

Lying with Statistics: Today's Example

CNN: "Report: Fatalities soar after helmet law lifted"

"Motorcycle fatalities involving riders without helmets have soared in the nearly six years since Gov. Jeb Bush repealed the state's mandatory helmet law, a newspaper reported Sunday.

A Florida Today analysis of federal motorcycle crash statistics found "unhelmeted" deaths in Florida rose from 22 in 1998 and 1999, the years before the helmet law repeal, to 250 in 2004, the most recent year of available data.

Total motorcycle deaths in the state have increased 67 percent, from 259 in 2000 to 432 in 2004, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics.

Records, though, also show motorcycle registrations have increased 87 percent in Florida since Bush signed the helmet law repeal July 1, 2000."

Deaths went up 67%, registrations went up 87%, so deaths per motorcycle have been going down. "Unhelmeted deaths" went up steeply, which sounds convincing—until you realize that one result of not wearing a helmet is that an accident that would have killed you even with a helmet now counts as an "unhelmeted" instead of a "helmeted" death. I do not know what else changed over the period; it would be interesting to see comparable statistics from states that did not change their laws. But the evidence actually presented in the article, taken by itself, implies precisely the opposite of what the top level headline suggests.

Taken from <http://daviddfriedman.blogspot.com/2006/06/lying-with-statistics-todays-example.html>

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