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STRATEGIC IMPOLITENESS IN TELEVISED POLITICAL DEBATES: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF MEDIA-MEDIATED POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This study examines strategic impoliteness in Indonesian televised political debates, focusing on how language use shapes political communication and public perception in media-mediated interactions. Previous studies on political discourse have largely emphasized persuasion and politeness, while limited attention has been devoted to systematic analyses of impoliteness in televised political debates, particularly within the Indonesian context. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the forms and functions of impoliteness strategies and their implications for political image construction. Using a qualitative approach with pragmatic and sociopragmatic analysis, the study investigates 70 utterance segments containing face-threatening acts (FTAs) drawn from three televised talk show episodes: Indonesia Lawyers Club (2016; 2023) and Mata Najwa (2019). The analysis applies Culpeper's impoliteness framework, encompassing bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness/sarcasm, and withholding politeness. The findings demonstrate that televised political debates are inherently face-threatening due to argumentative competition, media performance pressure, and ideological polarization. All five impoliteness strategies were identified, with positive impoliteness and bald on record impoliteness emerging as the most dominant strategies, each accounting for 21.4% of the total occurrences. The study further reveals that the impact of impoliteness on politicians' public image is ambivalent, depending on audience ideology and group identification. Finally, this study proposes an integrative model linking communicative context, impoliteness strategies, and political image formation within media-mediated political discourse.
Keywords: *impoliteness; televised political debates; pragmatics; face-threatening acts; image of politicians; political communication.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of television as a medium for political communication has fundamentally transformed the character of public debate in Indonesia. Political talk shows such as Indonesia Lawyers Club (ILC) on TV One and Mata Najwa on Trans7 are no longer merely forums for exchanging ideas; they have evolved into arenas of discursive competition in which language functions strategically to dominate interactions, delegitimize opponents, and construct public images before millions of viewers. (Lu, S., & Liang, H., 2024) In this communication environment, verbal impoliteness can no longer be understood simply as communicative failure, but rather as a deliberate and goal-oriented rhetorical strategy. (Al-Sabbagh, et al, 2025; Hannah, 2023) According to Widodo and Kristiyono (2025), digital media and television in Indonesia have transformed political communication into a more competitive space, where impoliteness is strategically used to capture audience attention. This finding is reinforced by Al-Sabbagh et al. (2025), who show that political rhetoric often uses language that demonizes opponents to construct a narrative of dominance in public discourse. Meanwhile, Schubert (2022) examined US primary election debates and found that linguistic

impoliteness strategically functions to highlight candidates amidst electoral competition. (Biela, B. S., et al, 2025).

Furthermore, Hansson (2024) identified that coercive impoliteness and blame-avoidance also appear in government communications, suggesting that impoliteness is not only a phenomenon of opposition politics but also a tool of power communication. Van Rythoven (2022) adds that backstage taunts and asymmetries in interactions on the world stage reflect power imbalances expressed through impolite language. Thus, impoliteness in Indonesian political talk shows can be understood as a form of structured communication strategy, not simply a spontaneous emotional outburst. (Septiawan, 2025)

The phenomenon of impoliteness in Indonesian televised political debates demonstrates distinctive characteristics. Statements such as "Hey! Study first, don't act smart" (Arteria Dahlan to Ferry Amsari in Mata Najwa, 2019) or "Dude, we can use our brains, but we also have stuff if we use our muscles, be careful, dude" (Ngabalin to Rocky Gerung in ILC, 2023) illustrate how televised debates frequently shift from rational deliberation to confrontational rhetorical performance. Arteria Dahlan's remark to Ferry Amsari in the Mata Najwa program (2019) is not merely an attack on the interlocutor's face, but also a public performance directed at millions of television viewers. A similar pattern occurs when Ngabalin addresses Rocky Gerung in a threatening tone in Indonesia Lawyers Club (2023), where impoliteness is used to construct an image of someone firm and bold before the mass audience. (Setiawati, E., & Salamah, 2025)

According to Skichko (2025), motivational public speeches have structured cognitive-discursive and communicative functions that also apply to impoliteness in televised political debates. Guillén-Nieto (2024) adds that the language of harassment has pragmatic perspectives that can serve as evidence in analyzing problematic interactions. These utterances are not mere emotional outbursts but represent systematic, goal-oriented communication strategies that warrant rigorous linguistic analysis. Al-Sabbagh et al. (2025) found that political rhetoric often uses language that demonizes opponents to construct narratives of domination in public discourse, which also occurs in Indonesian televised debates. Zhang, Liu, and Zhang (2025) add that face-threatening impoliteness in diplomatic press conferences triggers strategic refutations, showing that impoliteness is measured and planned. Xiang, Jia, and Bu (2024) emphasize that politeness and impoliteness are two sides of pragmatics that are interrelated in shaping social interaction. (Ahmed & Hussein, 2024)

