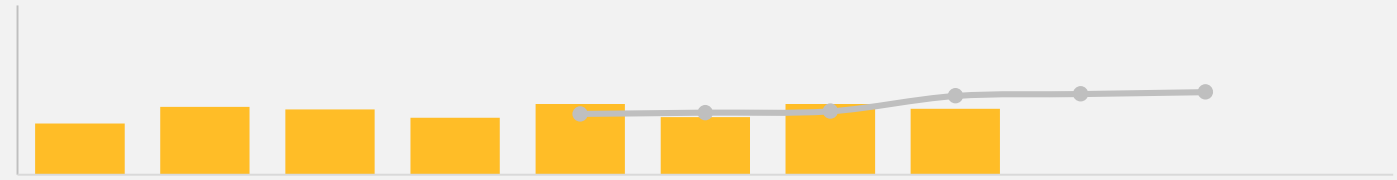

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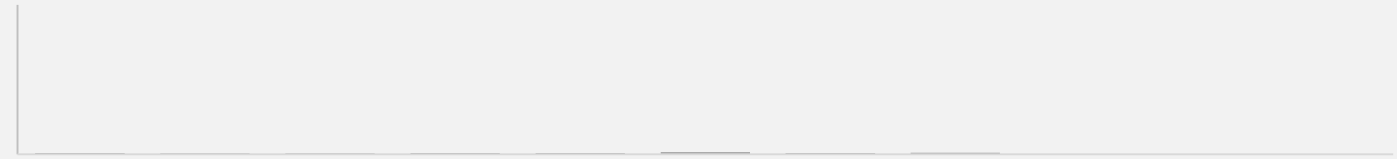

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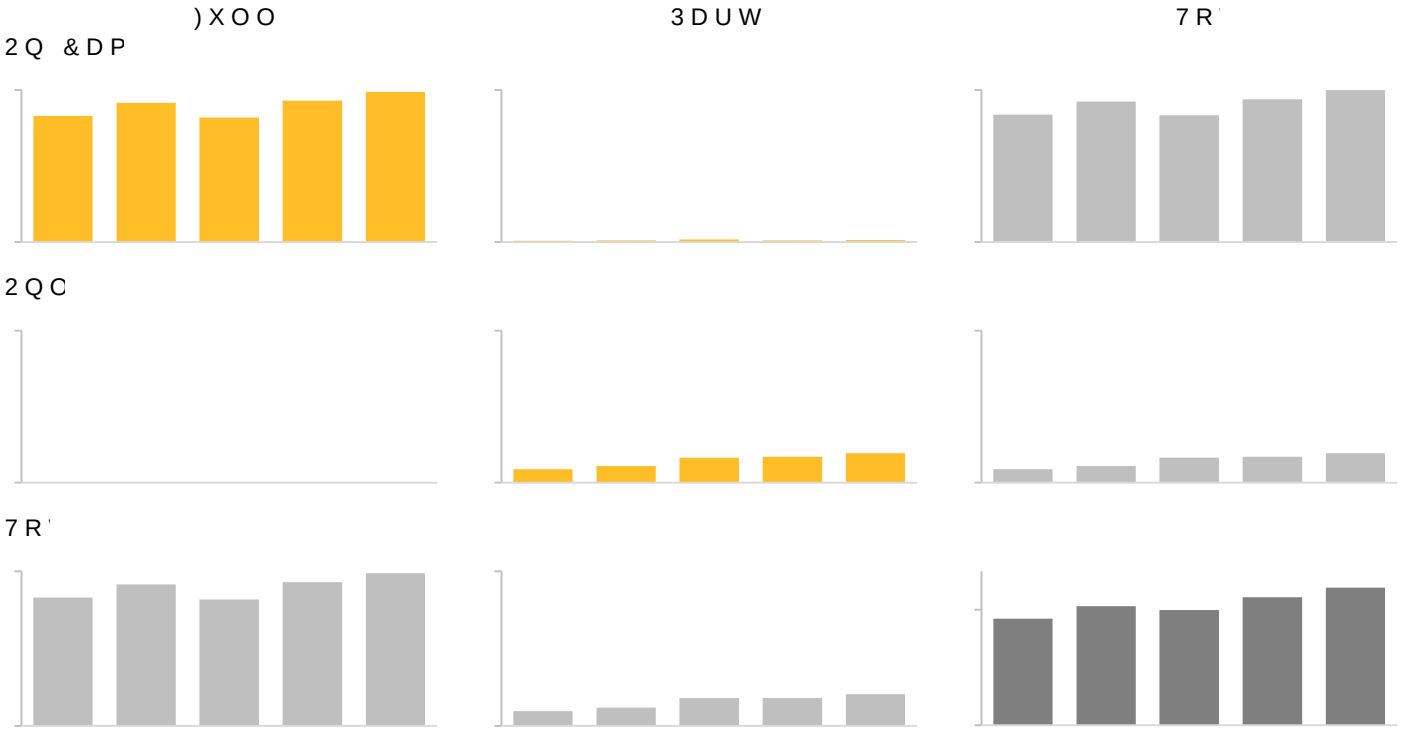

