



An Analysis of Protest Posters on RUU Pilkada Demonstration: A Landry Bourhis Linguistic Landscape Study

Mochamad Riza Fahlivi¹, Fitri Rakhmawati², Khristianto³, Sulasih
Nurhayati⁴

^{1,2,3,4} English Literature, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Jawa Tengah

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-01-21 Revised: 2026 01-27 Accepted: 2026 05-31</p> <p>Keywords: Linguistics Landscape; RUU Pilkada; Protest Poster</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.9396</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Mochamad Riza Fahlivi rizafahlivi10@gmail.com English Literature, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Jawa Tengah</p>	<p><i>This study examines how language choice in protest posters functions informatively and symbolically during demonstrations opposing the RUU Pilkada decision of Indonesia's Constitutional Court in 2024. Employing the linguistic landscape framework established by Landry and Bourhis (1997), this study examines protest posters as public texts that signify political identity, power dynamics, and ideological stances. The data consist of 38 protest posters collected from the social media platform X using the hashtag #KawalPutusanMK. These posters were categorized into three language types: monolingual Indonesian, monolingual English, and bilingual Indonesian-English. Qualitative textual transcription and interpretive analysis were employed to examine the posters' linguistic functions. The results show that monolingual Indonesian dominates the dataset (68.42%), followed by monolingual English (23.68%) and bilingual posters (7.89%). Indonesian is primarily used to communicate directly with local audiences and to construct a shared national political identity. In contrast, English and bilingual language choices are used strategically to frame local political criticism within global discourses of democracy, power, and human rights, which attracts greater attention in digital circulation. The results further indicate that protest posters mainly articulate power relations and ideological orientations, demonstrating how language is used to challenge political authority and express resistance across both physical and online spaces. This study contributes to linguistic landscape research by highlighting the role of temporary protest posters as strategic communicative resources in contemporary Indonesian political activism.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Recent changes in Indonesia's electoral governance have generated widespread public debate concerning the relationship between legal regulation, political authority, and democratic engagement. In August 2024, the Constitutional Court issued a decision regarding the Regional Election Bill (*RUU Pilkada*) that changed candidate nomination requirements by mandating that age eligibility be determined at the time of registration. While officially framed as a constitutional ruling, it was widely perceived as politically consequential, reinforcing the power of incumbents and political dynasties. The decision received extensive national media coverage and sparked large-scale demonstrations in major cities, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya (Adzkie, 2024). Legal scholars have noted that the controversy surrounding the RUU Pilkada reflects tension between the Constitutional Court's role as the guardian of democracy and legislative attempts to revise its decisions, raising concerns about justice and democratic legitimacy (Amanda, Lee, Lewis, & Sena, 2025).

The protests were primarily led by young citizens, including university students, youth activists, and community organizations. While the Court's decision served as the immediate trigger, the demonstrations reflected deeper concerns about political accountability, institutional transparency, and the concentration of power within Indonesia's democratic system. Studies have shown that Indonesia's transition from authoritarian rule did not dismantle entrenched oligarchic structures; instead, political elites adapted to democratic frameworks, maintaining dominance through legal and electoral mechanisms (Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Opposition to the RUU Pilkada should thus be understood as part of a broader struggle over democratic participation, political voice, and the perceived fairness of the political system.

One of the most visible features of these demonstrations was the widespread use of protest signs—posters, banners, and placards. In crowded and dynamic protest settings, such signs function as effective communicative tools, using short slogans, direct messages, and symbolic imagery to express opposition to political favoritism, dynastic power, and democratic decline. When displayed in public spaces, these signs become part of what Landry & Bourhis (1997) define as the linguistic landscape, signaling identity, ideology, and power relations.