Within the pragmatic tradition, the study of impoliteness developed in response to the limitations of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which assumed that communication is fundamentally oriented toward interpersonal harmony. Fathi (2024) revises Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and shows that in many social contexts, speakers actually use language strategies that intentionally attack the interlocutor's face to achieve specific communicative goals. Culpeper (2011) affirms that impoliteness uses language to cause offense as a deliberate strategy, not an accident. However, most previous research on impoliteness has focused on dyadic or small-group interaction contexts, failing to fully capture the complexity of television-mediated political communication with a massive audience. (Pendzel, 2023)

The concept of face was initially introduced by Goffman (1967), who defined it as the positive social value individuals claim during interaction. Building upon this concept, Brown and Levinson (1987) developed politeness theory by distinguishing positive face (the desire for approval and appreciation) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). Their framework assumes that communication is generally oriented toward maintaining interpersonal harmony and minimizing face-threatening acts (FTAs). (Nishi, 2024)

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face-threatening acts (FTAs) refer to communicative acts that potentially damage the interlocutor's positive or negative face needs. Buyukkal (2025) expands on this by discussing politeness strategies within socio-cultural concepts of (im)politeness, showing how interpretation and discourse analysis shape our understanding of face work. Walsh (2022) reconsidered Goffman's theory of face-work for digital culture, arguing that face Dynamics have evolved in online communication environments. (Törnberg & Chueri, 2025)

However, subsequent scholars questioned the universality of this harmony-oriented assumption, particularly in competitive communication settings such as political debates. Culpeper (2011) argued that speakers may intentionally employ face attacks as strategic communicative acts to achieve rhetorical, social, or political goals. Harris

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(2001) similarly extended politeness theory to adversarial political discourse, showing that being politically impolite is often a deliberate choice rather than communicative failure. (Zhang, 2025)

This perspective marked a major theoretical shift from politeness-oriented pragmatics toward impoliteness studies as an autonomous field. Aliyu (2025) demonstrates that impoliteness and face-threatening acts are prominent in the US presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, where confrontational language serves strategic purposes. Hansson (2024) adds that coercive impoliteness and blame avoidance appear in government communication, showing that impoliteness is not limited to opposition politics but also functions as a power communication tool. (Алексеев & Сорокина, 2024)

Tshetu (2023) further reveals that linguistic strategies for managing online reputation in the era of political trolling demonstrate how face-threatening impoliteness is strategically countered in digital political discourse. The debate between harmony-oriented and conflict-oriented models of interaction remains central in contemporary pragmatics, especially in contexts where confrontation is institutionally normalized. Al-Sabbagh et al. (2025) found that linguistic construction of domination and demonization in political discourse uses Islamophobic rhetoric as a face-threatening strategy, which aligns with the conflict-oriented model. (Khoirunnisa, 2024)

Zhang, Liu, and Zhang (2025) show that Chinese perceptions and refutations of face-threatening impoliteness in diplomatic press conferences reveal how nations strategically respond to face attacks. Xiang, Jia, and Bu (2024) emphasize that politeness and impoliteness are interconnected pragmatic phenomena that must be understood together. This unresolved tension highlights the need to examine impoliteness within highly mediated and adversarial communication settings. (Rega, et al, 2023)

Among contemporary scholars of impoliteness, Culpeper's framework has become one of the most influential analytical models in pragmatics and discourse studies. Culpeper (2011) classifies impoliteness into five principal strategies: bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness or sarcasm, and withholding politeness. Unlike normative approaches that treat impoliteness merely as a deviation from appropriate social behavior, Culpeper conceptualizes it as intentional communicative conduct that generates negative social meaning within specific interactional contexts. This perspective has significantly expanded the study of impoliteness by emphasizing speakers' strategic intentions and audience interpretations in communicative exchanges. (Altahmazi & Abid, 2023)

Recent studies have further reinforced the relevance of Culpeper's framework in contemporary mediated communication. Xiang (2024) argues that impoliteness strategies are closely connected to the negotiation of interpersonal relations and ideological positioning within public discourse. Similarly, Safitri (2022) demonstrates that impoliteness in political communication frequently functions persuasively by constructing images of assertiveness and authority. Nuessel (2022) additionally notes that sarcastic and confrontational language in public communication may strengthen audience engagement because such expressions are often interpreted as emotionally authentic and rhetorically powerful. (Tsoumou, 2023)

Bousfield (2008) further strengthens this perspective by emphasizing that impoliteness frequently emerges in confrontational and competitive interactions where dominance, challenge, and power negotiation become central communicative objectives. Whereas Culpeper primarily focuses on the classification of impoliteness strategies, Bousfield highlights the dynamic interactional processes through which impoliteness escalates during conflictual discourse. Shi (2023) supports this interactional perspective by showing that confrontational exchanges in mediated settings often develop progressively through reciprocal verbal attacks and defensive responses. Boukhris (2023) likewise argues that impoliteness should be understood as an interactional phenomenon shaped by contextual pressures and communicative goals rather than as isolated linguistic behavior. (Razaq, et al, 2023)

