

Performing Youth Political Engagement: A Comparative Analysis of Television Talk Shows during the West Java Gubernatorial Election

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Abstract

Young people constitute an important electoral constituency, yet their presence as voters does not necessarily mean that they are meaningfully incorporated into political communication. This study examines how two Indonesian television talk shows, *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi*, construct opportunities for youth participation and how political candidates perform their engagement with young voters. Both programmes produced special episodes featuring candidates contesting the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election but differed in how they structured interactions between candidates and young audiences. Using qualitative comparative performance analysis, the study draws on Goffman's concepts of participation framework, footing and face-work to examine participant positioning and candidate performances during political interaction. The findings reveal contrasting approaches to youth political engagement. *Rosi* largely centred its interactions on candidates responding to face-threatening situations and managing their public image. *Mata Najwa*, by contrast, incorporated young people more directly into its participation structure and encouraged more informal, entertainment-oriented candidate performances. The findings suggest that addressing young people as the intended audience does not necessarily result in their direct involvement in political interaction. More importantly, the study demonstrates how participation framework, shifts in footing and candidate performance shape the interactional processes through which engagement with young voters is performed in televised political discussion.

Keywords: Youth Political Engagement, Political Talk Shows, Political Communication, Performance Analysis, Indonesian Election

Introduction

Young people constitute an important segment of the electorate in local elections, particularly when they represent a substantial proportion of registered voters. Their electoral

participation can influence election outcomes and, consequently, the selection of political representatives and the direction of local governance. Beyond voter turnout, the participation of young people is also important in understanding how emerging generations engage with electoral politics and exercise their role as citizens.

This is particularly relevant in West Java Province, the most populous province in Indonesia. Of the approximately 31.7 million registered voters in the province, 30% were young voters aged between 17 and 21, making them a significant electoral constituency whose participation could influence the outcome of the local election (Wardhani, 2018; Fitriyah et al., 2019). The West Java gubernatorial election also carries significance beyond the provincial level, as electoral developments in the province are often regarded as indicative of broader political dynamics in Indonesia (Herdiansah, et al., 2022; Falah, 2026). Despite common perceptions that young people have limited political awareness and involvement, young voters constituted a substantial share of the electorate in the West Java local election. According to Indonesia's Election Commission (KPU), young voters comprised 30% of the total registered voters (Djuyandi & Herdiansyah, 2018). However, voter turnout alone does not necessarily reflect the depth of political engagement. Beyond participation at the ballot box, meaningful political engagement also involves awareness of electoral issues, familiarity with candidates, and the ability to make informed political choices. This raises broader questions about how young voters acquire political information and develop an understanding of candidates and electoral issues.

Mass media play an important role in this process by providing political information and creating spaces in which electoral issues, candidates, and public concerns can be discussed. In Indonesia, the relationship between young people and politics has received considerable media attention across news coverage, commentary, and political programming. Two prominent television talk shows, *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi*, addressed this issue through special episodes focusing on the West Java gubernatorial election. Both programmes sought to reach young voters by presenting the gubernatorial candidates and creating opportunities for political discussion aimed at a younger audience.

Despite the growing importance of young voters in Indonesian elections, less attention has been given to how young people are positioned within televised political discussion and how political talk shows construct engagement with this electoral group. Therefore, this study examines how two television talk shows construct opportunities for youth participation and how political candidates perform their engagement with young voters within mediated political interaction. The election provides the context for examining how political programming addresses young voters, particularly first-time voters participating in the 2018 election. Both programmes position young people as a key target audience and share an underlying concern with encouraging their involvement in political discussion. However, they differ in how young people are incorporated into the programmes and how political engagement is constructed through their respective formats and interactions. The 2018 West Java gubernatorial election provides an important case for understanding the development of youth-oriented political communication in Indonesia. During this period, young voters constituted a substantial electoral segment, prompting political actors and media organisations to explore communication strategies to reach this demographic through both conventional and emerging media platforms. Examining these interactions contributes to

broader social science debates on youth political engagement, mediated political participation and the changing ways in which political actors communicate with younger citizens.

Problem Statement

Young people constitute an increasingly significant segment of the electorate in Indonesia, making their participation an important consideration in electoral politics. In West Java, their substantial presence among registered voters has encouraged political actors and the media to develop strategies aimed at reaching younger audiences and encouraging their involvement in political discussion. However, the numerical presence of young voters or their participation in elections does not necessarily indicate how meaningfully they are incorporated into political communication. Young people may be identified as an important target audience while remaining largely positioned as recipients or subjects of political messages rather than active participants in political discourse.

Mass media play an important role in political socialisation by providing information about political issues, candidates, and electoral processes. Television talk shows, in particular, create mediated spaces in which political actors can present themselves, discuss electoral issues, and interact with audiences. During the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election, *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi* both produced special episodes aimed at young voters and featured candidates contesting the election. Despite sharing a similar concern with reaching younger audiences, the two programmes adopted different formats and interactional structures. This raises an important question concerning how young people were actually positioned within these televised political interactions and how candidates performed their engagement with them.