Linguistic landscapes are socially constructed and politically motivated, reflecting struggles over identity and authority (Gorter, 2013). Protest signs are deliberately produced semiotic resources that serve both informational and symbolic functions (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The informational function conveys explicit messages, such as political critiques or calls for action, while the symbolic function asserts visibility, group identity, and challenges to power hierarchies. During the RUU Pilkada protests, these functions are evident in slogans referencing constitutional issues, nepotism, and democratic values, as well as in the symbolic occupation of public spaces by ordinary citizens. Shohamy & Waksman (2008)

argue that linguistic landscapes are dynamic spaces where multiple voices compete for visibility, particularly through bottom-up actions such as protest signage that challenges official narratives. Distinguishing between official and non-official signs is crucial for understanding power in public spaces (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Research also shows that political expressions in public signage follow recognizable patterns and are strategically organized rather than random (Fabiszak et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship has expanded linguistic landscape analysis to digital environments. Images of protest signs shared on social media extend the urban linguistic landscape online, where meanings are recontextualized and redistributed (Hiippala, Hausmann, Tenkanen, & Toivonen, 2019). Public language on social media actively shapes how political spaces and issues are perceived (Lyons, 2016) and contributes to constructing identity and ideological positioning (Bani Amer, 2024). Temporary protest signs, such as placards and posters, play a vital role in expressing political resistance across both physical and digital spaces (Rubdy, 2015).

During the RUU Pilkada protests, participants often used short, emotionally charged, and easily understood messages on protest signs, which allowed them to communicate political concerns quickly and foster a sense of shared identity among demonstrators (Liu Boya & Chen Min, 2021). González (2021) also notes that concise, visually impactful texts help unify participants around common political goals. Beyond posters, other visual forms of protest such as graffiti and street art reshaped urban spaces by giving familiar streets and public areas new political meanings, turning everyday environments into arenas for contesting power (Moskowljevic, 2023). In politically tense moments, these signs provided participants a means to express emotions like anger, hope, and resistance in public (Borba, 2019). As a result, protest signs became highly visible spaces where social conflicts, ideological debates, and power struggles were played out (Muassomah, Billah, Faisol, & Halimi, 2024). This view aligns with Pavlenko (2009), who highlights how public texts can reveal and challenge existing power dynamics, illustrating both the symbolic and informational roles of the RUU Pilkada protest posters.

During the RUU Pilkada protests, posters were widely photographed and circulated on social media using hashtags such as #KawalPutusanMK. Digital circulation extended the reach of protest messages, positioning them within broader national and global discussions on democracy and governance. The use of both Indonesian and English on posters reflects this dual orientation: Indonesian indexes local political identity and immediate concerns, while English connects the protests with global democratic discourse. From a linguistic landscape perspective, these multilingual choices strategically broaden visibility and reinforce collective identity.

Despite extensive research on linguistic landscapes, protest discourse, and

digital communication, limited attention has been given to Indonesian protest posters that operate simultaneously in physical and online spaces during short-term political crises. Existing studies often focus on official signage or long-term movements, leaving a gap in understanding how temporary protest text's function both informatively and symbolically in hybrid public spheres. Accordingly, this study applies the linguistic landscape framework proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) to analyze protest posters used during the RUU Pilkada demonstrations. The study aims to examine the distribution of language choices in protest posters and analyze how these posters function informatively and symbolically to articulate power relations, ideological positions, and collective identities across physical and digital spaces.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze how public sentiment is reflected in protest posters during the RUU Pilkada demonstrations. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the analysis emphasizes the interpretation of language choice, tone, symbolism, and communicative intent rather than the identification of numerical patterns. Qualitative research focuses on how meaning is constructed within social texts and contexts, allowing interpretations to emerge from the data rather than relying on predetermined variables (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This approach is particularly suitable for linguistic landscape analysis, which conceptualizes language as a visible and symbolic resource in public spaces.

Data Source and Collection

The data consist of images of protest posters shared on the social media platform X. These posters are treated as social texts and forms of public communication that demonstrate how protest messages are produced, circulated, and recontextualized in digital spaces. Data were collected from posts containing the hashtag *#KawalPutusanMK*, which was widely used to document and disseminate protest materials related to the RUU Pilkada issue. Poster images were systematically collected through screenshot capture.

