

Predicting Myside Biases with Covid Death Estimate Inaccuracy

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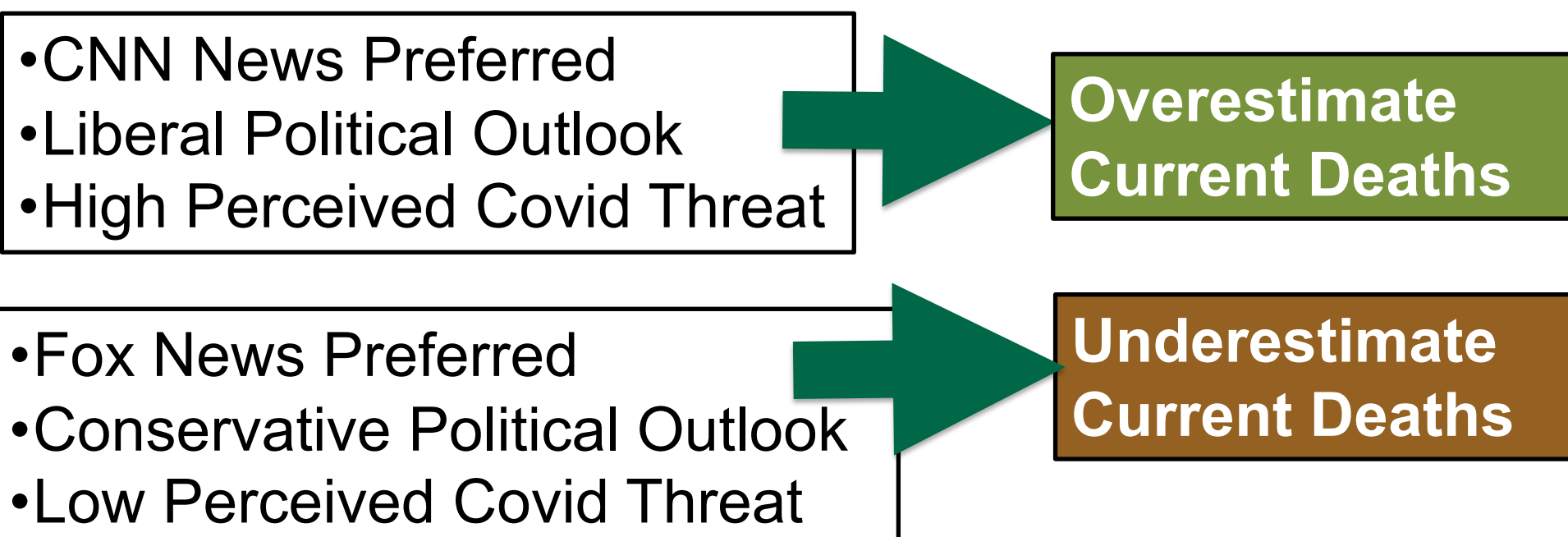
Introduction

➤ **Myside biases** occur when people rely more heavily on information that is confirmatory toward their own preexisting beliefs and attitudes (Stanovich et al., 2013).

Hypothesis:

We tested whether intensity of Covid-19 concerns, preferred news sources, and political party affiliations would demonstrate myside biases evident when predicting Covid-19 domestic deaths.

→ If myside biases are present, we would expect differential patterns of inaccuracies in Covid Death Estimates.



Methods

Participants and Design:

Data were analyzed from 501 USF psychology undergraduates who participated in a correlational study via online survey

Participants were asked, "Without looking it up, provide your best estimate of how many thousands of deaths from Covid-19 there have been in the U.S. to date."

➤ **DV = Inaccuracy Measure:** Covid death estimate – Johns Hopkins Univ. estimate

