# The Imbalance Data Handling of XGBoost in Insurance Fraud Detection

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Keywords: Insurance Fraud, Machine Learning, Binary Classification, XGBoost, Imbalance Class.

Abstract: Insurance fraud is an emerging problem threatening the insurance industry because of its potential severe loss. Many conventional efforts have been implemented to detect fraud, such as releasing blacklists and deeper investigation on every claim, but these efforts tend to cost financial resources a lot. Because of that, machine learning is proposed as a decision support system to detect potential insurance fraud. Insurance fraud detection problems often have data with an imbalanced class. This paper examines the imbalanced class handling of XGBoost in predicting insurance fraud. Our simulation shows that the weighted-XGBoost outperforms other approaches in handling the imbalanced class problem. The imbalance-XGBoost models are quite reliable in improving base models. They can reach up to 28% improvement of the recall score on minority class compared to the basic XGBoost model. The precision score of both imbalance-XGBoost models decreases, while the weighted-XGBoost model simultaneously improves the precision and recall score.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Insurance fraud has become a threatening problem in the insurance industry for its potential financial damage. In the United States, 10% of proposed claims were detected as fraud, contributing to around US\$34 Billion loss yearly<sup>1</sup>. Association of General Insurance in Indonesia (*Asosiasi Asuransi Umum Indonesia*, AAUI) also claimed that losses incurred by fraud could reach billions of Indonesian Rupiah for every company. Fraud cases are also reportedly increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic hits Indonesia<sup>2</sup>.

Many conventional efforts have been implemented to fight insurance fraud. AAUI has developed a system called AAUI Checking, which contains blocklists of policyholders and any other third parties accused of insurance fraud<sup>3</sup>. Deeper investigations on proposed claims are also imposed by many companies, though resulting in no significant impact. Even worse, many issues were hard to predict immediately; hence the devastating effects were known to present up to twenty months later<sup>4</sup>.

Machine learning is proposed as a solution to predict potential fraud on each claim. Historical data that contains essential information about policyholders, loss amount, and a description of whether the claim was a fraud can be used to train the model. This problem is a classification scenario in machine learning (Duda et al., 2001). The machine learning model is expected to shorten the time needed to investigate every claim manually without sacrificing accuracy. The model's decision can be considered a decision support system or a second opinion (Merkert et al., 2015).

Several methods have been proposed to achieve the high accuracy of insurance fraud detection systems. Wang and Xu (2018) proposed a text mining-based algorithm to analyze car accident description text to detect potential automobile insurance fraud. The text data was then used to train several models using support vector machine (SVM), random forest, and deep neural networks. All models achieve an f1-score of more than 75%. Roy and George (2017) used random forest and naïve Bayes to detect fraud in automobile insurance claims. Verma et al. (2017) implemented an outlier detection model

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In Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Data Science, Technology and Applications (DATA 2023), pages 460-467 ISBN: 978-989-758-664-4; ISSN: 2184-285X

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://knowledge.friss.com/survey-insurance-fraud-2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://finansial.bisnis.com/read/20201127/215/1323401/dampakcorona-industri-asuransi-mesti-antisipasi-maraknya-penipuan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.medcom.id/ekonomi/mikro/DkqVYaZK-aaui-biki n-daftar-hitam-nasabah-cegah-kecurangan-klaim

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://www.medcom.id/ekonomi/mikro/DkqVYaZK-aaui-biki n-daftar-hitam-nasabah-cegah-kecurangan-klaim

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DOI: 10.5220/0012126900003541

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to find anomalies, and potential health insurance claims fraud. Waghade and Karandikar (2018) also discussed the need for better machine learning and data mining methods to improve the effectiveness of fraud detection systems in health insurance.

