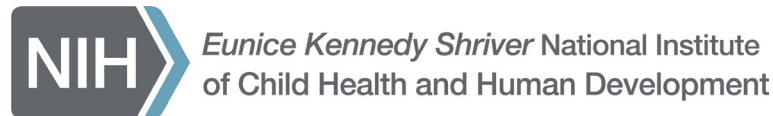


Year 1 of the NICHD Special Council Review Policy: a preliminary evaluation

Chris Belter, Division of Extramural Research

July 2026





Background

About Special Council Review (SCR)

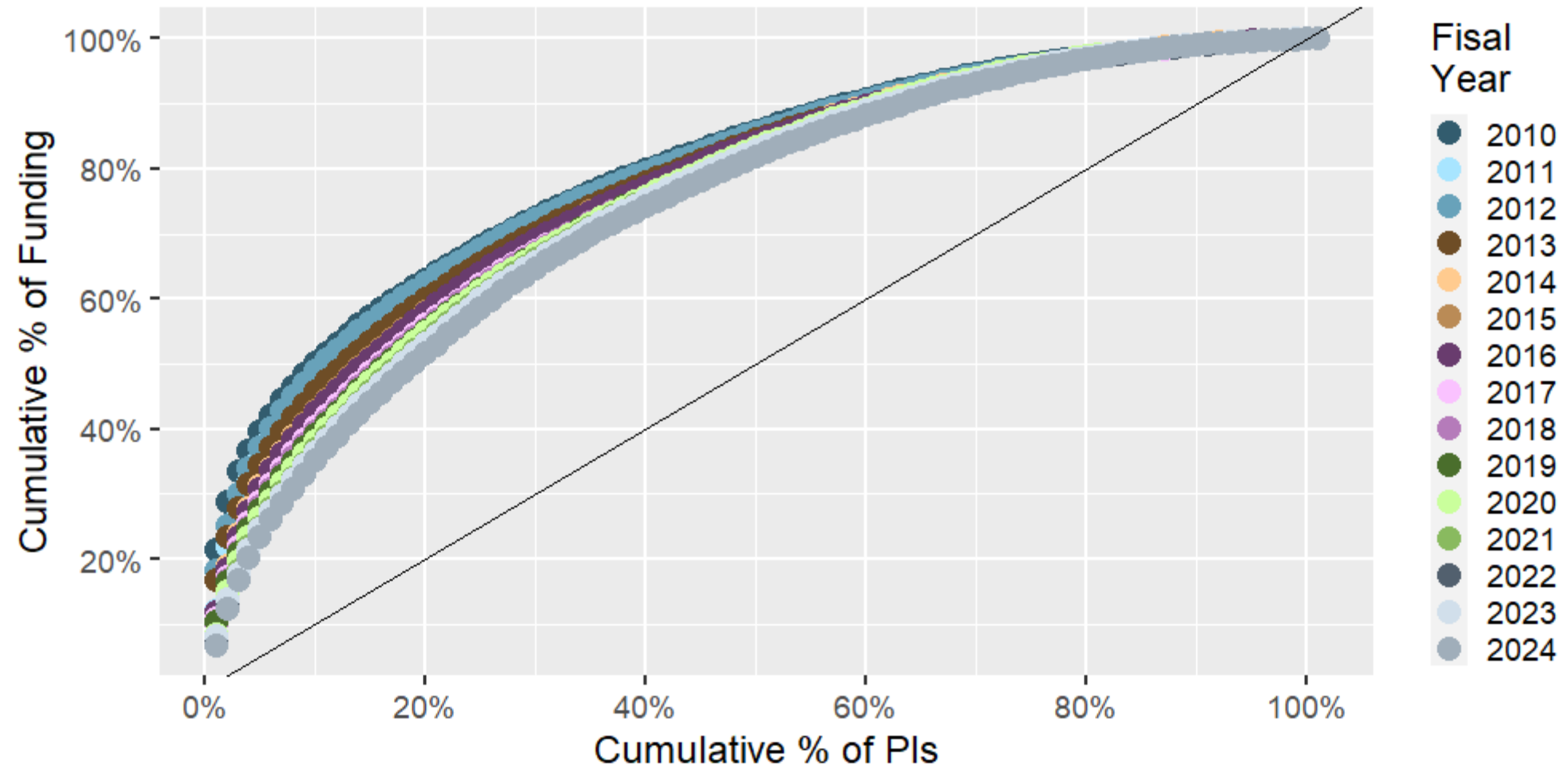
Purpose: to “help NIH effectively manage resources” and to “determine if additional funds should be provided to already well-supported investigators.”

Goal: not explicitly stated in the policy

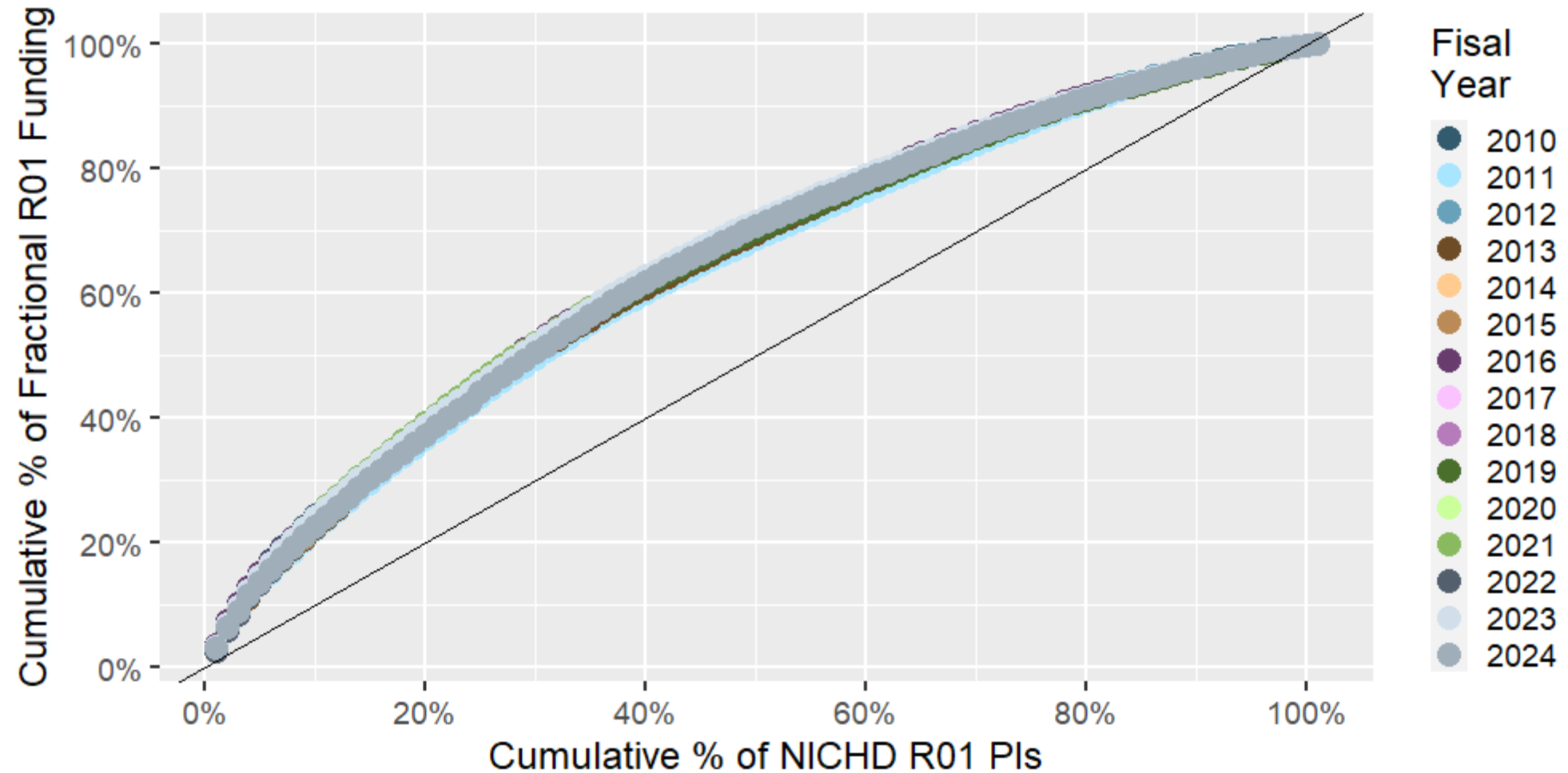
Approach: require extra scrutiny before funding PIs who are already well funded