In political communication contexts, these dynamics become increasingly complex because interactions are mediated by television and simultaneously directed toward mass audiences. Razaq et al. (2023) explain that televised political discourse encourages strategic performances of confrontation due to the competitive logic of media visibility and audience engagement. However, both Culpeper's and Bousfield's approaches primarily examine interpersonal interaction and provide limited explanation regarding how media mediation and audience presence influence the strategic deployment of impoliteness. Consequently, important questions

remain concerning how impoliteness operates within televised political debates characterized by performative communication, political image construction, and mass audience orientation. (Fuentes & Alcaide, 2023)

Research on political and media discourse demonstrates that impoliteness plays an increasingly significant role in contemporary mediated politics. According to Stromback (2008), the mediatization of politics refers to the process through which political communication increasingly adapts to media logic emphasizing dramatization, personalization, and conflict. Within televised debates, confrontation is therefore not merely tolerated but often structurally incentivized. Recent studies further indicate that contemporary media environments encourage politicians to employ confrontational discourse in order to attract audience attention and strengthen public visibility (Iftikhar, 2025). Jing (2024) additionally notes that televised political interactions frequently reward emotionally charged exchanges because they generate higher audience engagement. In a similar vein, Razaq et al. (2023) argue that conflict-oriented communication has become central to modern political performance in broadcast media. (Chankova, 2023)

Harris (2001) demonstrates that incivility in political debates is frequently strategic rather than spontaneous, functioning as a means of displaying discursive dominance and shaping audience perceptions. This strategic dimension is particularly evident in televised settings where candidates seek both argumentative victory and public approval. Sibalatani (2024) observes that political speakers often employ impoliteness to construct authority and undermine opponents simultaneously. Likewise, Tshetu (2023) explains that verbal aggression in mediated debates may strengthen group solidarity among supporters. Expanding this perspective, Schubert (2022) argues that impoliteness can operate as a persuasive rhetorical device when audiences interpret confrontational behavior as a sign of confidence or authenticity. (Ambarita, et al, 2023)

Ilie (2006) further explains that televised debates involve a dual audience orientation in which participants address not only their immediate interlocutors but also the viewing public. This communicative structure transforms impoliteness into a multifunctional rhetorical strategy capable of attacking opponents while simultaneously reinforcing political identity among supporters. McNair (2011) similarly argues that political actors in mediated democracies continuously perform impression management within public media spaces. From this perspective, impoliteness may function as a dramaturgical resource for constructing assertiveness, authenticity, or ideological commitment. Setiawati and Salamah (2025) suggest that such strategies are increasingly visible in Indonesian political media discourse, particularly in highly polarized political contexts. However, existing scholarship has largely concentrated on Western political settings. Musthapa (2022) points out that non-Western political communication environments remain underexplored despite their distinct sociocultural characteristics. (Walter & Kutlaca, 2024)

Van Rythoven (2022) further emphasizes the importance of examining localized media practices because political polarization and communicative norms may differ substantially across national contexts. Consequently, limited understanding remains regarding how impoliteness operates within Indonesian televised political discourse, where media practices, political culture, and audience dynamics may function differently from those observed in Western democracies. (Murti, et al, 2024)

In Indonesia, research on impoliteness in televised political debates remains relatively limited. Early studies conducted by Swandi (2015) and Putri (2018) identified various forms of impoliteness in the television program Indonesia Lawyers Club, demonstrating that face-threatening acts (FTAs) frequently emerge within Indonesian political television discourse. These studies successfully highlighted the linguistic realization of impoliteness strategies in political interactions. However, their primary focus remained on the identification and classification of impolite expressions rather than on the broader communicative processes underlying their use. (Pendzel, et al, 2023)

More recent scholarship has suggested the importance of examining impoliteness within wider sociopolitical and interactional frameworks. Rahma et al. (2025), for example, argue that political impoliteness should be understood not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a strategic communicative practice shaped by media dynamics and audience expectations. Hansson (2024) similarly emphasizes that confrontational discourse in political media often reflects institutional and situational pressures rather than merely individual communicative choices. From a rhetorical perspective, Schubert (2022) further

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explains that impoliteness may function persuasively by reinforcing political identity and ideological positioning in highly mediated political environments. (Zhang, et al, 2025)

Despite these developments, previous Indonesian studies have not sufficiently examined the relationship between situational triggers and strategy selection in televised political debates. Nor have they explored how impoliteness influences politicians' public images across different audience groups. Zhang et al. (2025) note that audience interpretation plays a crucial role in determining whether confrontational political behavior is perceived negatively or as a sign of authenticity and strength. In the Indonesian context, Septiawan et al. (2025) argue that media polarization and digital audience participation increasingly shape public evaluations of political communication styles. Simanjuntak (2024) additionally highlights that sociocultural norms within Indonesian political discourse may produce distinct patterns of interpretation regarding verbal aggression and rhetorical confrontation. Consequently, the broader communicative functions and sociopolitical implications of impoliteness in Indonesian televised political debates remain insufficiently understood. This gap therefore motivates the present study. (Nishi, 2024)

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) What communication situations in televised political debates trigger face-threatening acts (FTAs)? (2) What types and patterns of impoliteness strategies are used by debate participants? (3) How do these impoliteness strategies impact politicians' public images and the dynamics of political communication?