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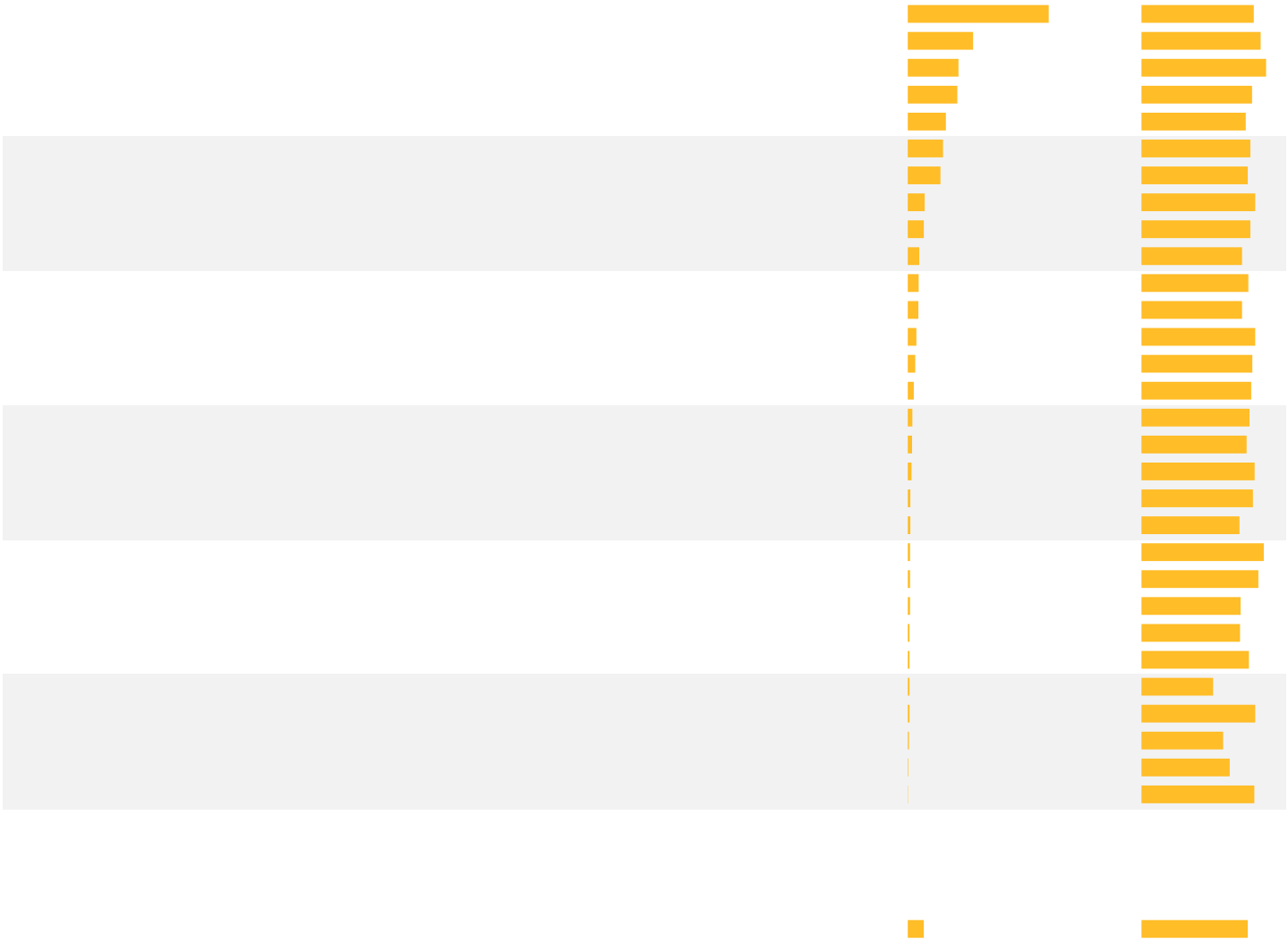

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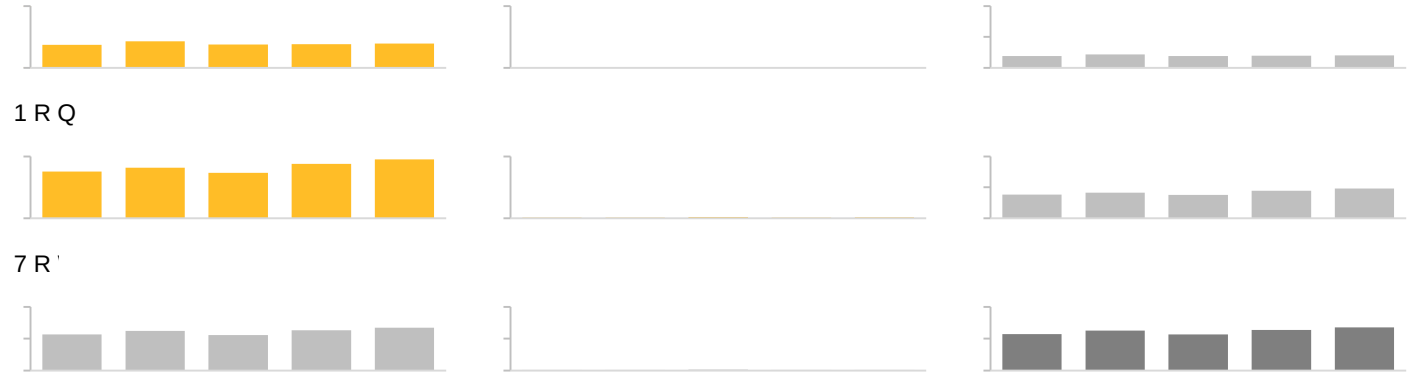

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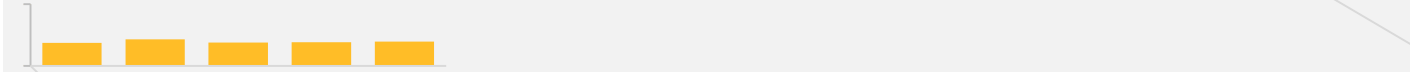

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