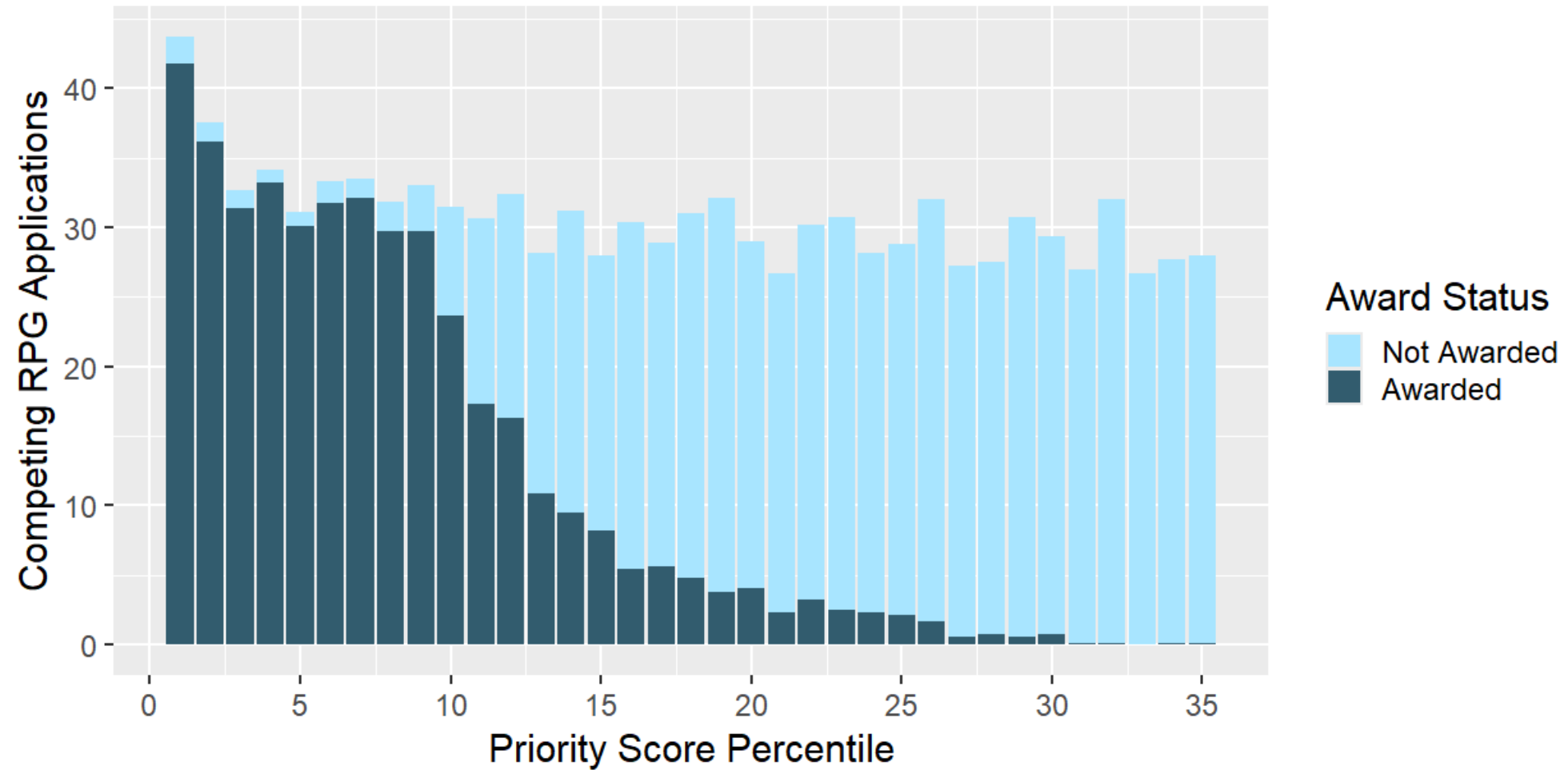
NICHD PI funding distributions: All awards