This study is the first to: (1) systematically analyze all five of Culpeper's impoliteness strategies across multiple Indonesian televised political debate episodes; (2) examine the relationship between situational triggers and strategy selection; and (3) propose an integrative model linking linguistic pragmatics and political communication within the Indonesian media context.

By analyzing 70 speech segments from Indonesia Lawyers Club and Mata Najwa, this study extends impoliteness research beyond descriptive categorization toward a more integrated understanding of how impoliteness operates strategically within media-mediated political interactions.

This research is significant for three reasons. First, theoretically, it extends Culpeper's impoliteness framework to the context of Indonesian televised political debates, a setting characterized by high-stakes argumentative competition and mass media mediation. Second, methodologically, it offers an integrative analytical model connecting situational triggers, impoliteness strategies, and political image outcomes. Third, practically, the findings may contribute to media literacy development and political communication training by increasing public awareness of how confrontational discourse strategies shape political perception and democratic debate.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive orientation that integrates pragmatic and sociopragmatic analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate because impoliteness is context-dependent and requires interpretation of speaker intentions, audience reactions, and situational factors that cannot be quantified. The interpretive orientation allows the researcher to understand meaning as it emerges from the interactional context. In this study, pragmatic analysis is used to identify face-threatening acts (FTAs) and classify impoliteness strategies, while sociopragmatic analysis is used to interpret how social roles, media performance, ideological positioning, and audience orientation shape the meaning and function of impolite utterances.

The research data came from three episodes of Indonesian national television political talk shows, selected based on the intensity of verbal conflict and the availability of high-quality audiovisual recordings: (1) Indonesia Lawyers Club, "Moment Rocky Gerung Diganggu Ngabalin di Anniversary tvOne ke-15" (tvOne, February 14, 2023); (2) Indonesia Lawyers Club, "The Political Temperature is Heating Up: Who is Megawati Actually Angry With?" (tvOne, October 11, 2016); (3) Mata Najwa, "Ragu-Ragu Perpu KPK" (Trans7, October 11, 2019).

These three episodes were selected because they present intense verbal conflict between participants, involve participants with diverse ideological backgrounds (politicians, academics, observers), and represent two of the most influential political talk shows in Indonesia. The data span from 2016 to 2023, a period that includes different phases of Indonesian political communication, particularly Jokowi's first and second presidential terms. While this time span provides a broader view of impoliteness strategies across televised political debates, changes in

political climate, media practices, and polarization over time may influence strategy use. Therefore, the findings should not be read as representing a single homogeneous political era. Future research could examine impoliteness diachronically to compare how strategies change across administrations, electoral cycles, or media platforms.

Data were collected through repeated viewing and verbatim transcription of recordings of the three episodes. Utterances were transcribed orthographically. Nonverbal cues relevant to impoliteness, such as laughter, gestures, interruptions, or audience responses, were noted in brackets when they contributed to the interpretation of the utterance. Pauses were not systematically transcribed because they were not central to the present analysis. Intonation was represented through punctuation, for example a question mark (?) for rising intonation and an exclamation mark (!) for emphatic or exclamatory delivery. The unit of analysis was a speech segment containing indications of face-threatening actions and impoliteness strategies as identified by Culpeper's framework. All utterances containing explicit or implicit FTAs were first identified. From an initial pool of 112 candidate utterances, 70 speech segments were selected because they met the following criteria: (1) they contained explicit or implicit attacks on the interlocutor's face; (2) they were delivered in the context of a live debate interaction; (3) they had clear interactional context; (4) the speaker and target were identifiable; and (5) they could be classified unambiguously into at least one of Culpeper's five impoliteness strategies. This amount of data meets the principle of data saturation in qualitative research.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, speech segments containing FTAs were identified based on the context of the interaction, the speaker's intention as inferable from the surrounding discourse, and the interlocutor's verbal or nonverbal responses. Second, the impoliteness strategies were classified based on Culpeper's taxonomy (1996; 2011), namely bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness/sarcasm, and withholding politeness. Third, the pragmatic function of each strategy was analyzed within the context of the debate interaction, including whether the utterance functioned to dominate, delegitimize, provoke, ridicule, or strategically ignore the interlocutor. Fourth, the impact of strategy use on the dynamics of the interaction and the formation of the politician's image was interpreted in relation to media performance and audience orientation. A second researcher independently coded 20% of the data (14 utterances). Inter-coder agreement reached 89%, and Cohen's kappa was calculated at 0.85, indicating strong agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (three different episodes), theory triangulation (integrating the perspectives of Culpeper, Brown and Levinson, and Goffman), prolonged engagement through repeated viewing of the videos over four weeks, peer debriefing through regular discussions with supervisors, and negative case analysis by searching for utterances that did not fit the framework.