In 2014, Tiangi Chen invented XGBoost as a library containing optimized tree gradient boosting. It is designed as a highly efficient, flexible, and portable model. The fundamental idea of XGBoost is to optimize the tree gradient boosting model to handle sparse data, manage large amounts of data efficiently, implement efficient computation, and be highly scalable. This project is often claimed to be the most successful machine learning since XGBoost-based models often outperform other models and dominate data science competitions (Chen, 2016). It has also been implemented to many problems across different fields, including insurance. Fauzan & Murfi (2018) implemented XGBoost for insurance claim prediction and got better accuracy than other ensemble learning models such as AdaBoost, Stochastic Gradient Boosting, Random Forest, and Neural Networks. Rusdah & Murfi (2020) also proved that XGBoost could learn from the dataset with missing values directly and give comparable accuracy to the XGBoost model trained using the imputed dataset.

Yet, XGBoost is not optimized over the imbalanced dataset in the classification problem. In many cases, the XGBoost base model did not give desirable results, such as in the simulation by Ruisen et al. (2018). Several common strategies have been invented and implemented to handle imbalanced classes. Dhankhad et al. (2018) and Rio et al. (2015) used undersampling and oversampling with increased ratios to alter the dataset's composition before implementing the machine learning model. Another widely used approach to imbalance class problems is Minority Oversampling Synthetic Technique Varmedja et al. (SMOTE), which (2019)implemented to predict credit card fraud. Some researchers have also developed and implemented a strategy to handle imbalance class without altering the dataset, such as Wei et al. (2012), who integrated contrast pattern mining, neural network, and decision forest to predict online banking fraud activities. Wang et al. (2020) proposed modifying the XGBoost base model and called it Imbalance-XGBoost. The improvement was made by adding either a weighted function or a focal loss function on the boosting machine. The fundamental idea of the weighted function is to increase the penalty if the model wrongly predicts the minority class. Meanwhile, the focal loss function adds a multiplier factor to the cross-entropy function for the same purpose as the

weighted function. These modifications are expected to improve the XGBoost base model's performance.

This paper examines the imbalanced class handling of XGBoost in predicting insurance fraud. The comparative analysis of the existing methods is measured based on some metrics, i.e., accuracy, precision, recall, f1-score, and AUC. Our implementation shows that the weighted-XGBoost outperforms other approaches in handling the imbalanced class problem. The imbalance-XGBoost models are quite reliable for improving base models. They can reach up to 28% improvement of the recall score on minority class compared to the basic XGBoost model. The precision score of both imbalance-XGBoost models decreases, while the weighted-XGBoost model simultaneously improves the precision and recall score.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents materials and methods that explain the theoretical foundations of machine learning models implemented in this research. In Section 3, we discuss the process and the results of the simulations. Finally, we give a conclusion of this research in Section 4.

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 2.1 XGBoost

XGBoost is a popular model that optimizes gradient tree boosting and learns from tabular data. High scalability makes XGBoost run ten times faster than other conventional models and robust to a highdimensional dataset. This high scalability is empowered by implementing a tree-learning algorithm optimized for sparse data, a weighted quantile algorithm for more efficient computation, and a cache-aware block structure for parallelizing the tree-learning process using all processor cores (Chen & Guastrin, 2016).

The important improvement to XGBoost is how it handles overfitting. Overfitting is a condition where machine learning does capture not only the trend but also the noise. Consequently, model performance on training data will be very high, while model performance on observations outside training data will be far worse (Ying, 2019). The first method implemented in XGBoost is a regularized learning objective where weight terms are added to prevent the model from overlearning data. Equation 1 shows regularized learning function used in XGBoost.

$$L(\phi) = \sum_{i} l(\hat{y}_{i}, y_{i}) + \sum_{k} \Omega(f_{k})$$
(1)  
where  $\Omega(f) = \gamma T + \frac{1}{2} \lambda ||w||^{2}$ 

The second overfitting handling combines shrinkage and column subsampling. Shrinkage was first introduced by Friedman (2002). This technique multiplies newly added weights by a particular  $\eta$ value on every iteration in the tree-boosting machine. Shrinkage aims to reduce the influence of every tree built before to get an optimized tree model on the subsequent iterations. As the name suggests, column subsampling only uses several random columns or features to be used in the tree-fitting process. It is also used by Briedman (2001) and Friedman (2003) on the Random Forest model. This technique has been proven to prevent overfitting better than traditional row subsampling, which only uses several randomly sampled observations instead of features. It also efficiently shortens the time needed in the computational process.