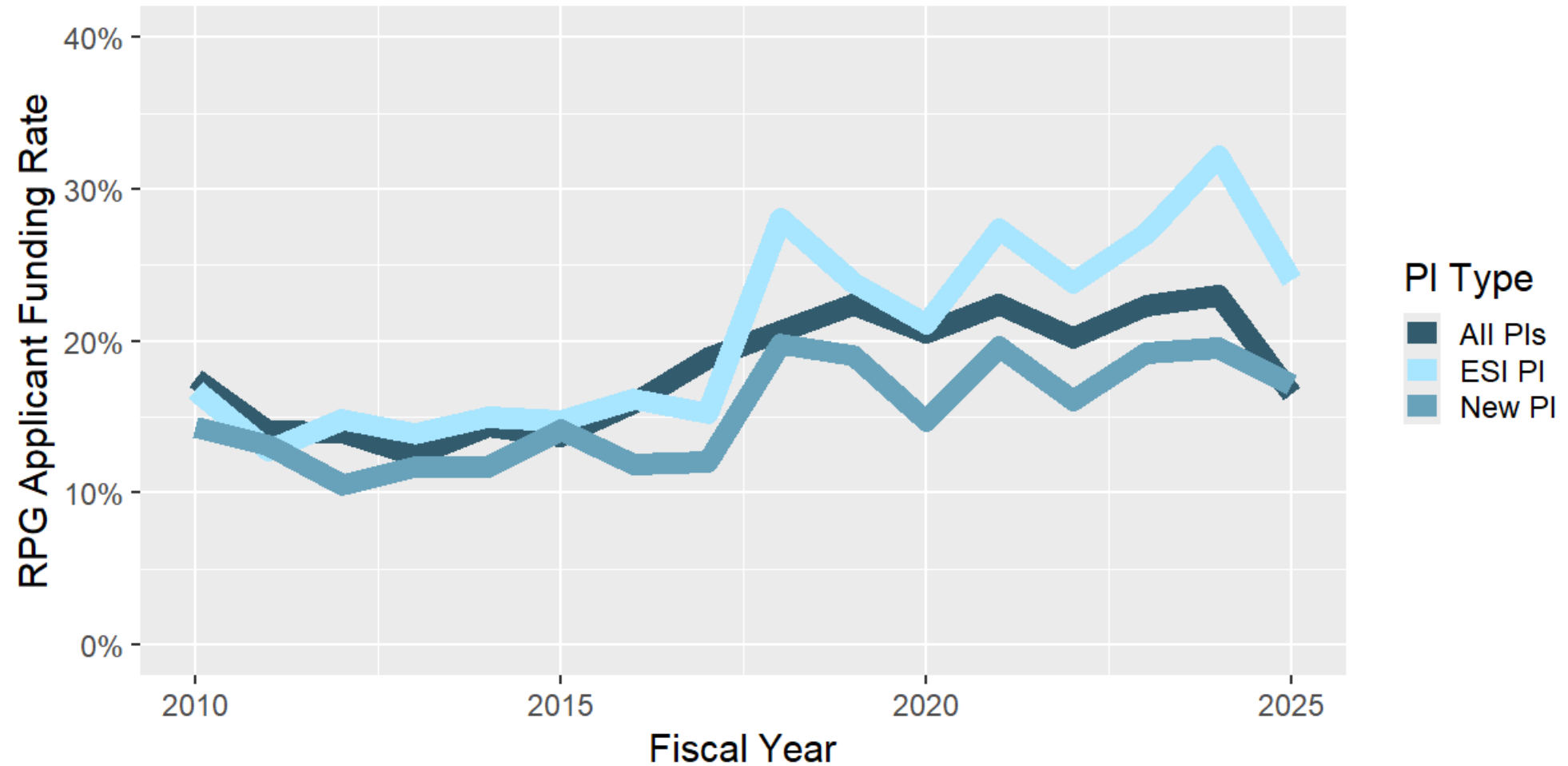
NICHD PI funding distributions: R01s



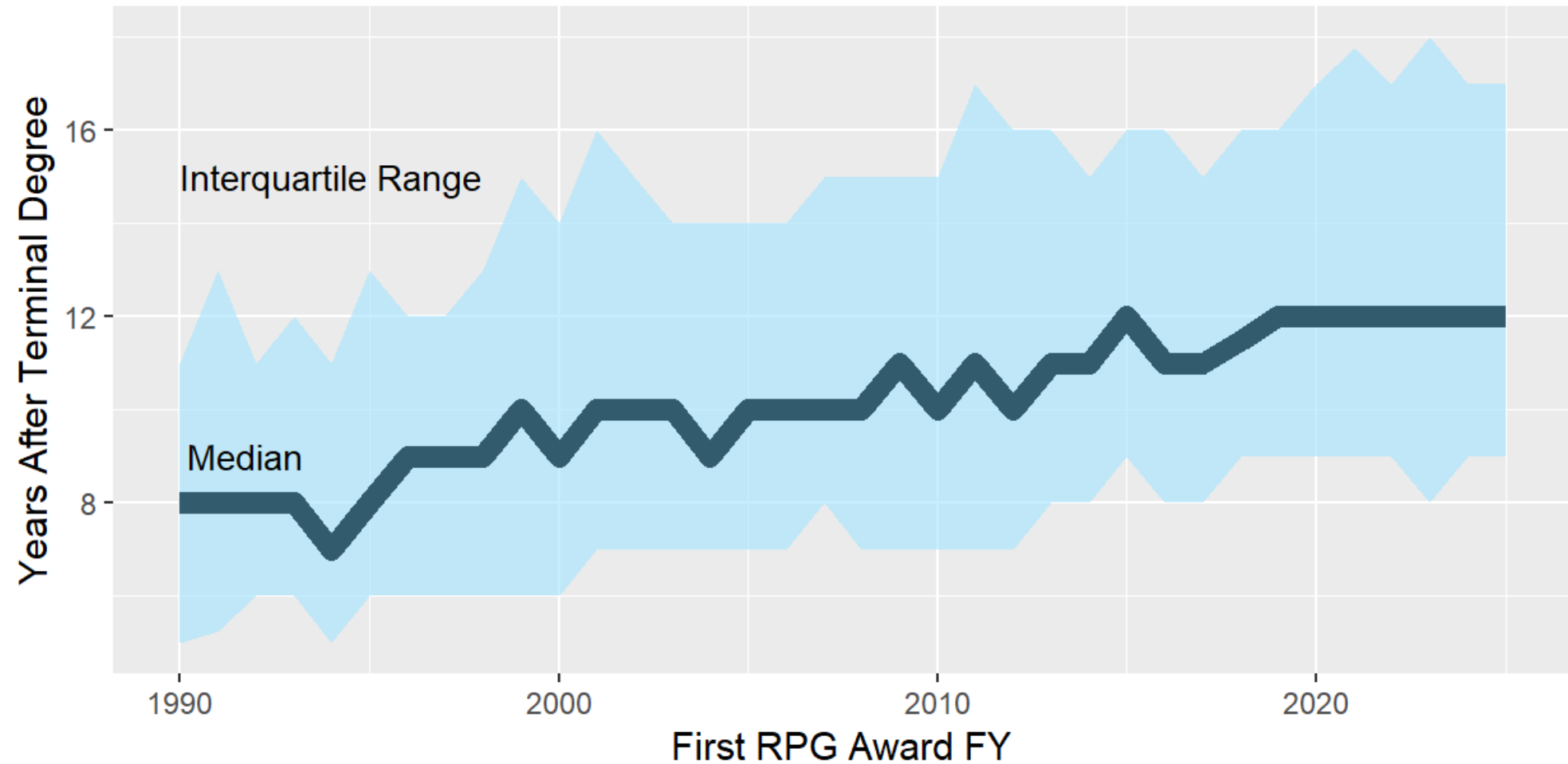
NICHD applications by percentile and award status



NICHD RPG applicant funding rates



Time to first awarded RPG for NICHD investigators



The NIH SCR Policy

- Asks ICOs to consider whether they should provide more funding to already well-funded investigators
- Implementation has two components
 - What do we consider a well-funded investigator?
 - What do we do with applications from well-funded investigators?
- Allows ICOs to create their own policies if they choose



SCR policy notices

- Original NIH policy: NOT-OD-12-110 (Pilot), NOT-OD-12-140 (final Policy)
- Updated NIH policy: NOT-OD-22-049
- IC-specific policies (that I know of)
 - NIMH: NOT-MH-22-030, NOT-MH-22-190, NOT-MH-24-230
 - NIGMS: Policy posted on IC website, not in an NIH notice
 - NINDS: NOT-NS-18-060, NOT-NS-22-115, NOT-NS-24-060, NOT-NS-26-033
 - NICHD: NOT-HD-23-038
 - NIDCR: NOT-DE-24-012



The NICHD policy

- A non-RFA, competing RPG application is subject to the policy if
 - Any PI on the application
 - Has \$1M or more in fractionally allocated total cost funding from the NIH
 - That will continue for at least 30 days beyond the Council date
- Applications subject to the policy will be considered for funding if
 - Their percentile is < 7 : funded on merit without Council discussion
 - Their percentile is ≥ 7 and they “represent a rare or unprecedented effort to address one or more NICHD priorities”: brought to Council for discussion and vote
- Applications on HIV, responding to the IMPROVE and INCLUDE programs, or responding to the NICHD clinical network PARs are exempt from this policy



Evaluation questions

- Have previous SCR policies reduced PI funding concentrations?
- Did the NICHD policy reduce funding concentrations at NICHD?
- Did the NICHD policy allow it to fund applications that wouldn't otherwise have been funded?
- How many NICHD applications fell into which policy categories?





