**On Bullshit**

*Bullshit involves language, statistical figures, data graphics, and other forms of presentation intended to persuade by impressing and overwhelming a reader or listener, with a blatant disregard for truth and logical coherence.*

-Calling Bullshit: Data Reasoning in a Digital World.

While not outright ‘lies’, ‘bullshit’ effectively points toward misrepresentation of data. It is by no means falsifying data, which is an example of ‘lying’, but comes in the form of misleading models, absence or lack of clarification of critical information and such.

For example, let’s consider the example of traffic safety in Bangladesh.

The first step to adopting a safety enhancement for a roadway is to select the element that is at most risk. This stems from the fact of limited resources. Various remedial actions are possible: increasing signal lengths for pedestrian crossing, median installation, increasing lane widths and thus increasing capacity etc. But the first step should always be the selection of a particular roadway to improve. So, a planner would make a list of at-risk roadways and the decision maker would choose the one which will have the most impact.

The following data has been collected from the Accident Research Institute, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. The data is the statistics of total number of crashes in several intersections in the capital city over 5 years (2005-2009).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Serial No.** | **Name of the Intersection** | **Type** | **Total Accident** | **Fatal** | **Normal Injury** | **Pedestrian Accident** |
| 1 | Jatrabari | Roundabt | 16 | 12 | 3 | 11 |
| 2 | Farmgate | Multiple | 19 | 13 | 5 | 9 |
| 3 | Saidabad | Tee | 16 | 16 | 0 | 14 |
| 4 | Topkhana-Purana Paltan | Cross | 8 | 6 | 6 | 4 |
| 5 | Sonargaon-Panthapth-E TV | Roundabt | 10 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 6 | Shapla Chattar | Roundabt | 7 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 7 | Cantt. Zia Colony Gate, Mymen. Rd. | Tee | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | Progoti Sarani (Badda) | Tee | 9 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 10 | Jasim Uddin Road Crossing | Tee | 24 | 17 | 5 | 17 |
| 11 | Kakoli (Mymen. Rd.+ Kamal At. Av.) | Cross | 18 | 10 | 5 | 8 |
| 13 | Tongi Diversion Rd. | Multiple(1cross+1tee) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 14 | Bijoy Sarani | Cross | 10 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| 15 | Shahbag | Roundabt | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

Plotting the number of crashes in each intersection in a bar-chart, we can easily point out the intersections that are at most risk from a traffic safety standpoint:

Judging from the bar-chart, the intersection with the highest number of crashes is Farmgate and thus it should be the one being chosen for future improvement. But this representation is missing a key information: the daily traffic through each intersection. If an intersection is allowing more traffic than others, it can be expected that it would have more crashes. So, to come to any conclusion, we need to normalize the data first.