The dataset consists of 38 protest poster images. The total number of posters was not set in advance; instead, data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, that is, when additional posters no longer contributed new linguistic patterns, themes, or communicative strategies relevant to the research aims. Poster selection followed clear inclusion criteria: (1) explicit reference to the RUU Pilkada or the Constitutional Court's decision, (2) unambiguous visual identification as protest material such as placards, banners, or handwritten or printed signs, and (3) circulation within an active protest context rather than as isolated political commentary or unrelated satire. To ensure analytical relevance and authenticity, duplicate images, reposts without original poster content, and materials lacking a

clear protest message were excluded from the dataset.

Language Categorization and Coding

After data collection, all poster texts were transcribed verbatim to preserve their original wording and structure. Each poster was then classified into one of three language categories, namely monolingual Indonesian, monolingual English, or bilingual Indonesian–English. This classification made it possible to examine language choice systematically as a key element of the protest’s linguistic landscape.

Following this step, the posters were qualitatively coded to identify how social identities, ideological orientations, and power relations were constructed and communicated. The coding process was carried out by the researcher through an iterative procedure that involved repeated close readings, comparison across posters, and ongoing refinement of analytical categories. Although the analysis was conducted by a single researcher and did not include formal inter-coder reliability testing, consistency was maintained by applying the same coding framework and criteria to the entire dataset.

Selection of Posters for In-Depth Analysis

From the complete dataset, six posters were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis through a purposive and theoretically informed sampling strategy. These posters were not intended to reflect statistical proportions but to illustrate recurring linguistic patterns and communicative strategies identified across the dataset. The selection was guided by several criteria: (1) explicit articulation of central protest concerns, including constitutional justice, nepotism, democratic values, and political accountability; (2) clear realization of both informational and symbolic functions as defined within the linguistic landscape framework; (3) representation of the different language categories presents in the data; and (4) adequate visual clarity to allow accurate transcription and interpretation. This approach allows for detailed, context-sensitive analysis while ensuring that the interpretations remain anchored in the broader linguistic and ideological patterns observed across the dataset.

Ethical Considerations

All data were obtained from publicly accessible social media posts. No private accounts, personal identifiers, or sensitive personal information were collected or reported. Usernames, profile images, and metadata were excluded to preserve anonymity. Screenshots were used solely for analytical purposes and treated as textual artifacts rather than personal expressions. Although social media content is publicly available, ethical standards were observed by minimizing potential harm and respecting user privacy, in line with established practices for social media research (Grant-Muller et al., 2015)

Analytical Method

Data analysis followed a systematic procedure grounded in the linguistic landscape framework proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997). The analytical process involved five interrelated stages. First, all textual elements appearing on the protest posters were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and consistency. Second, each poster was classified according to its language use as monolingual Indonesian, monolingual English, or bilingual Indonesian–English, allowing language choice to be examined as a key dimension of the protest’s linguistic landscape. Third, the data were qualitatively coded to identify recurring themes related to social identity, ideological orientation, and power relations through an iterative process of close reading and cross-poster comparison. Fourth, a functional analysis was conducted to examine how the posters operate at both informational and symbolic levels, particularly in conveying political messages and constructing collective meanings. Finally, selected posters were analyzed in depth to illustrate dominant linguistic patterns and ideological tendencies observed across the dataset. Overall, the analysis is both descriptive and interpretive, seeking to explain how meanings are constructed and negotiated through protest posters in digital spaces while remaining firmly grounded in the empirical data.

Methodological Limitations

This study focuses on a single social media platform *X* and one hashtag *#KawalPutusanMK*, which may not capture the full range of protest posters circulated through other platforms or offline settings. However, *X* was selected due to its central role in political communication and real-time protest documentation in Indonesia. These limitations are acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of the findings.