Previous SCR policies

About the IC comparison data

Data source: NIH ExPORTER (as of 27 May 2026)

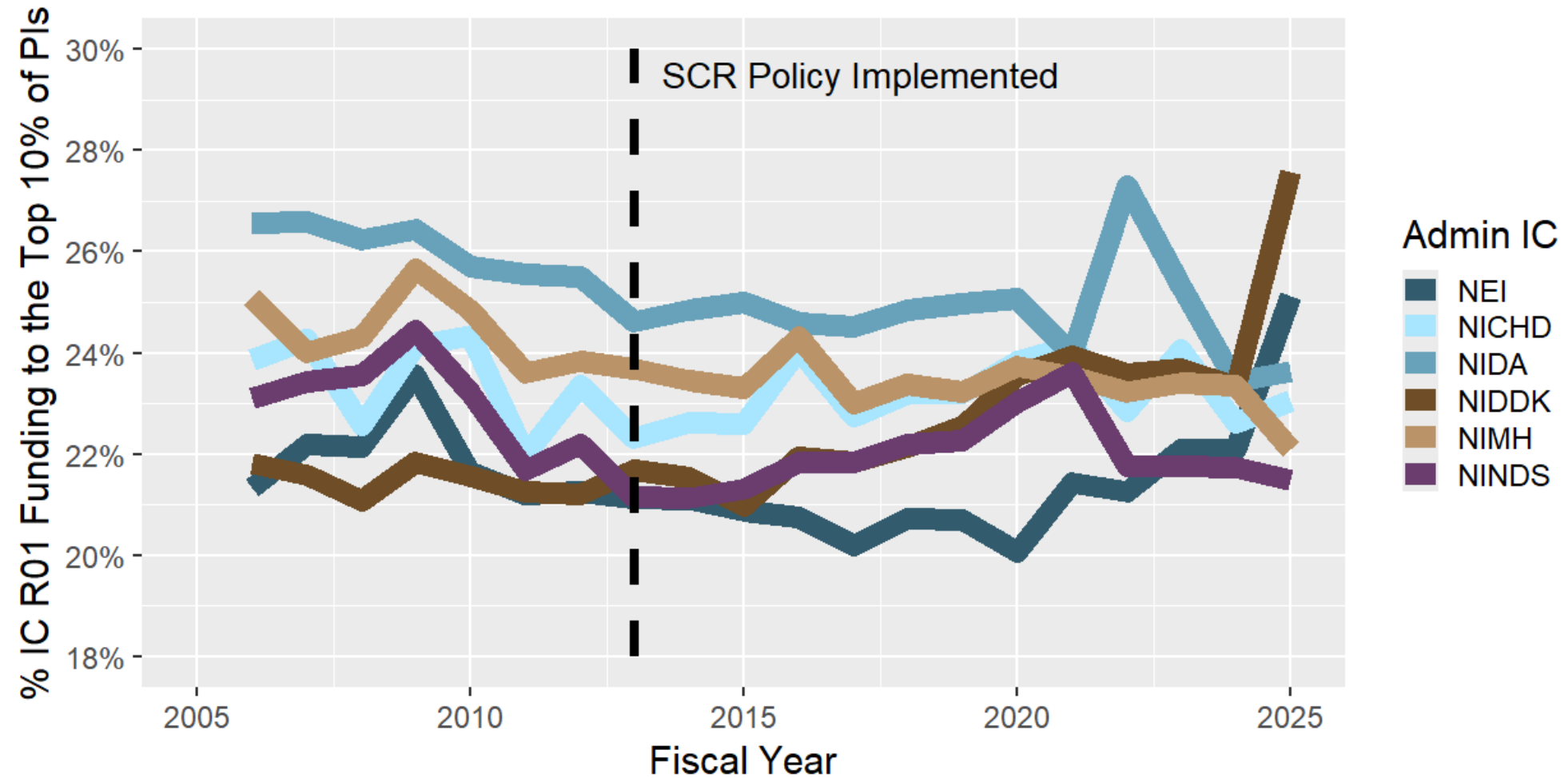
Inclusion criteria: All awarded R01s administered by NEI, NICHD, NIDA, NIDDK, NIMH, and NINDS from FY2006-2025 (N = 192,256)

Data processing:

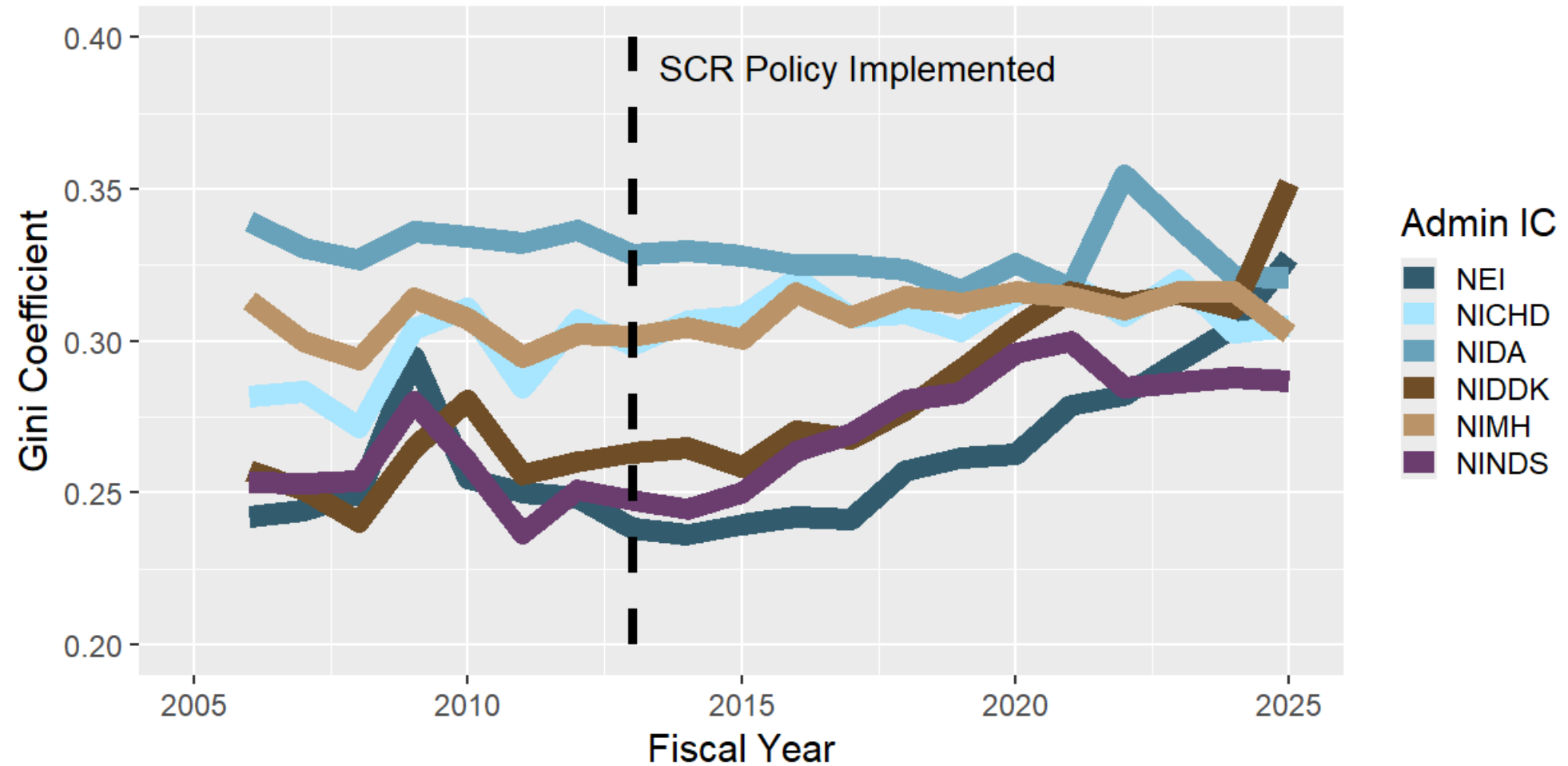
- Award amounts were adjusted for inflation using the US Consumer Price Index and given in 2025 dollars
- PI funding amounts for awards with multiple PIs were fractionally allocated
- Calculated three funding concentration measures: % of IC funding received by the top 10% of IC PIs, the Gini Coefficient, and the Theil Index