Existing studies have extensively examined youth political participation, political socialisation, and the role of media in providing political information. Studies of political talk shows have also considered their potential to influence political knowledge, attitudes and participation. However, less attention has been given to how youth political engagement is constructed and performed through the interactional structures of political television talk shows. In particular, limited attention has been paid to who is given opportunities to participate, how political candidates position themselves when interacting with young audiences and how candidates manage their public image within such interactions.

Addressing this gap, the present study compares *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi* using Goffman's concepts of participation framework, footing and face-work. Rather than measuring the effects of the programmes on young people's political attitudes or voting behaviour, the study examines how the two programmes construct opportunities for youth participation and how candidates perform their engagement with young voters within mediated political interaction.

The West Java Gubernatorial Election and the Rise of Young Voters

The West Java gubernatorial election represented an important political moment at both the provincial and national levels. Following a decade of relatively stable leadership, the election generated expectations for new leadership capable of addressing the province's social and political challenges. Its significance extended beyond West Java, as political developments in the province have often been regarded as influential in shaping broader national political

dynamics (Ardipandanto, 2018). West Java also occupies an important position in Indonesian electoral politics due to its large electorate and the significant influence of Islamic political constituencies within the province.

Four pairs of candidates contested the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election: Ridwan Kamil and Uu Ruzhanul Ulum (*Rindu*), Tubagus Hasanuddin and Anton Charliyan (*Hasanah*), Sudrajat and Ahmad Syaikh (Asyik), and Deddy Mizwar and Dedi Mulyadi (*Deddy-Dedi*). Despite expectations for political renewal, several candidates were already established political or public figures. Five of the eight candidates were incumbents, while three had military backgrounds, and several candidate pairs received the support of established political parties, including PDI-P, PKS, and Golkar. Religious identity, particularly appeals associated with Islam as the majority religion in West Java, also featured prominently within the electoral environment. The election therefore represented not simply a contest for new provincial leadership, but a political arena shaped by established political actors, party interests, and identity-based considerations.

Within this political landscape, young voters emerged as an increasingly important electoral constituency. Their significance was not only related to their substantial number, but also to their political characteristics and patterns of participation, which differed from those of older generations (Triwardani & Wiendijarti, 2016; Djuyandi & Herdiansah, 2018; Prihatini, 2018). Although young voters have often been characterised as less interested in formal politics and less attached to political parties (Wardhani, 2018; Fadhli et al., 2019; Intyaswati et al., 2022), such tendencies should not necessarily be interpreted as political disengagement. Rather, their political participation may take different forms and be shaped by particular issues and circumstances. This combination of electoral significance and less conventional patterns of political participation made young voters an important constituency for political candidates and the media during the West Java gubernatorial election.

Young People and Political Participation

Political participation has traditionally been associated with conventional political activities such as voting, signing petitions, joining political parties, and holding governments accountable. Within this perspective, political participation refers to activities intended to influence “the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take” (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978, as cited in Ekman & Amnå, 2012). More recent scholarship has broadened this understanding by defining political participation as actions undertaken by ordinary citizens with the intention of influencing political outcomes (Bortolotti & Trifuoggi, 2025; Waeterloos, 2025). This broader conceptualisation recognises political participation as extending beyond conventional electoral and party-based activities. Van Deth (2016) identifies four basic criteria for determining whether an activity constitutes political participation: it involves an activity rather than merely an attitude or intention; it is undertaken voluntarily; it is carried out by ordinary citizens rather than political professionals; and it is situated within, or directed towards, the political, governmental, or state sphere. These criteria provide a broader basis for understanding the diverse ways in which citizens, including young people, may participate in political life.

Political participation is widely regarded as an important indicator of the quality and sustainability of democratic processes. Consequently, the political participation of young

people, particularly first-time voters, has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Research in this area generally reflects two contrasting perspectives. The first points to the political disengagement of young people, while the second argues that young people are not necessarily disengaged but are participating through changing forms of citizenship and political action.

From the disengagement perspective, young people are often associated with relatively low levels of political knowledge, limited political motivation, and negative perceptions of politics as corrupt, manipulative, or driven by personal interests (Pruitt, 2017; Wardhani, 2018; Siahaan, 2023). Such attitudes may also be reflected in lower electoral participation and declining involvement in political parties (Weiss et al., 2025). However, other scholars question whether these conventional indicators adequately capture contemporary youth political participation. From this perspective, declining involvement in institutional politics does not necessarily indicate political apathy. Young people may critically evaluate political candidates and institutions while choosing to participate through less conventional or non-institutional forms of political action. As Weiss et al. (2025) argues, apparent youth disengagement may therefore reflect the way formal politics is organised rather than an absence of political interest among young people. This broader understanding reinforces the need to consider diverse forms of participation when examining young people's relationship with politics.

Engaging young people and harnessing their political participation are the goals of political socialisation. Political socialisation plays an important role in developing young people's political awareness and encouraging their participation in political life. Family, peers, voluntary associations, schools, and mass media have been identified as key agents through which political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours are developed (Ohme et al., 2019). This process is particularly important for first-time voters, who may have limited experience with electoral politics and therefore require access to information that enables them to understand political issues and make informed electoral decisions (Rossi, 2009; Ohme et al., 2019).