The last important thing in XGBoost is how it splits data into every branch to get a model producing the best result possible. This problem is the best-split problem in the decision tree. The algorithm implemented in XGBoost as a solution is called an approximate algorithm. This algorithm first proposes splitting points candidates based on percentiles of feature distribution. The algorithm then maps the feature into buckets split based on these splitting points candidates, aggregates the statistics, and finds the best solution among these candidates.

Despite all these advantages, the base model of XGBoost often struggles with imbalanced datasets. Several methods have been proposed to handle the imbalance class problem when implementing the XGBoost model.

### 2.2 Imbalance Class Handling

#### 2.2.1 Data-Level Approach: Oversampling

The data level approach is an imbalanced class handling strategy that manipulates the composition of the minority and majority classes. This approach is usually used as a baseline model (Batista et al., 2004). One widely used strategy in this approach is oversampling.

In the oversampling strategy, data from the minority class are resampled randomly until the composition of both classes is balanced. Oversampling has a tremendous advantage over any other data-level approach method where no information is omitted. However, after adding more observations, the model tends to take a lot of time to fit oversampled data due to its huge dimensionality. In addition, models built on oversampled data are prone to overfit because of several identical observations in the dataset (Kaur & Gosain, 2018).

#### 2.2.2 Weighted-XGBoost

Besides the oversampling method, there is another standard handling of the imbalance class provided by XGBoost. This method is usually referred to as Weighted-XGBoost. This method is integrated into the XGBoost package and can be activated by setting the scale pos weight parameter in model fitting.

The optimal value for the scale\_pos\_weight parameter does not need to be tuned through a sophisticated optimization method. XGBoost developers have stated that  $\frac{sum(negative instances)}{sum(positive instances)}$  can be used as its value<sup>5</sup>. Negative instances here mean majority class and positive instances represent minority class. Adjusting the scale\_pos\_weight value will penalize the algorithm more if the model mispredicts a positive class. This approach should also not increase the time needed to fit the model significantly compared to oversampling strategy.

#### 2.2.3 Imbalance-XGBoost

Imbalance-XGBoost proposes modified loss functions to solve the heavily penalized model if it wrongly predicts a minority class. This idea is suggested by Wang et al. (2020) as a solution to handle the imbalance class in XGBoost. The model proposes two modified functions: weighted crossentropy function (weighted function) and focal loss function. One should only choose a function to be implemented before building the model.

The weighted function modifies the standard cross-entropy loss function in XGBoost by adding the imbalance\_alpha ( $\alpha$ ). When  $\alpha > 1$ , the extra loss will be counted on "classifying 1 as 0". Otherwise, when  $\alpha < 1$ , the extra loss will be calculated on "wrongly identified 0". Plugging  $\alpha = 1$  returns the modified loss function to the base XGBoost's cross-entropy loss function. Equation 2 shows a weighted function.

$$L_{w} = -\sum_{i=1}^{m} (\alpha y_{i} \log(\hat{y}_{i}) + (1 - y_{i}) \log(1 - \hat{y}_{i}))$$
(2)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://xgboost.readthedocs.io/en/latest/parameter.html

The focal loss function adds focal\_gamma in exponential form to the cross-entropy loss function. This factor serves the same purpose as imbalance\_alpha in the weighted function. Plugging  $\gamma = 0$  returns the loss function to the base XGBoost's loss function. Equation 3 shows the focal loss function.

$$L_{f} = -\sum_{i=1}^{m} y_{i} (1 - \hat{y}_{i})^{\gamma} \log(\hat{y}_{i}) + (1 - y_{i}) \hat{y}_{i}^{\gamma} \log(1 - \hat{y}_{i})$$
(3)

These imbalance parameters should be tuned to achieve the best possible result while building the model. As with the weighted-XGBoost method, these two function modifications should not significantly increase the time to fit the model.