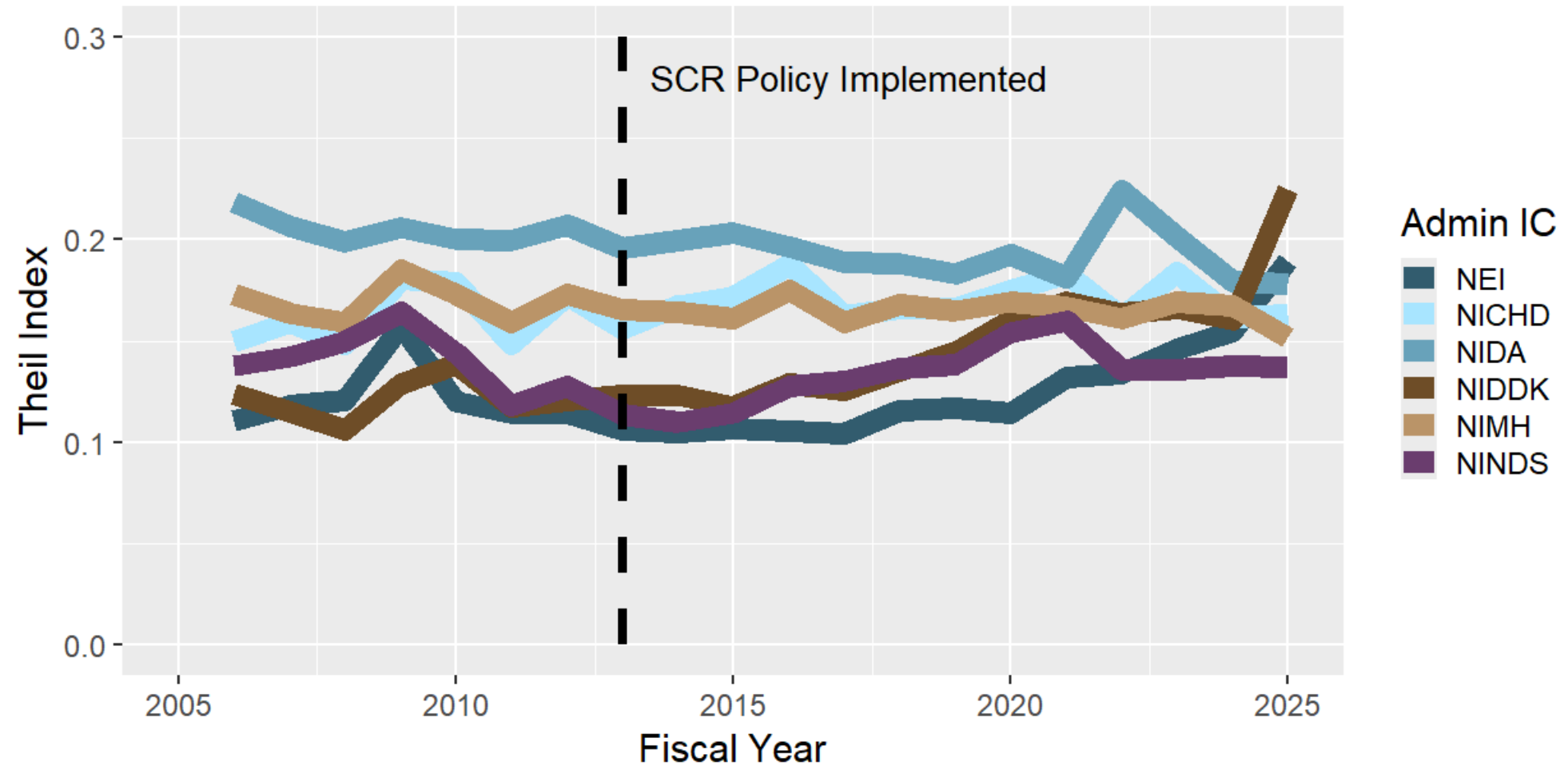
R01 funding received by highly funded PIs



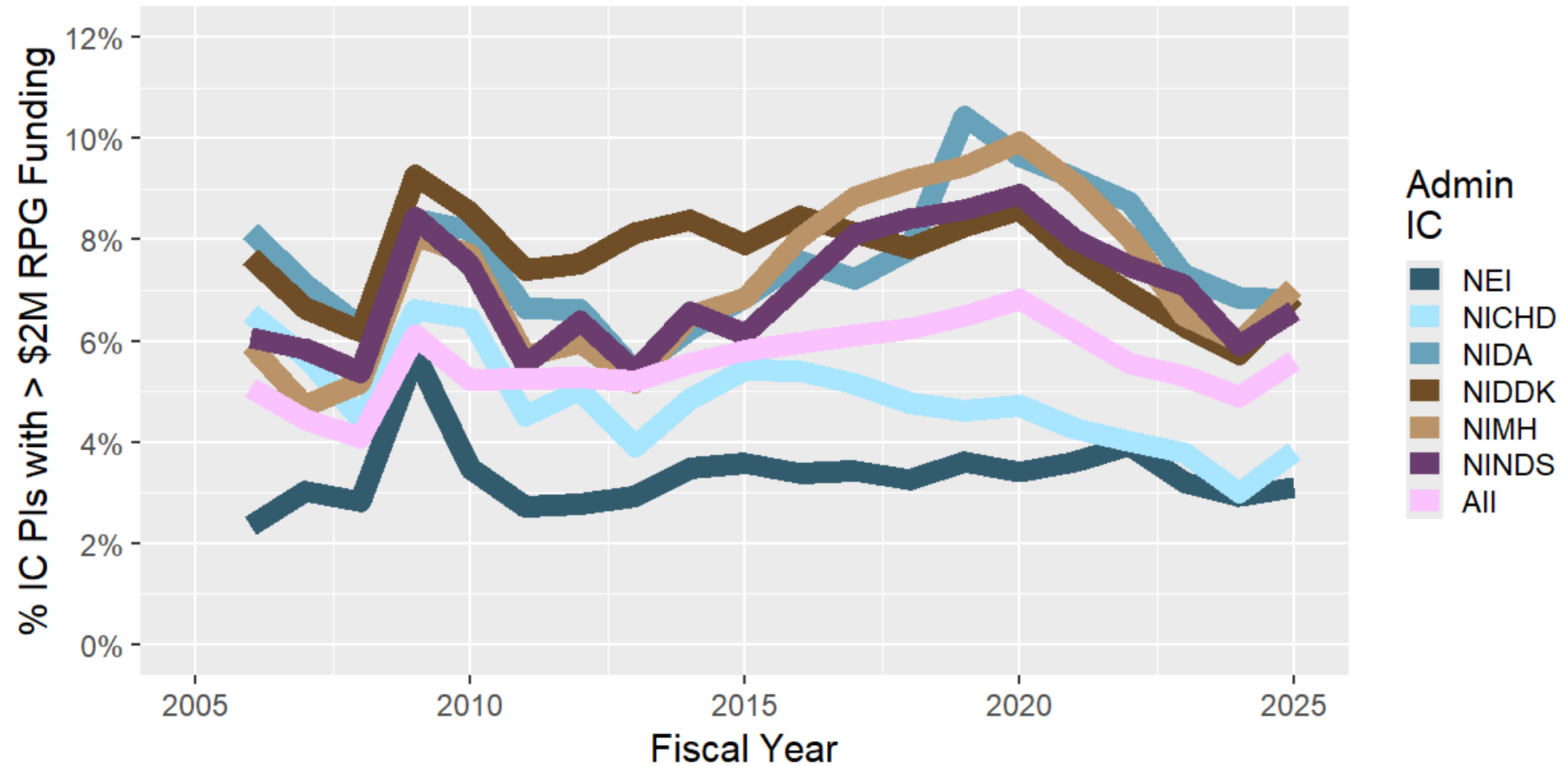
Gini Coefficient for R01 funding



Theil Index for R01 funding



Investigators with > \$2M in NIH RPG funding



Interpretation

NIH-wide and IC-specific SCR policies have not reduced PI funding concentrations at these ICs

But these policies only affect a small proportion of PIs receiving a relatively small proportion of overall NIH funding





The NICHD SCR policy in FY25

About the NICHD data

Data source: QVR (as of 9 February 2026) and manual curation

Inclusion criteria: All NICHD-administered competing applications that were considered in FY25 council rounds (202410, 202501, and 202505)