Within this process, mass media serve as an important source of political information and provide spaces for young people to encounter and discuss issues of public concern (Tan, 2024; Glynn & Cupples, 2025). During elections, the media can also introduce first-time voters to political candidates, their policy positions, and their proposed programmes. Unlike more experienced voters, who may draw on previous knowledge of political parties, candidates, or government performance, first-time voters have limited electoral experience on which to base their assessments. Access to political information through the media can therefore help address this informational gap and support young voters in developing their electoral choices (Ohme et al., 2019; Hadi et al., 2025).

Five key agents are commonly associated with political socialisation: family, peers, voluntary associations, schools, and mass media (Ohme et al., 2019). Among these, mass media play an important role in providing political information, particularly for young people and first-time voters who may have limited knowledge and experience of electoral politics (Wahab, 2011; Ohme et al., 2019; Khuswatun et al., 2025). Through exposure to political information and discussion, the media can introduce young people to issues of public concern and provide opportunities for them to develop their understanding of citizenship and political

participation (Tan, 2024; Glynn & Cupples, 2025). During elections, the media can also help first-time voters become familiar with political candidates, their policy positions, and proposed programmes. While experienced voters may draw on their previous assessments of political parties, candidates, or incumbent governments, first-time voters have less electoral experience on which to base their decisions. The media can therefore play an important role in addressing this informational gap (Ohme et al., 2019; Frau-Meigs & Corbu, 2024).

The importance of political socialisation is particularly relevant in West Java, where youth electoral participation has fluctuated considerably across election periods. Youth participation was reported at 86.19% in 2004 before declining to 63.85% in 2013. In the 2018 regional election, participation increased to 71.24%, although it remained below the level recorded in 2004 (Djuyandi & Herdiansyah, 2018). These fluctuations highlight the continuing importance of understanding how young voters are encouraged to participate in electoral politics and, more specifically, how political information and media communication may contribute to this process.

Earlier evidence had similarly raised concerns about youth electoral participation. A national report cited by Prihatini (2018), for example, indicated that 53% of young people surveyed prior to the 2014 election did not subsequently participate in the final vote, contributing to perceptions of young Indonesians as politically apathetic. Viewed alongside later evidence of more independent and selective political behaviour, however, such patterns point to a more complex relationship between young people and formal politics. Rather than simply confirming a narrative of youth disengagement, recent empirical evidence suggests that young Indonesians continue to engage with politics while becoming more selective and critical in how they obtain political information and evaluate political actors. As young voters constitute an increasingly significant electoral constituency, understanding how political institutions, candidates and the media communicate with them remains important.

Studies of young voters in Indonesia have indicated changing patterns of political behaviour and decision-making. Young voters increasingly seek political information from multiple sources and demonstrate greater independence in determining their political preferences (Fitriyah et al., 2019; Affandi, 2020). Prihatini (2018), for example, found that more than 70% of young voters reported political preferences that differed from those of their parents or families. Young voters also showed preferences for civilian rather than military leadership and were prepared to withhold their votes when available candidates did not meet their expectations. Such patterns suggest that young people's political choices cannot necessarily be understood through traditional assumptions about family influence, party loyalty, or established political affiliations.

More recent empirical studies reinforce this change in understanding of youth political engagement in Indonesia. For instance, Evita (2023), based on a survey of 802 Generation Z respondents and in-depth interviews with 19 participants, found that although political information was not their primary media preference, young people continued to access electoral information and placed importance on the credibility and authenticity of political information. Similarly, Sugiyono et al. (2024) found that Indonesian urban youth demonstrated a combination of political optimism and realism. While remaining interested in political news and candidate debates, they were also critical in addressing issues such as

corruption and political dynasties. These findings in a way challenge a straightforward interpretation of young Indonesians as politically disengaged, in fact it suggests that young people's political engagement is increasingly characterised by selective information seeking, critical evaluation and more independent political judgement.

This independence is also reflected in young people's relationship with political parties. Evidence from Indonesia suggests that party ideology may not be the primary factor shaping their political preferences. A survey by Indikator Politik Indonesia found that 42.8% of young respondents did not identify a preferred political party for the 2024 election, while 64.7% expressed concerns about political parties' ability to implement their programmes. Distrust was also associated with perceptions of political parties as corrupt, manipulative, and unreliable (Farisa, 2021; Siahaan, 2023). These findings suggest that weak attachment to political parties should not automatically be interpreted as an absence of political interest.

Media and Political Engagement

There are numerous ways to cultivate political engagement among young people. In the process of becoming citizens, mass media fills the gap that exists between educational institution curricula and the practical exercise of political rights (Hamad et al., 2001; Hadi et al., 2025). While civic education has become an integral part of any curriculum, the lessons provided by educational institutions are not sufficiently comprehensive to shape citizenship and put it into practice. Through various forms of programming, mass media provide platforms for political discussion and education (Wahab, 2011; Frau-Meigs & Corbu, 2024, Gherghina & Marian, 2024). They also provide opportunities for political campaigning and the dissemination of electoral information, thereby contributing to political socialisation and creating avenues for young people to engage with political issues (Mamori & Inam ur Rahman, 2017; Sanusi et al., 2026).