3. Result and Discussion

The protest posters analyzed in this study reveal how language is commonly used as a tool of resistance and as a channel for expressing public concern over the RUU Pilkada issue. Most of the posters rely on short, clear, and direct messages that are easy to read and quickly understood, particularly within protest contexts. These messages often employ strong wording, rhetorical questions, and expressive language to convey dissatisfaction, provoke reflection, and signal disagreement with the prevailing political conditions. Indonesian is predominantly used to address local audiences and to communicate shared concerns about national political developments, while English and bilingual combinations are strategically employed to enhance visibility and circulation, especially in digital spaces. Beyond voicing criticism, the posters also reflect how protesters construct themselves as active citizens who are committed to democratic values, political fairness, and the accountability of those in power; thereby using language not only to oppose authority but also to assert collective identity and civic engagement.

Table 1. Linguistic Characteristics of Protest Posters in the RUU Pilkada Demonstrations.

Language Category	Frequency	Percentage
Monolingual English	9	23.68%
Monolingual Indonesian	26	68.42%
Bilingual	3	7.89%
Total	38	100.0%

Language choice emerges as a key communicative strategy. As summarized in Table 1, monolingual Indonesian posters dominate the dataset (68.42%), followed by monolingual English posters (23.68%) and bilingual Indonesian–English posters (7.89%). This distribution suggests that while the primary audience of the protests remains domestic, protesters also consciously engage broader audiences through English and language mixing, particularly in online contexts.

Table 2. Distribution of Protest Posters by Analytical Dimension.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Power relation	16	42.1%
Social identities	6	15.8%
Ideological orientation	16	42.1%
Total	38	100.0%

Table 2 further shows that themes related to power relations and ideological orientation are equally prominent (each 42.1%), indicating that protest discourse is largely centered on challenging authority, exposing elite dominance, and articulating democratic values, rather than merely expressing group identity. Together, these distributions provide an overview of how protest language is structured and what concerns dominate the discourse, serving as a foundation for the qualitative analyses that follow.

Monolingual Indonesian Language

Monolingual Indonesian posters constitute the largest portion of the dataset, suggesting that the protests were primarily directed toward local audiences and embedded within domestic political discourse. The predominance of Indonesian represents a deliberate strategy to ensure accessibility and immediate comprehension among protest participants and the wider public within the national context. Most posters use short and direct sentences that are visually effective in crowded protest settings and draw on familiar civic and political

vocabulary to present the RUU Pilkada as a shared collective concern rather than a narrowly legal issue. Linguistic strategies such as rhetorical questions, imperatives, and contrastive phrasing are frequently employed to encourage reflection, foster solidarity, and intensify criticism of political authority. The use of informal expressions further strengthens interpersonal closeness, positioning the messages as authentic expressions of ordinary citizens rather than statements from institutional or elite actors. From this category, two posters were selected for closer analysis because they clearly illustrate recurring linguistic and ideological patterns in the monolingual Indonesian data, particularly in articulating democratic anxiety and redefining the relationship between citizens and the state.



Figure 1. <https://x.com/motion975fm/status/1826886765988512149?s=46>



Figure 2. <https://x.com/anandabadudu/status/1826550838640476300?s=46>

Figure 1. “Demokrasi Dibungkam, Merdeka Kah Kita?” (“Democracy is Silenced, Are We Free?”)

This poster expresses a shared sense of unease about the perceived erosion of democratic values. The phrase “*Demokrasi Dibungkam*” presents democracy as an entity that has been deliberately silenced, implying active intervention by those in power and signaling a departure from democratic norms. The following rhetorical question, “*Merdeka Kah Kita?*”, shifts the message from a simple expression of dissatisfaction to an invitation for collective self-reflection. Rather than making a direct accusation, the question encourages citizens to reconsider their political situation and reassess the meaning of freedom in the current context. By invoking concepts closely tied to Indonesia’s historical struggle for independence, the poster situates contemporary protest within a broader national narrative of resistance, incomplete democratization, and civic responsibility. From a linguistic landscape perspective, the poster performs an informational function by openly criticizing political developments while simultaneously fulfilling a symbolic function through the reinforcement of shared national identity and democratic ideals via the use of Indonesian.