Investigator triangulation was limited to the coding reliability procedure described above rather than full multi-coder analysis of the entire dataset. Method triangulation, such as combining discourse analysis with interviews, was not applied because the study focused on published televised interaction rather than participant experience. These methodological boundaries are acknowledged as limitations of the study.

All data were collected from publicly available YouTube videos produced and published by the original broadcasters. Ethical approval was not required because the study analyzed publicly available media content and did not involve direct interaction with human subjects. The authors respected the intellectual property of the original broadcasters by citing the video sources in the reference list.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication situations triggering face-threatening acts

The findings demonstrate that face-threatening acts (FTAs) in Indonesian televised political debates do not emerge randomly, but are systematically triggered by specific communicative situations that intensify interpersonal conflict and ideological contestation. Three major situational factors consistently appeared across the analyzed debates.

First, argumentative competition functions as a primary trigger of FTAs. Participants attempt not only to defend their ideological positions but also to delegitimize opposing arguments and undermine the credibility of their interlocutors. In many cases, disagreement over political issues escalates into personal attacks targeting

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intellectual competence, morality, or professional legitimacy. This pattern is evident in all three analyzed debates, including the confrontation between Arteria Dahlan and Ferry Amsari in Mata Najwa (2019), as well as the exchanges between Rocky Gerung and Ngabalin in Indonesia Lawyers Club (ILC) 2023.

Second, performative media pressure contributes significantly to the emergence of impoliteness. Television debates are not merely interpersonal interactions but public performances conducted before live and mediated audiences. Participants are aware that their statements are being broadcast and evaluated by viewers, encouraging them to adopt assertive, dramatic, and confrontational speaking styles as part of political image construction. In this context, impoliteness operates not only as a communicative strategy but also as a performative resource for attracting audience attention and demonstrating political strength.

Third, ideological polarization intensifies the likelihood of FTAs. Sharp ideological divisions encourage participants to perceive opposing arguments not simply as intellectual disagreement, but as threats to group identity, political legitimacy, and moral standing. Consequently, attacks frequently shift from policy criticism to attacks on the interlocutor's professional, academic, or personal identity. This reflects the increasingly polarized character of Indonesian political discourse in contemporary media spaces.

Bald on record impoliteness

Bald on record impoliteness was identified in 15 out of 70 utterances (21.4%). This strategy involves direct, unmitigated attacks on the interlocutor's face without any attempt to soften the threat.

One of the clearest examples appears in Mata Najwa (2019), when Arteria Dahlan addressed Ferry Amsari by stating: "Hei! Belajar dulu yang benar ya. Belajar dulu, jangan sok pintar" ("Hey! Study first, okay? Study first, don't act smart") (Mata Najwa, 2019, 23:45). The exclamation "Hei!" immediately establishes an aggressive tone, while the imperative "study first" explicitly demeans Ferry's competence. The phrase "don't act smart" further delegitimizes Ferry's intellectual identity before a national audience. Audience reactions in the recording, including audible laughter and heightened interruption patterns, indicate that the utterance was perceived as highly confrontational and interactionally dramatic.

Another prominent example occurred in ILC 2023, when Ngabalin stated to Rocky Gerung: "Bro, kita pakai otak bisa, tapi kalau pakai otot juga kita punya itu, hati-hati bro" ("Dude, we can use our brains, but we also have muscles too, be careful, dude") (ILC, 2023, 1:12:10). This utterance contains an explicit physical threat and therefore constitutes bald-on-record impoliteness. Rocky responded similarly through humor: "Tunggu saya ikat tali sepatu dulu supaya sepatu tidak terbang ke orang itu" ("Let me tie my shoelaces first so the shoe doesn't fly toward that person") (ILC, 2023, 1:12:32). Although framed humorously, the statement still contains a direct threat.

Functionally, bald-on-record impoliteness in the analyzed debates serves several purposes: (a) asserting interactional dominance openly; (b) producing dramatic confrontational moments within televised interaction; and (c) escalating conflict to reinforce the speaker's public image as firm, fearless, and ideologically committed. However, claims regarding audience reception remain inferential because this study analyzes discourse production rather than audience interpretation directly.