### 2.3 Accuracy Measurement

Accuracy measurement is an essential step in evaluating model performance. It serves as an objective way to compare the model's performance. These are the accuracy metrics that we use in this research. Overall accuracy is the ratio between correctly predicted and total observations. Precision measures the classifier's ability to not label negative observations as positive. Recall measures the classifier's ability to find positive observations. F1score is the harmonic mean of precision and recall. It compares several models instead of illustrating their accuracy (Pedregosa et al., 2011). Area Under Curve (AUC) is the total area under the ROC (Receiver Operator Characteristic) curve. ROC consists of a false positive (FP) on the x-axis and a true positive (TP) on the y-axis. It is constructed by mapping (FP, TP) from the model by varying its decision threshold (Bradley, 1996).

### **3** IMPLEMENTATIONS

#### 3.1 Dataset

This research uses the fraud insurance dataset published by Roshan Sharma on Kaggle. This dataset was published in 2019 and contained labeled data on automobile insurance fraud. The dataset has 40 features with 18 numerical variables and 22 categorical variables. Of 1,000 observations, 24.7% are classified as fraud observations. While this imbalance class may not cause the model to predict all data as majority class like in more extreme cases, it is still prone to bias toward the majority class. The model's performance in predicting data from minority classes may be unreliable.

The dataset also has several features with missing values. These features are collision\_type, property\_damage, and police\_report\_available. Since XGBoost can handle missing values, no imputation is performed to fill these missing values. Table 1 lists all features contained in the dataset.

Nu-	months_as_customer, age, policy_number,
me-	policy_deductable, policy_annual_premium,
rical	umbrella_limit, insured_zip, capital-gains,
	capital-loss, incident hour of the day,
	number of vehicles involved, bodily injuries,
	witnesses, total claim amount, injury claim,
	property_claim, vehicle_claim, auto_year
Cate-	policy_bind_date, policy_state, policy_csl,
gori-	insured_sex, insured_education_level,
cal	insured_occupation, insured_hobbies,
	insured_relationship, incident_date,
	incident_type, collision_type,
	incident_severity, authorities_contacted,
<u>}</u>	incident_state, incident_city,
	incident_location, property_damage,
/	police_report_available, auto_make,
/	auto_model, fraud_reported

### **3.2 Preprocessing Data**

Before fitting the model, the dataset needs to be preprocessed first to optimize the result. Here, the process involves dropping and joining some features, extracting new features, one hot encoding categorical features, and rescaling numerical features.

The first feature to be dropped is incident\_location. It has 1,000 unique string values, which tend to act as noise since it has very detailed data on where the incident happened. Policy\_number is also removed from the list as it only serves as a unique identifier for each company-issued policy. Total\_claim\_amount is also dropped from the feature list since it has perfect multicollinearity with injury claim, vehicle claim, and property\_claim.

Even though some features are dropped from the dataset, several new features are also generated from existing features. They are policy\_duration and auto features. Policy\_duration is obtained by calculating how many days the policy had been in charge since issued until the incident happened. In other words, it is extracted by subtracting policy\_bind\_date from incident\_date. The idea of generating this feature arises from the expectation that those willing to commit insurance fraud will not wait for a very long time (e.g., several years or more) to execute their

plan. Another feature is also generated by joining auto\_make and auto\_brand. This feature is expected to efficiently shorten the time to fit the model since it has only 39 unique values instead of 53 unique values from auto\_make and auto\_brand one-hot encoded separately.

All numerical and categorical features need to be further preprocessed. Categorical features are processed using one-hot encoding. This process creates dummy variables for every unique value in one feature to store information related to the feature for every observation. However, missing values (NaN values) in some observations are retained in the dummy variables.