Among mass media products that offer such opportunities, talk shows are one of the most important programs for channelling political information. Political talk shows have even evolved into a popular, specific audience-political programming genre that is essential and has become a hallmark of supposedly 'quality' television (Burton, 2000; Tolson, 2006). Political talk shows embody the essence of active citizenship by creating spaces for discussing civic issues (Dahlgreen, 2009). For young people, talk shows offer an experience or a 'chance' to be full-fledged citizens who participate in discussing public affairs (Ohme, et.al., 2018) and be part of decision-making by articulating support to legitimize certain laws (Cao & Brewer, 2008).

The potential of talk shows to introduce political issues, shape opinions, enhance knowledge, build awareness, and influence attitudes has long attracted scholarly attention (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Naz et al., 2014; Hayat et al., 2015; Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016). However, creative or innovative programme formats do not necessarily produce the intended outcomes. Efforts to communicate political issues to young people may be less effective when they are based on assumptions about youth rather than an understanding of young people's own perspectives, experiences, and concerns (Deri & Szabo, 2024; Soler-i-Martí & Balleste-Isern, 2025).

Political talk shows nevertheless remain important spaces through which political actors, issues, and interests are mediated to audiences, including young people (Sakr, 2012; Gautam, 2015; Beciu et al., 2017, Dar & Ali, 2023). By bringing political actors into mediated interaction with audiences, talk shows provide opportunities for candidates to communicate with voters who may have limited experience of electoral politics (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Eriksson, 2010; Khuswatun et al., 2025). However, the extent to which young people are actually incorporated into these interactions may vary according to the format and communicative structure of individual programmes.

Against this background, this study examines two Indonesian television talk shows, *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi*. *Mata Najwa* broadcast an episode aimed at young people on 14 April 2018, while *Rosi* aired its youth-focused episode on 7 April 2018. Both programmes addressed the West Java gubernatorial election and shared an explicit concern with reaching young voters. Their different programme formats, however, provide an opportunity to examine how opportunities for youth participation were structured and how engagement with young voters was performed within televised political interaction.

Television was particularly relevant to the context of the 2018 election because it remained an important source of information and political content for Indonesian audiences. Subsequent evidence also indicates the continuing significance of television within Indonesia's changing media environment. Television viewing increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, while concerns surrounding misinformation on digital and social media contributed to television's continued role as a source of information (Nielsen, 2022). Rather than suggesting that television remains the dominant medium today, these developments demonstrate its continuing relevance alongside the growth of digital and social media platforms.

Television has played an important role in political communication by providing visibility to political figures and facilitating the circulation of political discourse across media platforms (Sakr, 2012; Dar & Ali, 2023). Within electoral contexts, television talk shows provide a platform for political communication by bringing together candidates, experts, and audiences through debates, panel discussions, and live interactions. Such programmes not only provide opportunities for candidates to communicate their political positions and proposed programmes but also create a mediated space in which political figures present themselves and interact with potential voters.

Astuti and Abdul Wahab (2022) examined how youth political participation was represented in popular Indonesian political talk shows. Using critical textual analysis, the study found that the two programmes constructed youth participation differently through programme content, structure and modes of address. Building on this earlier work, the present study shifts the analytical focus from the textual representation of youth participation to the interactional and performative dimensions of political talk shows. Drawing on Goffman's performative framework, the study examines participant interaction, changes in footing and performance to understand how engagement with young people is produced within televised political discussion. This extends the earlier research by providing a closer examination of the interactional processes through which youth engagement is performed.

Goffman's Framework for Analysing Mediated Interaction

Goffman's work on social interaction (1955, 1974, 1981) provides a useful basis for examining how individuals position and present themselves during communicative encounters. In mediated interactions such as television talk shows, participants do not merely exchange information; they also perform particular roles, negotiate their relationships with other participants, and manage how they are presented before an audience. Goffman's concepts continue to inform contemporary studies of mediated and political interaction, particularly in examining participant roles, political performance, and the management of public identity (Rautajoki, 2023; Higgins & Smith, 2025; Maly, 2025).

Participation framework refers to the different positions occupied by individuals within an interaction. Goffman (1981) distinguishes participants according to their involvement in and relationship to an ongoing conversation, moving beyond a simple distinction between speaker and listener. This concept is particularly relevant to television talk shows, where communication occurs simultaneously among hosts, guests, studio audiences, and wider television audiences. Recent research on current-affairs television similarly demonstrates how participation frameworks can be used to examine the organisation of participant roles and, particularly, the positioning of audiences within mediated political discussion (Rautajoki, 2023). In the present study, the participation framework provides a basis for examining whether young people are directly incorporated into political discussion, addressed by candidates, or positioned primarily as the subject of discussion.

Footing refers to the alignment or position participants adopt towards themselves, other participants, and the interaction in which they are involved (Goffman, 1981; Tolson, 2006). Changes in footing occur when participants shift their stance or communicative role during interaction. Such shifts remain particularly relevant to mediated discourse. For example, Ozsoz (2024), in an analysis of interpreter-mediated television talk shows, demonstrates how shifts in footing can facilitate changing participant roles and contribute to the creation of more informal, entertaining, and participatory interaction. In political talk shows, a candidate may similarly shift from speaking formally as a political representative to adopting a more informal or entertaining position when interacting with a young audience.