Data processing:

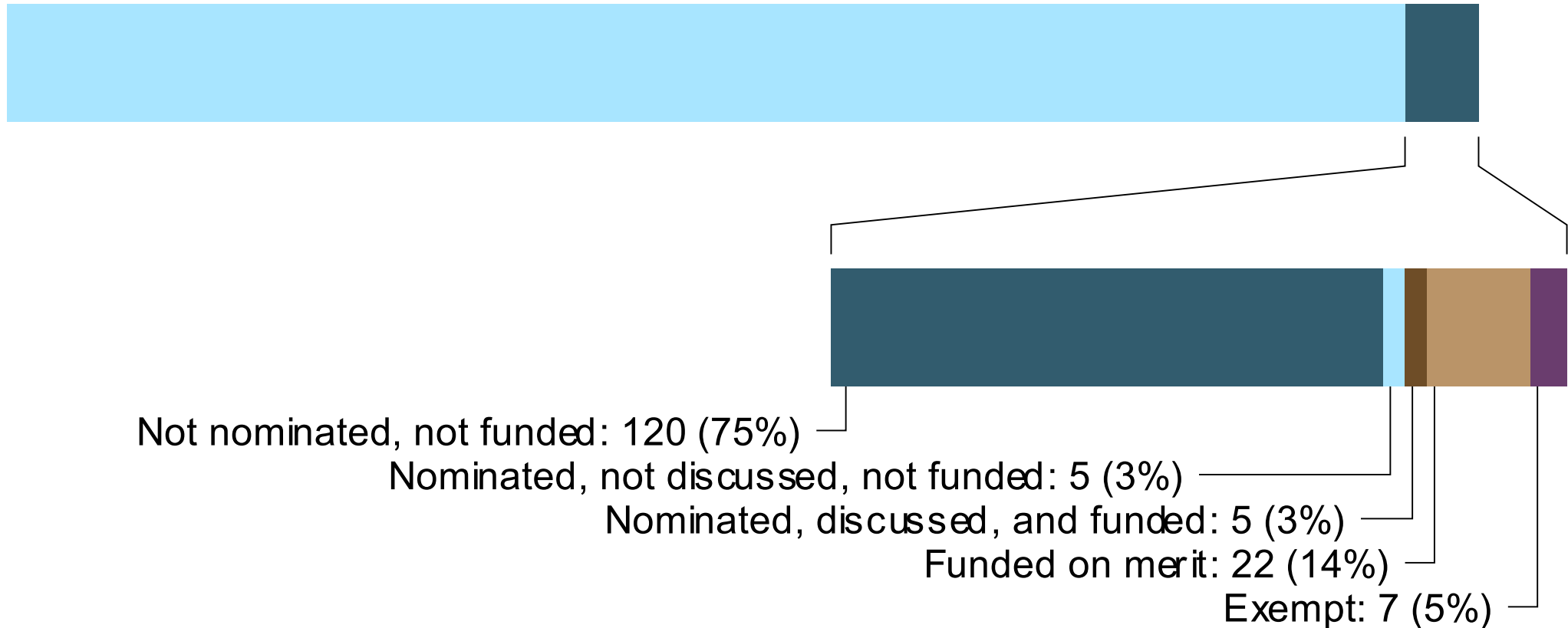
- Applications were manually assigned a custom SCR status



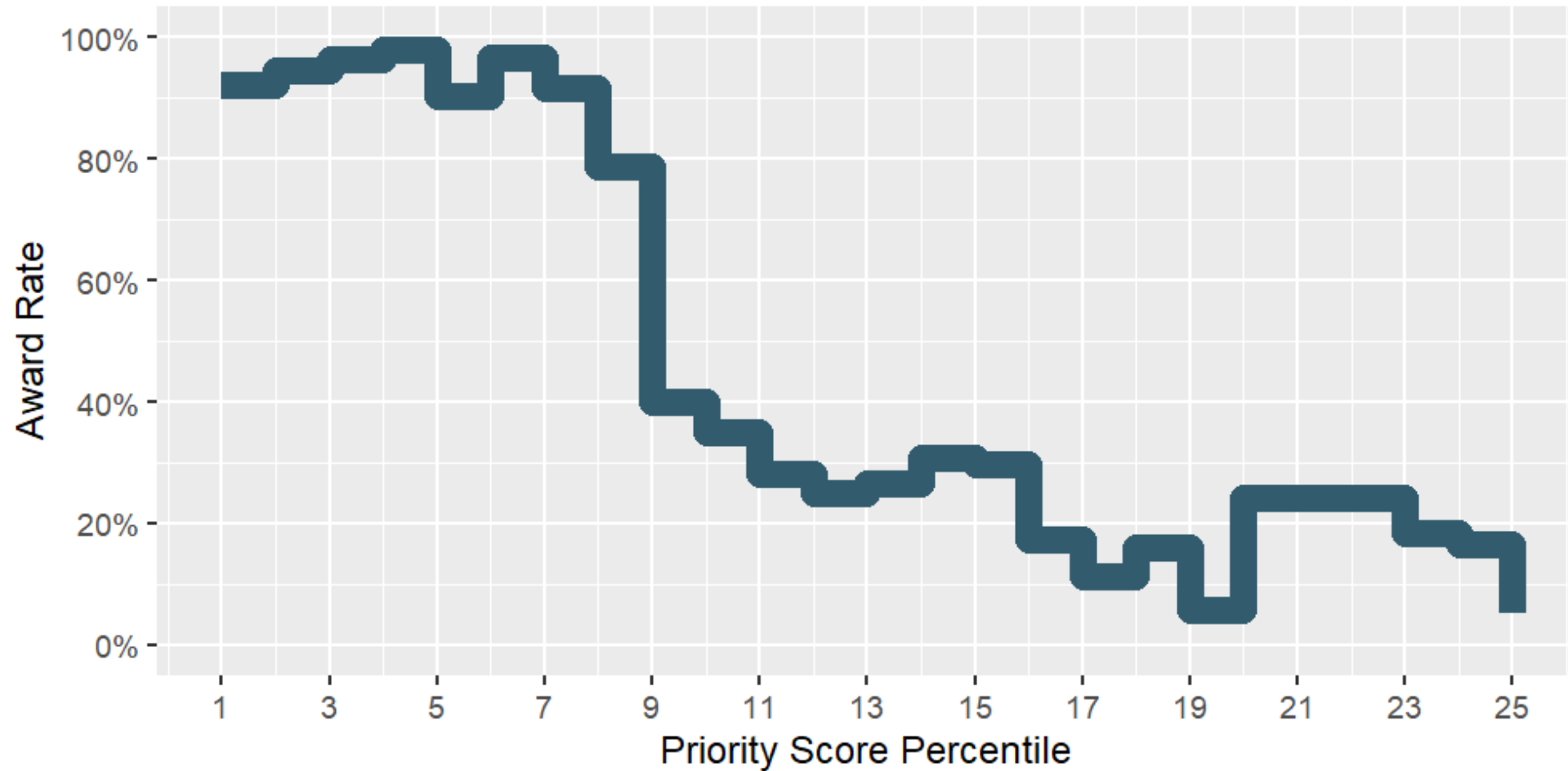
Application summary: All RPGs (N = 3,209)

Not subject to the policy: 3,157 (95%)

Subject to the policy: 159 (5%)