Positive impoliteness

Positive impoliteness was also identified in 15 out of 70 utterances (21.4%), making it one of the most dominant strategies in the dataset. According to Brown and Levinson's framework, positive face refers to an individual's desire to be appreciated, respected, and recognized as a valued member of the social community. Positive impoliteness therefore attacks the interlocutor's need for approval, respect, and social recognition.

A representative example appears in Arteria Dahlan's statement toward Ferry Amsari: "Ahli tata negara kok tidak sadar. Ahli tata negara macam apa Anda?" ("This constitutional expert is unaware. What kind of constitutional expert are you?") (Mata Najwa, 2019, 24:11). The utterance attacks Ferry's positive face through two mechanisms. First, the claim that Ferry is "unaware" implies incompetence within his own field of expertise. Second, the rhetorical question delegitimizes Ferry's professional identity before the public audience.

Another striking example is Rocky Gerung's repeated use of the term "barang" ("thing/object") to refer to Ngabalin in ILC 2023, such as "Ada barang ribut terus" ("There's that thing making noise again") (ILC, 2023, 58:21). Positive face refers to the desire to be respected and treated as a

legitimate social actor. By referring to Ngabalin as barang, Rocky symbolically denies his humanity and excludes him from the category of respected interlocutors, thereby directly attacking his positive face.

In ILC 2016, Adian Napitupulu employed a more indirect form of positive impoliteness by stating:

> *"Orang yang berpikir besar berbicara tentang kehidupan, orang yang berpikir menengah berbicara tentang kejadian, orang yang berpikir kecil berbicara tentang orang lain."*
> ("People who think big talk about life, people who think middle-class talk about events, people who think small talk about other people.")

Although no individual is explicitly named, the contextual framing allows the audience to infer the intended target. This indirectness enables the speaker to attack the opponent's intellectual status while preserving plausible deniability.

Negative impoliteness

Negative impoliteness was identified in 15 out of 70 utterances (21.4%). This strategy attacks the interlocutor's negative face, namely their desire for autonomy, freedom of action, and freedom from imposition.

A representative example appears in Arteria Dahlan's statement:

> *"Jangan bicara wakil rakyat. Jangan bicara wakil rakyat. Rakyat yang mana Anda? Ganti kalimat Anda, sedikit sopan."*
> ("Don't talk about the people's representatives. Don't talk about the people's representatives. Which people are you referring to? Change your sentence, be a little polite.")
> (Mata Najwa, 2019)

This utterance restricts Ferry Amsari's freedom to define political representation and simultaneously imposes behavioral constraints on how he should speak. The repeated commands intensify the coercive effect and reinforce interactional dominance.

An important finding concerns the moderator's use of negative impoliteness. Najwa Shihab intervened by stating:

> *"Ini bukan DPR. Di sini semua menghormati pembicara."*
> ("This isn't the House of Representatives. Here, everyone respects the speaker.")
> (Mata Najwa, 2019)

Although confrontational, the moderator's impoliteness can be interpreted differently from participant impoliteness. Rather than functioning solely as a personal attack, it also serves as an institutional mechanism for enforcing debate norms and restoring interactional order. This suggests that impoliteness may perform different communicative functions depending on the speaker's institutional role.

Mock politeness / sarcasm

Mock politeness or sarcasm was identified in 8 out of 70 utterances (11.4%). This strategy involves the ironic use of apparently polite expressions to communicate criticism, ridicule, or condescension.

A highly illustrative example occurs in ILC 2016 when Rocky Gerung commented on Adian Napitupulu's speech:

> *"Pidato Adian hari ini A plus. A untuk retorika, A plus untuk sugesti."*
> ("Adian's speech today gets an A plus. A for rhetoric, A plus for suggestion.")
> (ILC, 2016)

The statement appears complimentary on the surface but actually dismisses Adian's argument as rhetorical manipulation rather than substantive reasoning. The effectiveness of this strategy lies in its ambiguity. Rocky can claim he was "complimenting" Adian if challenged, while the audience recognizes the sarcastic implication. This ambiguity creates a form of plausible deniability that strengthens the strategic value of sarcasm in political debate.

Similarly, in ILC 2023, Ngabalin responded to Rocky's legal explanation with laughter and exaggerated praise:

> *"Rocky… hebat… hahaha…"*
> ("Rocky… amazing… hahaha…")
> (ILC, 2023)

The accompanying laughter functions as a metacommunicative cue signaling that the praise is insincere. This allows the speaker to ridicule the opponent indirectly while simultaneously creating humorous alignment with the audience.

Withholding politeness

Withholding politeness was identified in 7 out of 70 utterances (10%). This strategy represents the absence of expected politeness behavior in situations where politeness is socially required.