Face-work concerns the ways individuals maintain, protect, or restore a favourable social image during interaction. The 'face' is a concept defined by a set of social values that individuals claim to attach to in order to gain higher acceptance among their social circles (Goffman, 1955, 1974). This is particularly relevant to political communication, where politicians are frequently required to respond to criticism, challenges, or situations that potentially threaten their public image. Contemporary scholarship continues to demonstrate the usefulness of Goffman's concept in understanding political self-presentation. Maly (2025), for instance, applies face-work to political communication and demonstrates how politicians construct and maintain their public identities when confronted with potentially damaging situations. More specifically in the Indonesian context, Yafi and Maris (2025) apply Goffman's concept of face to political interviews on *Mata Najwa*, examining how Indonesian political actors manage their public image when responding to sensitive and confrontational questions.

The participation framework, footing and face-work provide an analytical framework for examining not only what candidates communicate in political talk shows but also how political interaction is organised and performed. The participation framework identifies how young people are positioned within the interaction. Footing reveals shifts in candidates' communicative alignment and roles and face-work illuminates how candidates negotiate and maintain their public image. Comparing *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi*, these concepts help examine how young people are involved in each programme and how different forms of interaction shape candidates' performances in engaging young voters.

Methodology

Mata Najwa and *Rosi* are prominent Indonesian television talk shows known for discussing contemporary political and public affairs. Both provide space for political figures and other public actors to discuss current issues, including elections and electoral politics.

This study employed a qualitative comparative performance analysis to examine how youth political engagement was constructed through interactions in these two Indonesian television talk shows, *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi*. The analysis was informed by Goffman's concepts of participation framework, footing, and face-work. These concepts were used to examine how participants were positioned within the programmes, how candidates adjusted their communicative alignment during interactions, and how they managed their public image when responding to questions and performative challenges.

The study examined special episodes of *Rosi*, broadcast on 7 April 2018 (102 minutes), and *Mata Najwa*, broadcast on 14 April 2018 (108 minutes). Both programmes focused on the West Java gubernatorial election and featured candidates contesting the election. More importantly, both episodes were specifically structured around young voters, making them suitable comparative cases for examining how television talk shows construct political interaction between candidates and younger audiences.

The analysis began by transcribing and closely observing the interactions within the selected programme segments. Participants were identified according to their roles within each interaction, including hosts, political candidates, studio audiences, and other individuals involved in the programme. The participation structure of each programme was subsequently mapped to determine who was directly involved in the interaction, who was addressed, and how young people were positioned within the communicative structure. Participants were also examined according to their ratified or unratified participation status.

The second stage focused on footing, particularly changes in candidates' alignment, stance, or communicative roles during interaction. Exchanges between candidates, hosts, and audiences were examined to identify how candidates responded to different interactional situations. Particular attention was given to moments in which candidates shifted between formal political roles and more informal or performative positions. In *Mata Najwa*, for example, this included candidates' participation in stand-up comedy and their direct interaction with young studio audiences. In *Rosi*, the analysis examined how candidates positioned themselves when responding to questions and survey findings concerning their perceived characteristics among young voters.

The analysis also considered face-work, particularly situations in which candidates encountered potentially unfavourable evaluations or challenges to their public image. Their verbal responses and observable performances were examined to identify how they attempted to maintain, negotiate, or restore a favourable presentation of themselves. In addition to spoken interaction, observable performative elements such as humour, laughter, applause, audience responses and changes in the candidates' modes of presentation were considered where these contributed to the interpretation of the interaction.

Finally, the participation structures and performances identified in the two programmes were compared to examine differences in how *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi* positioned young people within televised political discussion. Rather than assessing whether the programmes produced actual changes in young people's political attitudes or voting behaviour, the analysis focused on how opportunities for youth political engagement were constructed and performed within the interactional structures of the two programmes.

Findings

Positioning Young People in the Talk Shows

The analysis of the participation frameworks of *Mata Najwa* and *Rosi* reveals similarities in their principal participants but important differences in how young people were positioned within the interaction. In both programmes, the hosts and gubernatorial candidates occupied central and clearly ratified positions. The hosts directed the interaction by introducing topics, posing questions, and managing exchanges, while the candidates were directly addressed and given opportunities to respond, explain their political positions, and present themselves to the audience. However, the two programmes differed considerably in the extent to which young people, despite being the intended audience of both episodes, were incorporated into the political interaction.

Table 1

Positioning of Participants in Mata Najwa and Rosi

Participants	<i>Mata Najwa</i>	<i>Rosi</i>
Talk-show host	Central ratified participant; directs and moderate interaction	Central ratified participant; directs and moderates interaction
Gubernatorial candidates	Ratified and directly addressed; actively involved in interaction	Ratified and directly addressed; actively involved in interaction
Political observer /co-host/comedian	Ratified and directly involved in interaction	Not present
Student/youth representatives	Ratified, directly addressed, and given opportunities to participate	Not directly represented in the main interaction
Young/studio audience	Incorporated into interaction and performative activities	Primarily positioned as audience

Wider television
audience

Addressed as a mediated audience,
with particular emphasis on young
viewers

Addressed as a mediated
general audience

The most notable difference concerned the position of young people. In *Mata Najwa*, young people occupied a more visible and active position within the participation framework. Student representatives were recognised and directly addressed, while members of the predominantly young audience were incorporated into the programme's interactional and performative activities. Their role therefore extended beyond spectatorship. They became part of the communicative setting through which candidates were required to present themselves and interact with a younger constituency.