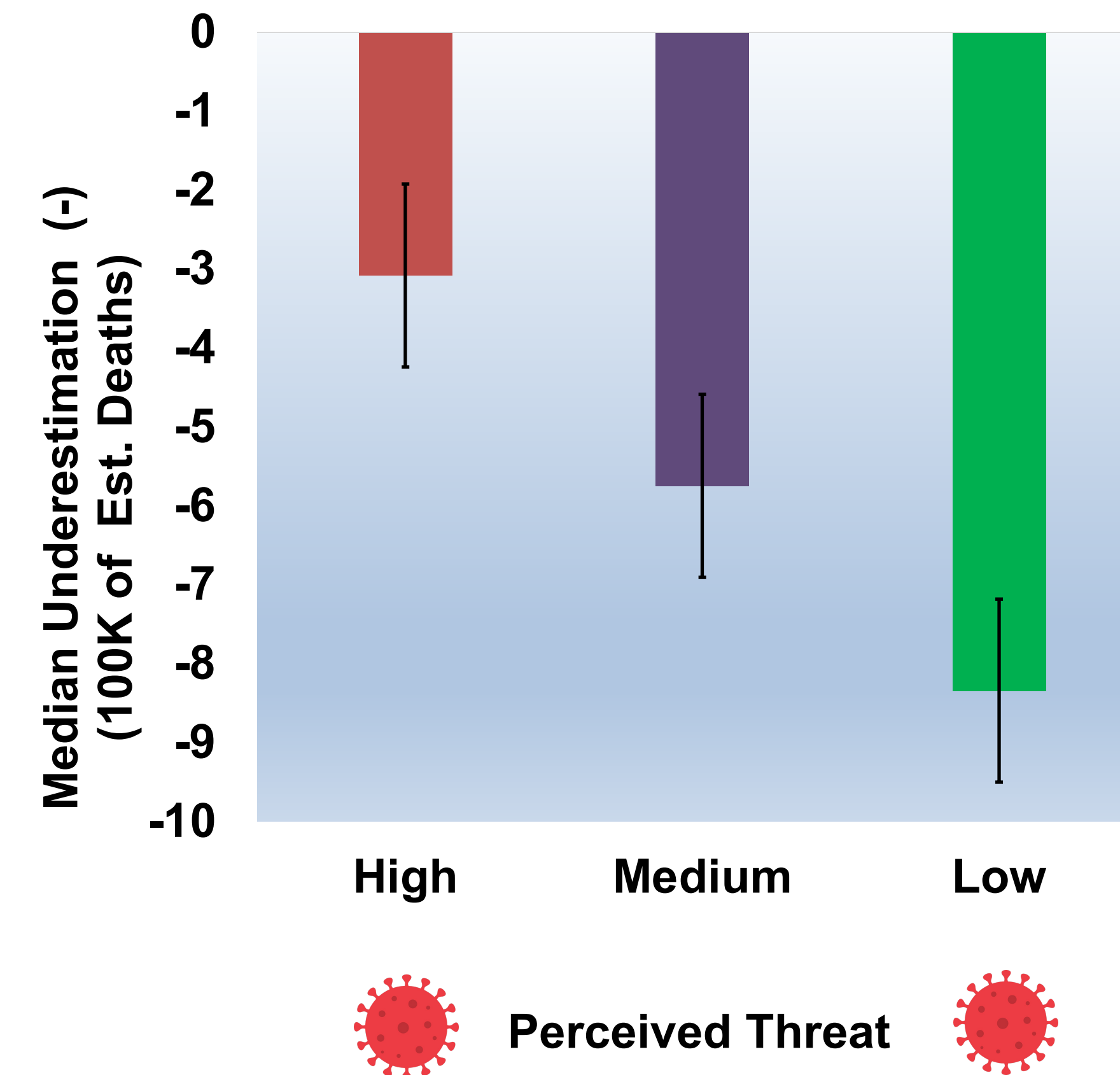