Figure 2. “Mendidik rakyat dengan pergerakan, mendidik penguasa dengan perlawanan” (“Educating the people through movement, educating the rulers through resistance”)

This poster presents protest as a purposeful and constructive political act rather than an impulsive reaction. The parallel structure and repetition of the word “*mendidik*” frame political struggle as an ongoing process of learning and awareness. The first clause emphasizes “*pergerakan*” as a collective effort through which citizens develop political consciousness and mutual solidarity. The second clause introduces “*perlawanan*” as a necessary means of addressing power, implying that resistance functions as a form of accountability when institutional mechanisms fall short. This linguistic structure clarifies power relations by positioning citizens as active agents while depicting authority as subject to challenge and correction. The handwritten form of the poster reinforces its grassroots character, visually aligning the message with ordinary citizens and enhancing its symbolic opposition to institutional power.

Monolingual English Language

Monolingual English posters occur less frequently in the dataset, yet they play a significant strategic role in extending the reach of protest messages beyond the national context, particularly through circulation on digital platforms. The use of English enables the issues surrounding the RUU Pilkada to be framed in terms that resonate with transnational audiences and global discourses on democracy and human rights. These posters tend to adopt short, slogan-like formulations with a strong evaluative tone, relying on widely recognizable political vocabulary to present local political concerns as part of broader, globally relevant struggles. Two posters from this category were selected for closer analysis because they exemplify dominant linguistic strategies within the English data: one foregrounds themes of democracy and freedom, while the other challenges political rebranding by assigning a clear ideological label that delegitimizes the actors in question.



Figure 3. <https://x.com/motion975fm/status/1826886765988512149?s=46>



Figure 4. <https://x.com/anandabadudu/status/1826550838640476300?s=46>

Figure 3. “Indonesian Democracy in Crisis, Are We Free?”

This poster frames the political situation in Indonesia as a democratic emergency

by using globally familiar language associated with political instability and rights violations. The phrase “Indonesian Democracy in Crisis” constructs the situation as urgent and systemic rather than incidental, suggesting that democratic institutions themselves are under threat. The following question, “Are we free?”, invites readers to question the reality of political freedom under current conditions. By presenting the message in English, the poster creates a communicative space that is accessible to international audiences, including foreign media, observers, and transnational activist networks. From a linguistic landscape perspective, the poster fulfills an informational function by explicitly naming the crisis and a symbolic function by positioning Indonesian protesters within a global community concerned with democratic decline. The use of English thus strengthens the power of the message by subjecting domestic political authority to broader moral and ideological evaluation.

Figure 4. “NEW FACE OLD FASCIST”

This poster employs a short and confrontational phrase to express skepticism toward political rebranding. The contrast between “new face” and “old fascist” suggests that superficial changes in leadership or appearance do not necessarily signal meaningful ideological transformation. The term “fascist” functions as a deliberately strong ideological label, invoking historical associations with authoritarianism, repression, and violence. By using this label, the poster delegitimizes the targeted political actor and rejects any attempt to normalize or soften authoritarian practices through image management. The minimal wording and bold visual presentation enhance the message’s impact, presenting the protest stance as definitive and uncompromising. In terms of power relations, the poster reverses symbolic authority by denying legitimacy to those in power and asserting the right of citizens to define political truth through public language.