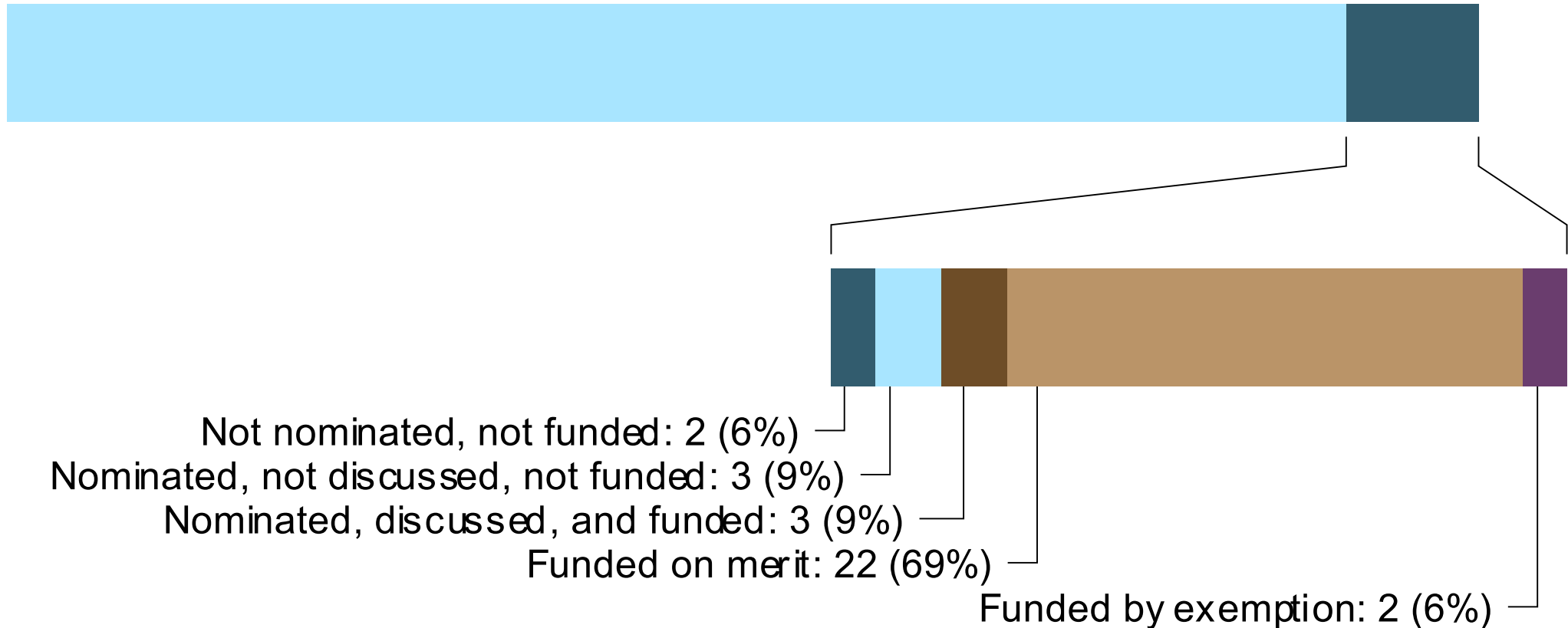
RPG award rate by percentile (FY25)



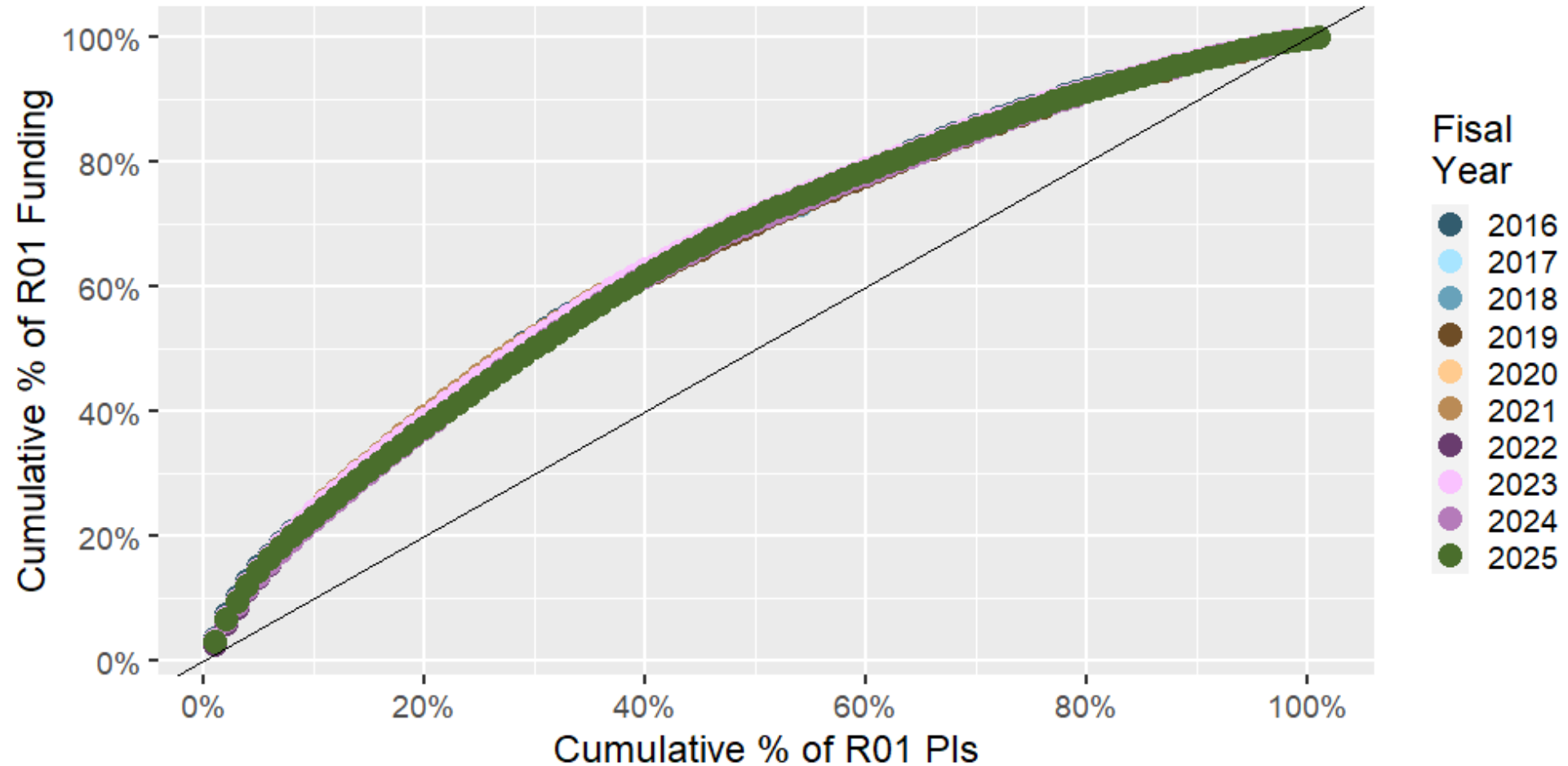
Application summary: RPGs with a percentile ≤ 8 (N = 344)

Not subject to the policy: 312 (91%)