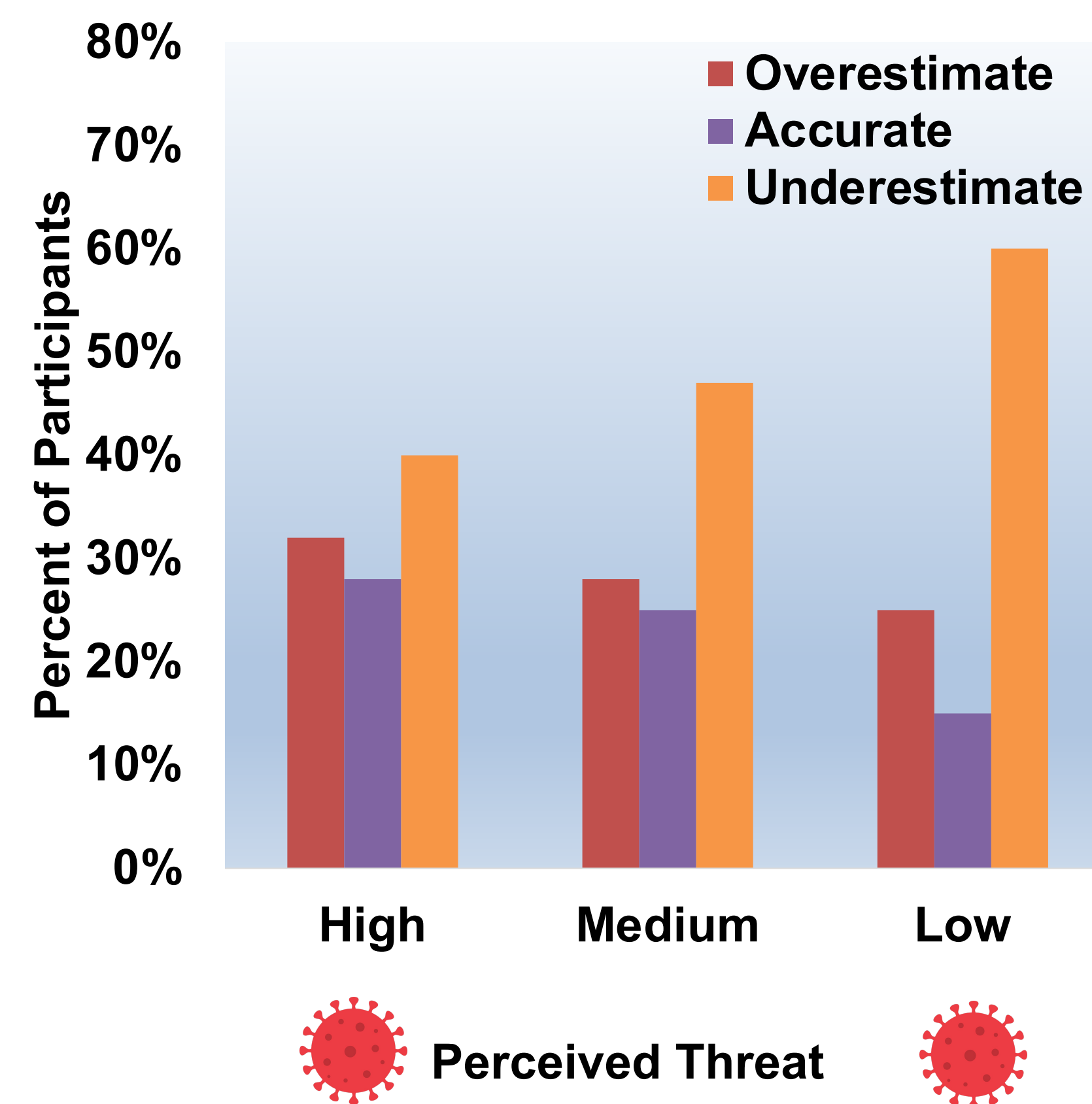
Predictors:

- 7-point degree of preference for **Fox News to CNN**
- 7-point intensity of political outlook (**Conservative to Liberal**)
- Four 7-point scales combined to measure degree of **perceived threat** from Covid (Reduces Feelings of Safety and Economic Functioning, Often Worry, How much it is a threat,)

Analysis:

- For simplicity, group mean differences were tested via ANOVA
- Group differences and frequencies in percentages used χ^2

Results



Figures 1 & 2: Perceived Threat and Death Estimate Inaccuracy

We found differences in estimation tendencies across threat groups, $\chi^2(4, N=501) = 11.47, p=.02$.

- All perceived threat groups tended to underestimate deaths due to Covid.
- Consistent with myside bias, the low threat group had the highest tendency to underestimate deaths.
- However, we did not find myside bias in the high threat group as they did not tend to overestimate deaths.

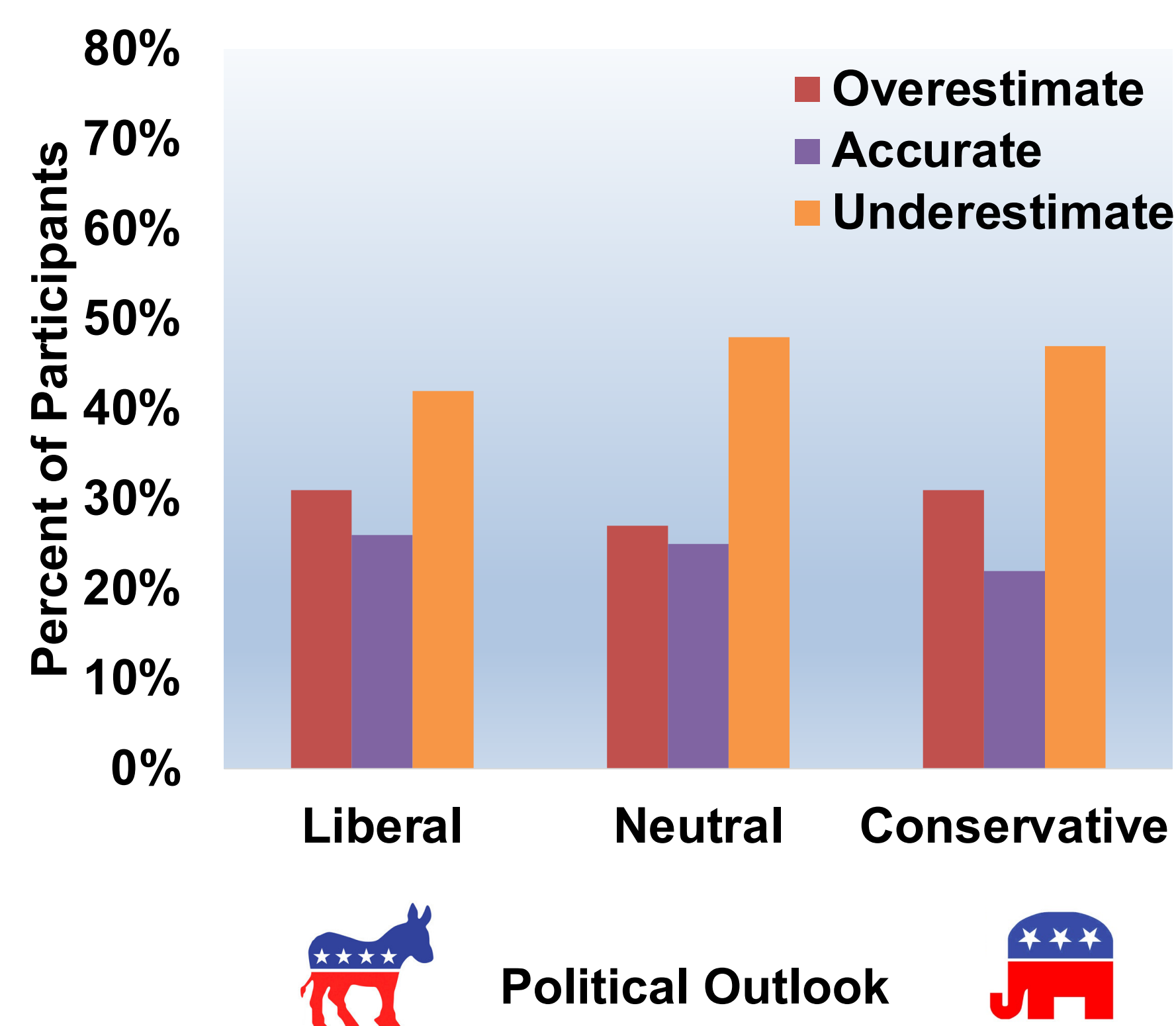


Fig. 3: Political Outlook and Inaccuracy Est.

Across political outlook groups, findings did not reveal a difference in underestimation vs. overestimation based on political leaning, with all groups tending toward underestimation (via χ^2, ns).