In *Rosi*, by contrast, the participation framework was more strongly centred on the interaction between the host and the gubernatorial candidates. Young people were central to the subject of discussion and constituted the intended audience of the episode, but they were not afforded the same degree of direct interactional access. Rather than participating as active interlocutors, young people were predominantly positioned as an electoral constituency being discussed by the host and candidates. Thus, while youth political engagement provided the thematic basis of the programme, young people's voices were less directly incorporated into the interaction itself.

Viewed through Goffman's participation framework, this distinction demonstrates that ratification alone does not fully explain the degree of participation within a mediated interaction. Participants may be recognised within the communicative setting while occupying different levels of interactional involvement. In *Mata Najwa*, young people were more directly incorporated into the programme's participation structure, whereas *Rosi* largely maintained a host–candidate interaction in which young people remained the intended audience and subject of discussion. The findings therefore suggest two different approaches to constructing youth political engagement: one that brings young people into the political interaction, and another that predominantly conducts political discussion about and for young people.

This difference also shaped the ways in which candidates performed within the two programmes. The interactional structures created different opportunities and pressures for candidates to position themselves, respond to challenges, and manage their public image. These differences become more apparent when examining candidates' shifts in footing and face-work, which are discussed in the following section.

Contrasting Footings: From Face-Work to Youth-Oriented Performance

The entire episode of *Rosi* created a relatively confrontational interactional setting in which candidates were required to respond to unfavourable public perceptions of their personalities and political characteristics. By presenting these assessments directly to the candidates, the host created potentially face-threatening situations that required them to defend, negotiate, or reposition their public identities. These exchanges produced noticeable shifts in footing as candidates adopted different communicative strategies to manage the assessments while maintaining a favourable political image.

Performing for Young Audiences in Rosi

In *Rosi*, the host presented candidates with the results of a survey concerning public perceptions of their personalities and political characteristics. The format placed candidates in potentially face-threatening situations by confronting them with unfavourable assessments and inviting them to respond publicly. Their responses revealed different strategies for negotiating these assessments and maintaining a favourable political image.

Sudrajat, for example, was confronted with the perception that he was “less populist”. Rather than responding only to the assessment itself, he invoked the public persona and communication style associated with President Joko Widodo, particularly his well-known practice of making unannounced visits to public-service locations. This represented a shift in footing from responding to an evaluation of his own political persona to positioning himself in relation to another political figure. Rather than treating Joko Widodo as an unrati ed participant, as suggested in the original analysis, the reference can be understood as a discursive resource through which Sudrajat attempted to reposition himself and negotiate the unfavourable assessment.

Deddy Mizwar and Dedi Mulyadi also responded differently when confronted with unfavourable public perceptions. Deddy Mizwar challenged the credibility of the survey, thereby redirecting attention from the evaluation of himself towards the validity of its source. Dedi Mulyadi, by contrast, shifted the interaction towards arguments grounded in local wisdom and cultural identity, drawing upon an established public image associated with the preservation of local culture. Both responses illustrate different forms of face-work: one contested the basis of the negative evaluation, while the other redirected the interaction towards a more favourable aspect of political identity.

Ridwan Kamil adopted a different strategy when confronted with a survey finding that characterised him as “arrogant”. Rather than rejecting the assessment outright, he responded with humour and referred to his substantial social-media presence. His response combined partial acknowledgement of the criticism with an attempt to reinterpret it in a less damaging manner. In doing so, he shifted from defending himself against the negative characterisation towards a more informal and humorous footing. This communicative style also drew on forms of expression associated with younger and digitally connected audiences. Uu Ruzhanul Ulum responded more quietly to an unfavourable assessment of his candidacy, displaying acknowledgement primarily through non-verbal responses rather than an extended verbal defence.

Overall, the candidates in *Rosi* employed different forms of footing and face-work when confronted with potentially unfavourable evaluations. Some challenged the source of the evaluation, some redirected the discussion towards alternative aspects of their political identity, while others employed humour or partial acknowledgement. The interactional structure of *Rosi* therefore placed considerable emphasis on how candidates managed their political image under questioning, rather than on direct interaction between candidates and young people.

Performing for Young Audiences in Mata Najwa

Mata Najwa adopted a markedly different approach in this particular episode. Rather than confronting candidates with unfavourable personality assessments, the programme required each candidate to deliver a two-minute stand-up comedy performance before a predominantly young audience. This altered the candidates' footing by temporarily moving them away from the conventional role of politicians presenting campaign messages and placing them in a more informal and entertainment-oriented communicative role.

The format also changed the relationship between candidates and young people. Rather than discussing young voters primarily as an electoral constituency, candidates were required to perform directly before them. Audience responses, including laughter and applause, became part of the interaction and provided immediate reactions to the candidates' performances. In this sense, the stand-up comedy format created a more direct interactional relationship between political candidates and the young audience.