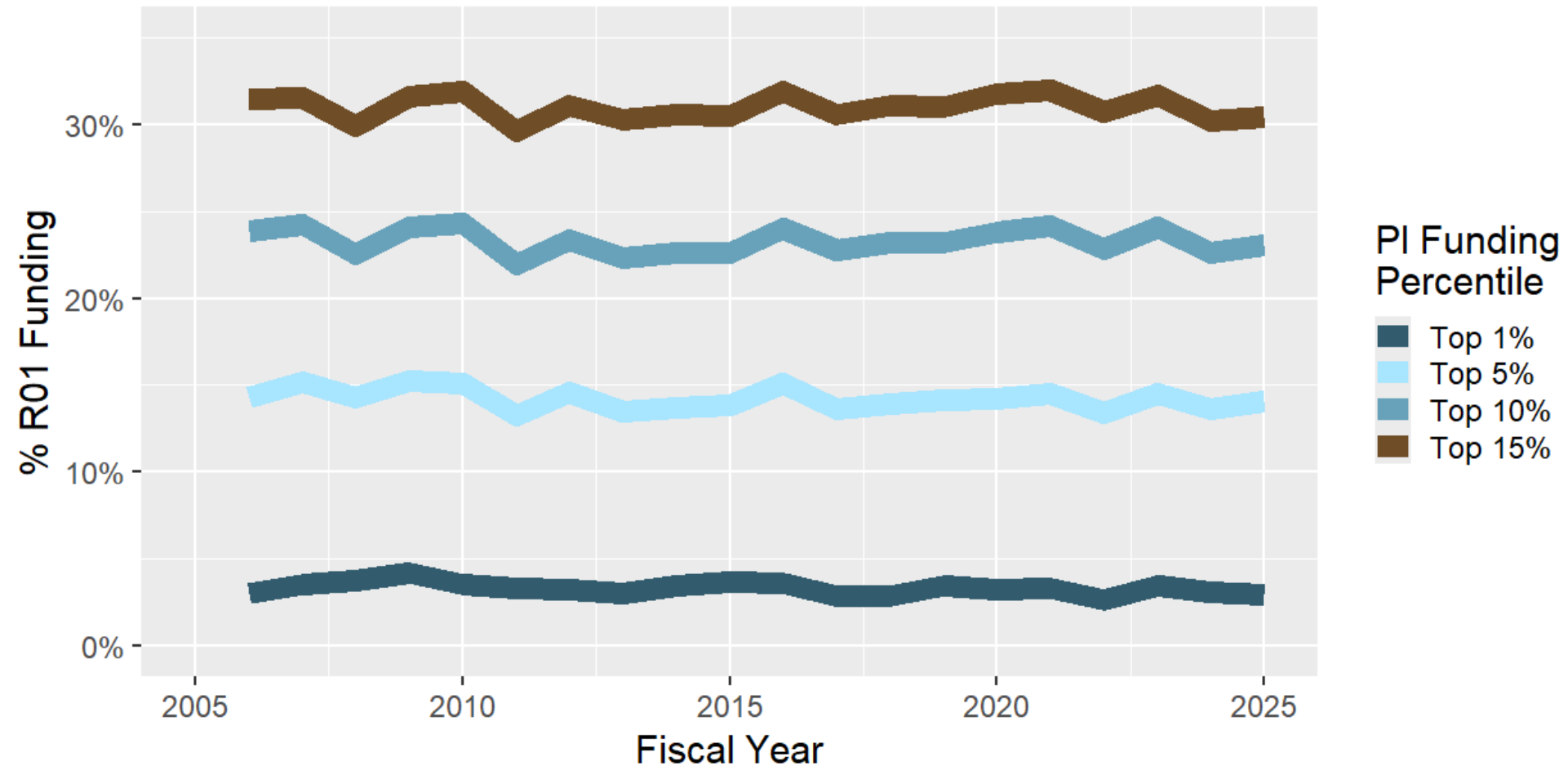
Subject to the policy: 32 (9%)



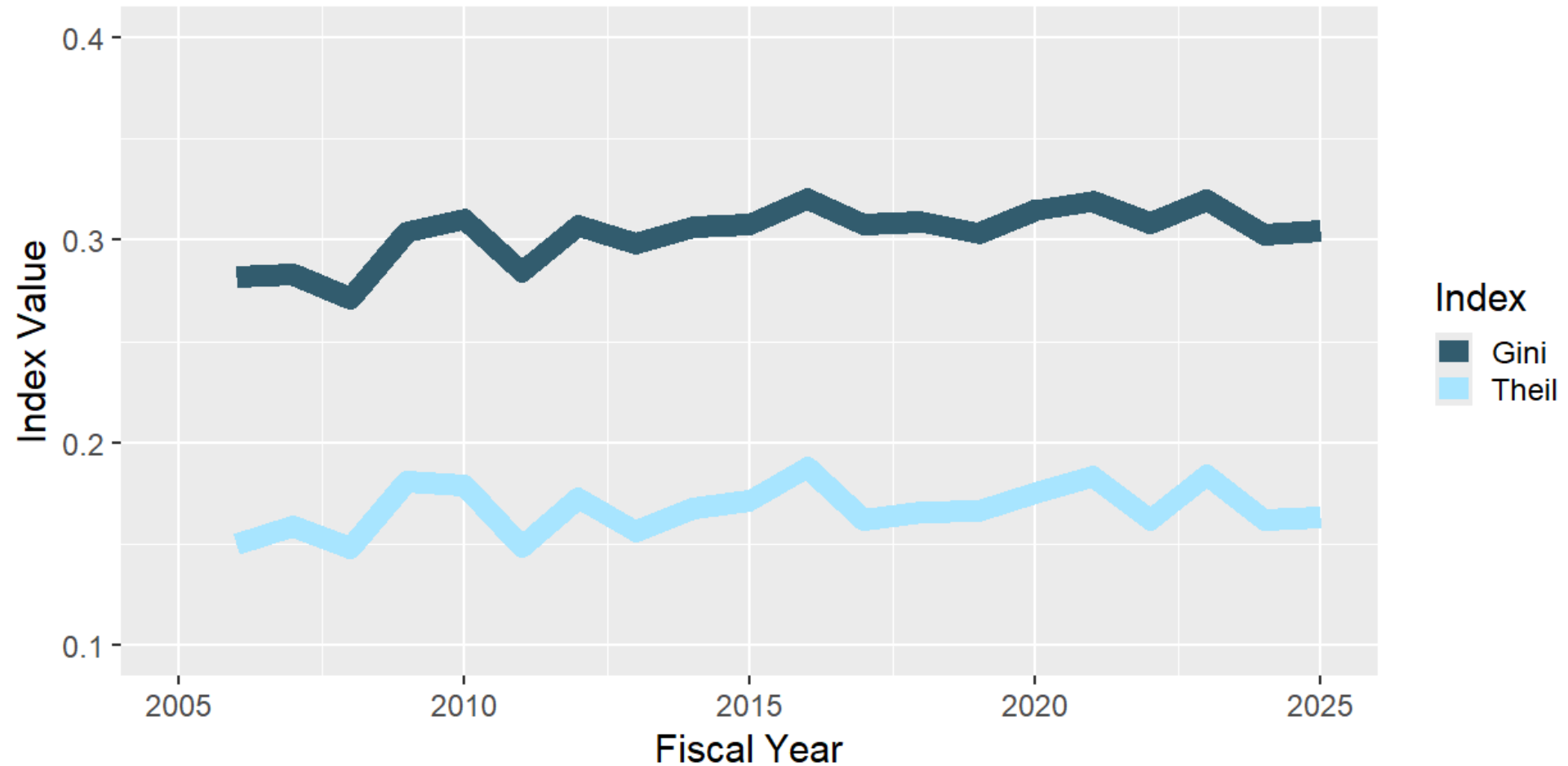
PI funding distributions: R01s



NICHD R01 funding received by highly funded PIs



Inequality indices for R01 funding amounts



Analytical conclusions

- 85% (N = 27) of the 32 competitive RPGs subject to the policy were funded, while 15% (N = 5) were not funded
- 69% (N = 22) of the competitive RPGs subject to the policy were funded through the exceptional score criterion
- 5 total applications were not funded because of the policy
 - 1% of the 425 competing RPGs awarded in FY25
 - More than previous 10 fiscal years combined
- Funding concentrations among R01 investigators in FY25 were unchanged from those in FY16-24





Discussion

Discussion questions

- What problem are we trying to solve? Are we trying to reduce funding concentrations or are we trying to fund targeted applications?
- If we want to fund targeted applications, is an SCR policy the best mechanism for doing so?