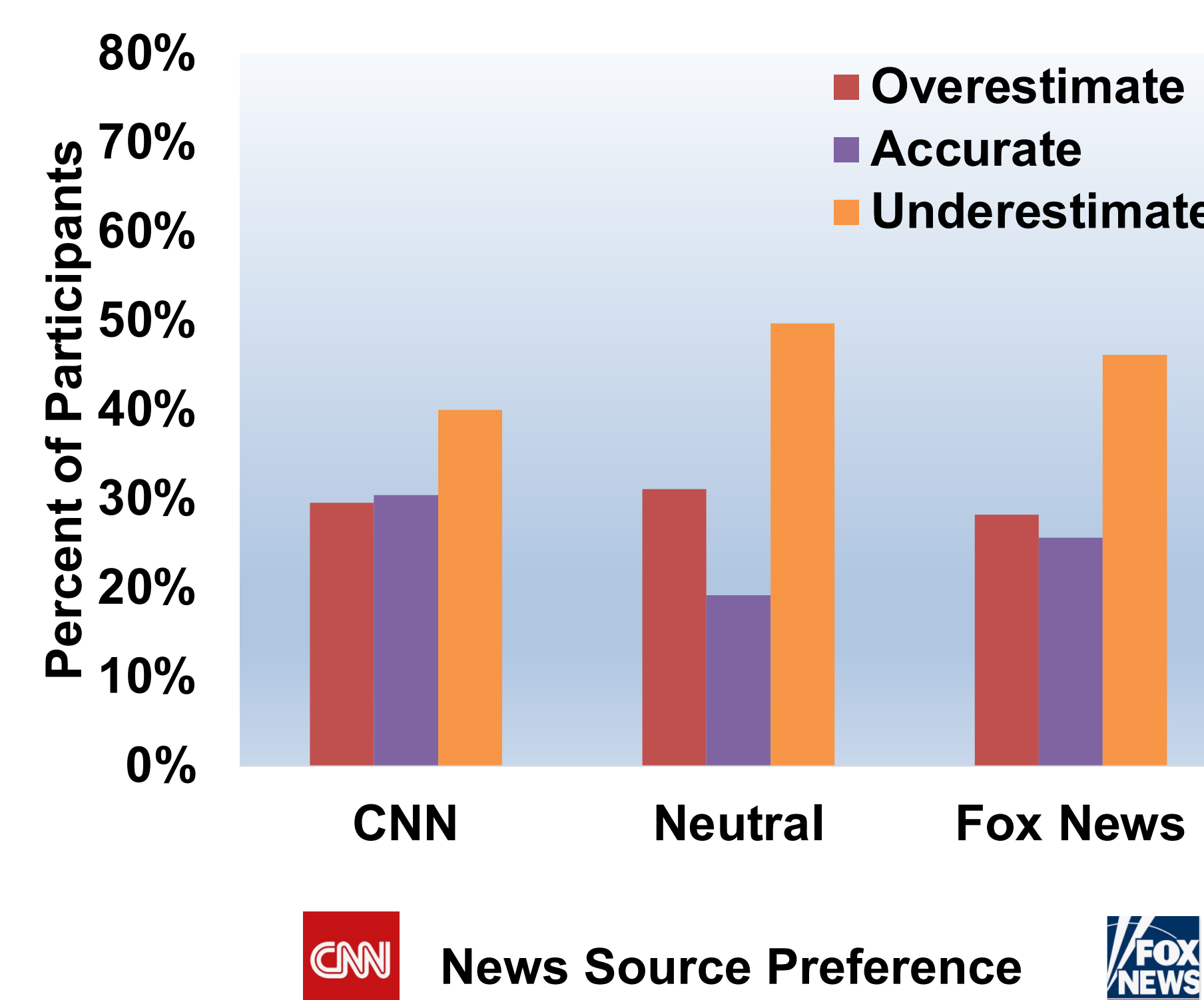


Fig. 4: News Source and Inaccuracy Est.

Across preferred news source groups, findings did not reveal a difference in underestimation vs. overestimation based on news source preferences, with all groups tending toward underestimation (via χ^2, ns).

Conclusion

➤ Differences in **Perceived Threat** may predict myside biases when making death estimates, but only weakly.

→ Those who reported lower perceived threat from Covid had stronger tendencies to underestimate the current death toll from Covid.

➤ However, evidence of myside bias was not observed based on **political outlook** or **news source preference**

→ All groups had a tendency to underestimate Covid deaths

➤ **No more than 30% of any group was accurate (i.e., within 50K)**

➤ This suggests that myside bias may not be present in all cases.

Future Research

➤ **Participants' tendency to underestimate** might stem from a variety of different sources to be explored in the future:

→ Participants might not have been keeping up-to-date on news about deaths, and provided **outdated estimates**

➤ There is a tendency to **avoid hedonically negative information** (Golman et al., 2017); perhaps participants avoid learning or thinking about Covid deaths because it is too unpleasant

➤ **Psychic numbing** (Slovic, 2007) suggests general difficulty in comprehending large numbers, especially concerning highly negative outcomes such as deaths

References

Golman, R., Hagmann, D., & Loewenstein, G. (2017). Information avoidance. *Journal of Economic Lit.*, 55(1), 96-135.

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Stanovich, K. E., West, R. F., & Toplak, M. E. (2013). Myside bias, rational thinking, and intelligence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(4), 259-264.