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A notable example occurs in ILC 2016 when Rocky Gerung interrupted Adian Napitupulu's lengthy speech by stating:

> *"Permisi, saya ke toilet dulu. Bisa satu menit saya ke toilet supaya lebih lancar."*
> ("Excuse me, I'm going to the restroom first. Can I take a minute so things can go more smoothly?")
> (ILC, 2016)

This act is provocative because it violates the expectation that debate participants listen respectfully to their opponents. By prioritizing his physical needs over the obligation to attend to Adian's speech, Rocky implicitly communicates that Adian's argument is not important enough to deserve attention. This represents a form of "silent impoliteness," where the act itself constitutes the attack rather than explicit verbal aggression.

Another example appears when Rocky rejected Ngabalin's invitation to engage seriously in discussion by stating:

> *"Islah itu kalau ada argumentasi mental. Tidak ada argumentasi mental."*
> ("Reconciliation only exists when there is a mental argument. There is no mental argument.")
> (ILC, 2023)

Rather than directly insulting Ngabalin, Rocky withholds recognition of him as an intellectually equal interlocutor.

Distribution of strategies and patterns across episodes

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of impoliteness strategies identified in the research data.

Table 1. *Distribution of impoliteness strategies in Indonesian television political debates*

No	Impoliteness Strategy	ILC 2023	ILC 2016	Mata Najwa 2019	Total	%
1	Bald on Record Impoliteness	6	4	5	15	21,4
2	Positive Impoliteness	5	4	6	15	21,4
3	Negative Impoliteness	4	6	5	15	21,4
4	Mock Politeness / Sarcasm	3	2	3	8	11,4
5	Withholding Politeness	2	3	2	7	10,0
6	Hybrid / Unclassifiable FTAs	4	3	3	10	10,0
	Total	24	22	24	70	100

The revised distribution demonstrates that the frequencies are not perfectly symmetrical across episodes. While bald-on-record, positive, and negative impoliteness each occurred 15 times overall, their distribution across debates varied depending on the interactional context of each episode. The remaining 10 utterances were categorized as hybrid or unclassifiable FTAs because they simultaneously displayed overlapping characteristics of multiple Culpeper categories, making reliable single-category classification difficult.

The findings suggest that Indonesian televised political debates contain a broad repertoire of impoliteness strategies used flexibly according to situational demands. ILC 2023 was characterized by intense personal confrontation and verbal aggression, ILC 2016 relied more heavily on indirect ridicule and philosophical analogy, while Mata Najwa 2019 displayed impoliteness strongly connected to institutional hierarchy and political authority.

The impact of impoliteness on politicians' images and debate dynamics

The findings indicate that the impact of impoliteness on politicians' public images is highly ambivalent and context-dependent. Confrontational language may strengthen perceptions of firmness, courage, and ideological consistency among supporters, while simultaneously generating perceptions of aggression, disrespect, or emotional instability among opponents.

This ambivalence is closely related to political polarization and group identification. In polarized contexts, the same utterance may be interpreted differently depending on the audience's ideological orientation. Supporters may interpret aggressive confrontation as authenticity and decisiveness, whereas opposing audiences may

interpret the same behavior as arrogance or incivility.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The present research analyzes the production of impoliteness strategies in televised debates rather than audience reception directly. Consequently, claims regarding audience interpretation remain inferential rather than empirically measured. Future studies should therefore investigate audience responses through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or digital audience analysis.

From the perspective of debate dynamics, the increasing dominance of impoliteness contributes to a shift from deliberative political discussion toward performative confrontation. Rather than functioning primarily as spaces for substantive policy debate, televised political forums increasingly become arenas of symbolic competition, image construction, and ideological performance. As a result, political discourse risks prioritizing spectacle and antagonism over rational deliberation and democratic dialogue.

Integrative model of impoliteness in Indonesian television political debates

The findings of this study support an integrative model linking three analytical dimensions: (1) Situational Triggers terdiri atas (a) argumentative competition, (b) performative media pressure, dan (c) ideological polarization. (2) Impoliteness Strategies mencakup (a) bald on record impoliteness, (b) positive impoliteness, (c) negative impoliteness, (d) mock politeness/sarcasm, dan (e) withholding politeness. (3) Interactional Outcomes meliputi (a) politician image construction, (b) escalation of confrontation, (c) audience polarization, dan (d) shift from deliberative to performative debate.

This model demonstrates that impoliteness in televised political discourse should not be understood merely as individual communicative deviation, but as a strategic and structurally conditioned phenomenon shaped by media logic, ideological conflict, and public performance.

Figure 1 illustrates the integrative model of impoliteness in Indonesian televised political debates developed from the findings of this study. The model demonstrates that impoliteness emerges through the interaction between three interconnected dimensions: situational triggers, impoliteness strategies, and interactional outcomes. Situational triggers, including argumentative competition, performative media pressure, and ideological polarization, create communicative conditions that encourage the use of impoliteness strategies. These conditions subsequently shape the selection of impoliteness strategies such as bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness or sarcasm, and withholding politeness. The use of these strategies then produces various interactional outcomes, including politician image construction, escalation of confrontation, audience polarization, and the transformation of debate from a deliberative process into a performative spectacle. The model further highlights the existence of a feedback loop in which these outcomes reinforce future communicative behavior and contribute to the normalization of impoliteness in televised political discourse.