Ridwan Kamil's performance illustrates this shift particularly clearly. His stand-up routine incorporated references to relationships, everyday digital practices, and expressions associated with young people's everyday experiences. Humour was used to communicate political messages through familiar cultural references rather than through a conventional campaign speech. The audience responded with laughter and applause, indicating immediate engagement with elements of the performance. These responses should be interpreted as evidence of interaction within the programme rather than evidence that the performance changed young people's political attitudes or voting intentions.

The contrast between the two programmes is therefore not simply one of seriousness versus entertainment. Their respective formats created different forms of political performance and different positions for young audiences. *Rosi* predominantly required candidates to negotiate potentially face-threatening evaluations and manage their public image through interaction with the host. *Mata Najwa*, in contrast, shifted candidates towards a more informal footing and incorporated the young audience more directly into the performative encounter. These differences demonstrate how programme format can shape both candidates' political self-presentation and the opportunities afforded to young people within televised political communication.

Programme Format and the Construction of Youth Political Engagement

The comparative analysis above demonstrates that the different participation frameworks of *Rosi* and *Mata Najwa* created distinct conditions for political interaction with young audiences. The organisation of participants, the interactional roles afforded to young people, and the footing adopted by candidates collectively shaped how youth political engagement was constructed within each programme. The programme format was therefore significant not simply as a production arrangement, but because it structured who participated, how participants interacted, and how candidates positioned themselves in relation to young audiences.

In *Rosi*, the interaction was predominantly organised around exchanges between the host and the gubernatorial candidates. The host directed the discussion and confronted candidates with unfavourable public perceptions, requiring them to explain, defend, or reposition their

political identities. As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, this produced shifts in footing that were largely associated with candidates' attempts to negotiate face-threatening situations and maintain a favourable public image. Within this interactional structure, young people were important as the intended audience and as the subject of political discussion, but they were afforded relatively limited opportunities to participate directly in the exchanges. Consequently, *Rosi* constructed youth-oriented political communication largely through a model in which political actors communicated to and about young people. Candidates were provided with opportunities to present themselves to younger voters, but the interaction remained principally between the host and the candidates. Young people's political engagement was therefore represented within the discussion without their voices being equally incorporated into the interaction itself.

Mata Najwa constructed a different participation framework. The programme was staged before a predominantly young audience and incorporated young people more visibly into the interaction. The candidates were also required to move beyond the conventional footing of political actors presenting campaign messages. Activities such as the stand-up comedy segment placed them in a more informal and performative position, requiring them to communicate before and respond to a young audience using humour, everyday experiences, and culturally familiar references.

The young audience also became part of the unfolding interaction through their immediate responses to the candidates' performances. Laughter, applause, and other audience reactions contributed to the communicative encounter between candidates and young people. These responses do not demonstrate that the programme changed young people's political attitudes or voting behaviour. Rather, they indicate that *Mata Najwa* afforded young people a more visible and responsive position within the participation framework and created opportunities for candidates to adjust their footing in relation to them.

The findings reveal two different ways of constructing youth political engagement through televised political discussion. *Rosi* largely positioned young people as the target and subject of political discussion, whereas *Mata Najwa* incorporated young people more directly into the interaction between political candidates and their audiences. From a Goffmanian perspective, this distinction demonstrates how the participation framework shapes the positions available to participants and, in turn, influences the footing adopted by political actors. The findings therefore suggest that targeting young people as an audience does not necessarily mean incorporating them into political interaction; rather, the structure of the mediated encounter determines the extent to which they are positioned as recipients of political communication or participants within it.

Discussion

This study examined how two Indonesian political talk shows constructed youth political engagement during the West Java gubernatorial election by focusing on the organisation of participation and candidates' performances within mediated interaction. Drawing on Goffman's participation framework, footing, and face-work, the findings demonstrate that identifying young people as the intended audience of political programming does not necessarily mean incorporating them into political interaction. Rather, the extent and form of

youth involvement were shaped by how each programme organised its participants and structured the interaction between political candidates and young audiences.

A central finding concerns the different positions afforded to young people in the participation frameworks of *Rosi* and *Mata Najwa*. In *Rosi*, political interaction was predominantly organised around exchanges between the host and the candidates. Young people remained important as an electoral constituency and intended audience but their voices were less directly incorporated into the interaction. *Mata Najwa*, in contrast, positioned young people more visibly within the communicative setting through student representation, the presence of a predominantly young audience, and activities that required candidates to perform before and respond to them. From a Goffmanian perspective, the distinction demonstrates that participation is not simply a matter of audience presence. What is significant is the interactional position afforded to participants and the opportunities available for them to become part of the communicative encounter.

The analysis of footing further demonstrates how the different interactional structures shaped candidates' political performances. In *Rosi*, shifts in footing occurred primarily when candidates responded to unfavourable public assessments presented by the host. These situations prompted candidates to defend, reinterpret, or redirect potentially damaging characterisations. Face-work consequently became particularly visible as candidates attempted to maintain favourable political identities. Some challenged the basis of the evaluation, others redirected discussion towards more advantageous aspects of their public identities, while Ridwan Kamil employed humour and partial acknowledgement in responding to criticism. The interaction was therefore oriented largely towards the relationship between host and candidate and towards candidates' management of their public image.