Numerical features are scaled using several rescaling methods. They are standard scaler, min-max scaler, and robust scaler. Standard scaler is used on normally distributed features: only the policy annual premium feature satisfies this condition. A robust scaler is used on features with many outliers. Umbrella limit and property claim are two features scaled using a robust scaler. The other numerical features are scaled using a min-max scaler suitable for uniformly distributed data.

#### **3.3** Performance Evaluation

The preprocessed dataset is then used to fit all five models mentioned earlier. The fitting process used 70% train and 30% test data to minimize bias while inferring the result (Xu & Goodacre, 2018). Figure 1 briefly illustrates the model fitting scheme that involved five replications in minimizing bias.

Before fitting the models, each model's parameters must be optimized first. The optimization processes use Bayesian Search Cross-Validation with five-fold and 100 samples. The following scheme in Figure 2 is used in parameter optimization processes. Utilizing the accuracy measurements mentioned in the previous section, the overall model performance result can be summarized in Figure 3. Further analysis of how each model predicts majority and minority class is shown in Figure 4.

Based on overall results from Figure 3, imbalance class handling using Weighted-XGBoost and both Imbalance-XGBoost models produce slight improvement based on overall accuracy, precision, recall, and f1-score. Nevertheless, there is no significant difference between these five models measured by AUC. The lowest score is obtained by Imbalance-XGBoost using focal loss, and XGBoost obtains the highest with oversampling.

More exciting results are observed when detailed performance in each class is analyzed (Figure 4). In



Figure 1: Implementation Scheme.

the majority class (non-fraud observations), the imbalance class handling provided by both Imbalance-XGBoost models improves the precision score by more than 7% compared to other models however, the recall score on these two models and weighted-XGBoost decrease by the same percentage. As a result, the f1-score for all these models does not differ much except for weighted-XGBoost, which results 3% lower than the rest.

Significant improvements are shown in the model's performance in predicting minority class (fraud observations). The precision score on weighted-XGBoost is the highest among other models, with over 80%. Imbalance-XGBoost with both models surprisingly suffers here, resulting in a lower score than the base XGBoost model and XGBoost with oversampling. However, the recall score on these three models improved significantly, with 91.04% compared to 63.28% on base XGBoost and 57.91% on XGBoost with oversampling. Hence, weighted-XGBoost produces the highest score on the f1-score, with 88.09%. Those two Imbalance-XGBoost models have 76% in f1-score, lower than weighted-XGBoost but still significantly higher than the base XGBoost model on 66.13% and XGBoost with oversampling on 62.73%. Given this result, we could observe that both modified objective functions given by Imbalance-XGBoost deliver reliable improvements compared to the base and oversampling model. However, weighted-XGBoost still outperforms the rest of the models.



Figure 3: Comparison of Overall Models Performance.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Insurance fraud prediction is an important solution to avoid fraud-related loss for the insurance company. Since claims proposed to the insurance company usually consist of many non-fraud cases and a small percentage of fraud cases, imbalance class problems arise when fitting machine learning models. Predictions may be biased toward majority class or non-fraud cases in this research. Hence, Imbalance-XGBoost is proposed as a solution to the imbalance dataset. Imbalance-XGBoost with both loss functions achieves desirable improvement, especially in predicting minority class in the case of predicting insurance fraud. These two models can improve up to 28% compared to the basic XGBoost model based on minority recall scores. Yet, the standard method using the scale\_pos\_weight parameter in the weighted-XGBoost model also significantly improves. Minority precision scores on both Imbalance-XGBoost models decrease compared to the basic XGBoost model, while the weighted-XGBoost model improves minority precision and recall score



Figure 4: Comparison of Models Performance in Predicting Each Class.

simultaneously. Thus, Imbalance-XGBoost models are quite reliable for improving base models, but weighted-XGBoost still outperforms any other imbalance class handling, in this case, the imbalance class problem.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Republic of Indonesia, funded this research under Penelitian Fundamental 2023.

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