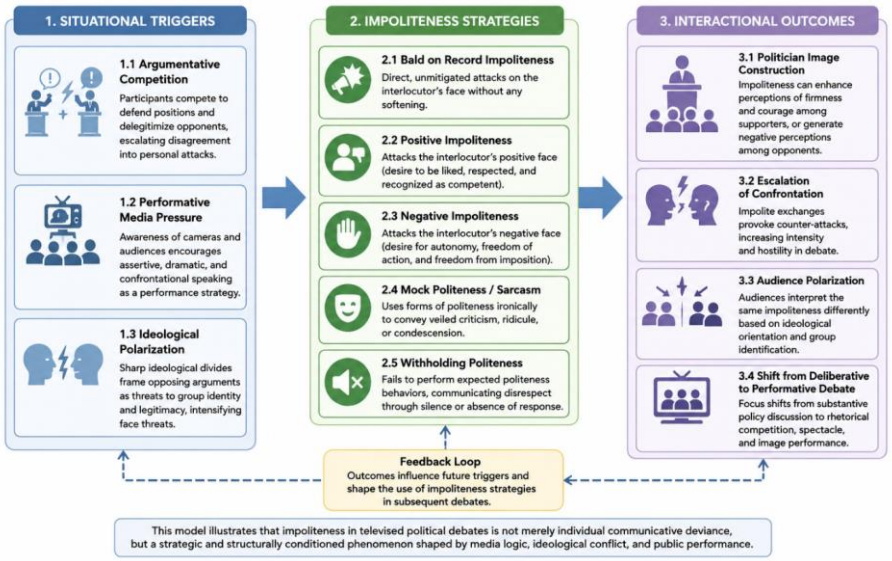


Figure 1. *Integrative model of impoliteness in Indonesian television political debates*

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CONCLUSION

This research has shown that, within the analyzed data, impoliteness in Indonesian televised political debates functions as a systematic, strategic, and multifunctional pragmatic phenomenon. The findings indicate that FTAs are primarily triggered by three interconnected situational factors: argumentative competition, performative media pressure, and ideological polarization. All five of Culpeper's impoliteness strategies were identified in the data, with positive impoliteness and bald-on-record impoliteness emerging as the most dominant strategies used to challenge competence, authority, and ideological legitimacy. The study further demonstrates that the impact of impoliteness on politicians' public images is highly ambivalent, as audience evaluations are strongly mediated by ideological orientation and group identification. Overall, the findings suggest that televised political debates increasingly function not only as deliberative forums but also as performative arenas of symbolic confrontation and identity construction.

The theoretical contribution of this study is threefold. First, it extends Culpeper's impoliteness framework to the context of Indonesian televised political debates. Second, it identifies three major situational triggers of FTAs: argumentative competition, performative media pressure, and ideological polarization. Third, it proposes an integrative model suggesting that the impact of impoliteness on political image is mediated by audience ideology and group identification.

Practically, the findings suggest that debate moderators should be trained to recognize and manage impoliteness strategies that undermine substantive discussion. Politicians and public figures should also be aware that impolite strategies may strengthen support among loyal audiences while simultaneously alienating undecided viewers. In addition, media literacy programs are needed to help audiences recognize impoliteness as a strategic communicative performance rather than merely authentic emotional expression.

This study has several limitations. First, the dataset is relatively limited, consisting of only three debate episodes and 70 utterances. Second, audience reception was not directly analyzed, meaning interpretations regarding audience responses remain inferential. Third, the study does not report inter-coder reliability in the categorization of impoliteness strategies. Fourth, the analyzed data span from 2016 to 2023, during which the Indonesian political context changed significantly. Fifth, the study focuses exclusively on televised political discourse and does not compare impoliteness strategies in other communication settings such as social media or offline political interaction. Sixth, the findings are limited to the Indonesian sociopolitical context and may not be fully generalizable to other cultures. Finally, the analysis relies solely on publicly available broadcast recordings without access to unedited footage or backstage interactions.

Future research should examine audience responses to impoliteness through survey-based or experimental methods in order to validate interpretations regarding audience perception. Comparative studies across different media platforms, such as television, social media, podcasts, and radio, would also help clarify how media environments shape impoliteness strategies. Longitudinal research may further reveal changes in impoliteness practices over time, particularly across electoral periods and shifting political climates. Cross-cultural comparisons between Indonesian political debates and debates in other countries could enrich the sociopragmatic understanding of political impoliteness. Finally, future studies should investigate the relationship between impoliteness strategies and broader political outcomes, including public opinion, electoral performance, and media visibility.

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