Mata Najwa produced a different form of footing shift. By requiring candidates to perform stand-up comedy before a predominantly young audience, the programme temporarily repositioned them from conventional political speakers to more informal performers. Candidates were required to adjust their communicative stance to an immediate young audience, using humour and culturally familiar references as part of their political self-presentation. In Ridwan Kamil's performance, for example, references to relationships, digital practices, and everyday experiences provided a communicative repertoire more closely associated with younger audiences. Audience laughter and applause became part of this interaction, although these responses should be understood as evidence of immediate participation within the programme rather than evidence of changes in political attitudes or voting intentions.

The differences in participation framework and footing demonstrate how the two programmes constructed youth political engagement in different ways. *Rosi* predominantly constructed political communication to and about young people, whereas *Mata Najwa* created greater opportunities for political communication with young people. This distinction is important because youth-oriented political communication cannot be understood solely in terms of the topics discussed or the demographic group targeted by a programme. The organisation of interaction itself determines whether young people remain primarily recipients of political messages or are incorporated more visibly into the mediated political encounter.

The entertainment-oriented approach adopted by *Mata Najwa* can also be considered in relation to previous research on political entertainment. Studies have shown that humour and entertainment can make political content more accessible, particularly to audiences who may not routinely seek conventional political news (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016; Doona, 2020). Political talk and entertainment formats can also simplify complex political issues and present political criticism through less conventional communicative forms. The present findings extend this discussion by suggesting that entertainment is significant not simply because it may make political content more appealing, but because it can alter the interactional relationship between political actors and audiences, potentially changing how political realities are perceived (Korkut et.al., 2022; Kasmani, 2022). In *Mata Najwa*, humour functioned as part of a format that required candidates to adopt different footing and perform before an immediately present young audience.

Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that an entertainment-oriented format necessarily produces greater political knowledge, participation, or electoral engagement. Political learning and participation are shaped by multiple factors, including attention, frequency of exposure, political interest, and cognitive engagement (Gil, Borah & Goyanes, 2021; Intyaswati et al., 2022). The present study analyses mediated interaction rather than audience reception and therefore cannot establish whether young viewers became more politically knowledgeable, changed their perceptions of candidates, or were more likely to vote after watching either programme. Instead, its contribution lies in demonstrating how television formats can construct different opportunities and positions for youth participation within political communication.

The comparison remains relevant beyond the specific 2018 electoral context because the underlying issue concerns how political media address younger voters and whether youth are treated primarily as electoral targets or incorporated into political communication as visible participants. As younger voters continue to constitute an important electoral constituency, understanding these interactional distinctions can contribute to broader discussions of youth-oriented political communication across both television and contemporary mediated environments.

Conclusion

This study examined how *Rosi* and *Mata Najwa* constructed youth political engagement during the West Java gubernatorial election through their participation frameworks and candidates' performances. Drawing on Goffman's concepts of participation framework, footing and face-work, the analysis identified three interrelated findings.

First, the programmes positioned young people differently within their participation frameworks. While both identified young people as an important audience for political communication, *Rosi* predominantly organised interaction between the host and gubernatorial candidates, with young people occupying a less active position in the political exchange. *Mata Najwa*, in contrast, incorporated young people more visibly through student participation, the presence of a predominantly young audience and interactional activities involving candidates and audience members. The findings therefore demonstrate that targeting young people as an audience is not equivalent to incorporating them as participants in political interaction.

Second, the different participation structures produced contrasting shifts in candidates' footing. In *Rosi*, candidates' footing shifts were particularly evident in their responses to unfavourable public assessments, where face-work became an important strategy for negotiating and maintaining political identity. In *Mata Najwa*, the stand-up comedy format prompted candidates to move from conventional political footing towards more informal and entertainment-oriented performances directed at a young audience. Thus, the structure of the mediated interaction shaped not only who participated but also how political candidates positioned and presented themselves.

Third, the comparison demonstrates two distinct ways of constructing youth-oriented political communication. *Rosi* primarily facilitated communication to and about young people, whereas *Mata Najwa* created greater opportunities for communication with young people. This distinction represents the central contribution of the study: youth political engagement in mediated political communication is shaped not simply by the inclusion of youth-related topics but by the interactional positions and opportunities afforded to young people within the programme itself.

The findings should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that either programme successfully increased political participation or influenced voting behaviour. Such conclusions would require audience-based evidence that is beyond the scope of the present performance and interaction analysis. Future research could therefore complement this approach with interviews, focus groups, surveys, or audience reception studies to examine how young viewers interpret different forms of political performance and whether more participatory or entertainment-oriented formats influence political knowledge, candidate evaluation, political interest, or electoral participation.

Overall, the study demonstrates the continuing value of Goffman's interactional perspective for examining mediated political communication. Participation framework, footing and face-work reveal that political talk shows do more than provide candidates with a platform to communicate campaign messages: their interactional structures determine who is allowed to participate, how political actors position themselves and whether young people are primarily spoken about, spoken to, or brought more directly into political conversation.

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