Bilingual Language

Bilingual Indonesian–English posters are the smallest group in the dataset, but they are highly strategic because they combine global readability with local political meaning. Across these posters, English is often used to introduce a familiar public phrase or authoritative sounding statement, while Indonesian delivers the sharper local punch through slang, sarcasm, or culturally loaded words. This mixing creates contrast and irony, making the message more memorable and easier to circulate online while still staying grounded in Indonesian protest discourse. The two posters selected for deeper analysis represent these common bilingual strategies, one using satire and moral evaluation to criticize oligarchy and dynastic power, and the other combining a formal political warning in English with a direct sarcastic address in Indonesian.



Figure 5. <https://x.com/timpenguinnas/status/status/1826917231143628918?s=46>



Figure 6. <https://x.com/motion975fm/status/1826886765988512149?s=46>

Figure 5. “Happy Family / Keluarga Oligarki / Halal dibasmi” (“Happy Family / Oligarchic Family :) / Legitimate to be eradicated”)

This poster constructs its critique through a deliberate tension between visual presentation and political meaning. The English phrase “Happy Family,” accompanied by a simple family illustration, initially evokes harmony, innocence, and social normalcy. This interpretation is disrupted by the Indonesian phrase “*Keluarga Oligarki*,” which reframes the image as a satirical representation of political dynasties and elite domination. The emoticon intensifies the irony by mimicking cheerful messaging while exposing what is framed as a morally unacceptable political reality. The final phrase, “*Halal dibasmi*,” delivers the strongest evaluative judgment in the poster, positioning oligarchy as something that must be firmly rejected. Linguistically, this phrase functions as an explicit moral stance rather than a literal call to action, expressing deep frustration toward entrenched power structures. The hashtag #KawalPutusanMK situates the poster within a broader collective movement, reinforcing its role as part of organized resistance rather than an isolated expression of dissent.

From a linguistic landscape standpoint, this poster illustrates how bilingualism enhances both informational and symbolic functions. It communicates a clear political critique while simultaneously transforming public and digital space into a site of moral evaluation and resistance against elite authority.

Figure 6. “Soeharto aja keder! #WeDeserveBetter”

(“Even Soeharto would be intimidated! #WeDeserveBetter”).”))

This poster combines historical reference and evaluative exaggeration to

critique contemporary political power. The Indonesian phrase “Soeharto aja keder!” invokes the figure of Soeharto, a former authoritarian leader closely associated with repression and centralized control. By suggesting that even Soeharto would feel intimidated, the poster draws on collective historical memory to intensify its critique, implying that current political developments are perceived as deeply alarming and potentially reminiscent of authoritarian pasts. The informal wording “aja keder” reinforces the grassroots character of the message and strengthens its emotional resonance among local audiences familiar with Indonesia’s political history.

The English hashtag “#WeDeserveBetter” extends the message into digital and transnational spaces. As a globally recognizable protest phrase, it signals moral entitlement to democratic governance and political accountability. Symbolically, the hashtag increases the poster’s visibility online and aligns local protest discourse with broader global movements that challenge political injustice. Within the linguistic landscape framework, the poster performs an informational function by articulating dissatisfaction with political authority and a symbolic function by asserting collective identity and resistance through language mixing, historical comparison, and strategic occupation of both physical and digital spaces.

Although this study focuses on six posters for detailed qualitative analysis, the remaining posters in the dataset display consistent linguistic, ideological, and rhetorical patterns. These additional examples strengthen the validity of the identified protest strategies and demonstrate that the analyzed posters are representative of broader trends within the dataset.

One example is the slogan “Make Nepotism Fall Again,” which explicitly challenges favoritism and family-based political power. Nepotism refers to the practice of granting special treatment or advantages to family members or close relatives in order to secure or maintain positions of power (Jaskiewicz, Uhlenbruck, Balkin, & Reay, 2013). The poster draws on this established definition and reformulates it into a globally familiar slogan structure, transforming a complex political critique into a concise and accessible message. This linguistic strategy allows the critique to be quickly understood while increasing its potential circulation in digital protest spaces. Similarly, the poster “Rotten to the Core” uses moral decay imagery to frame corruption as systemic rather than incidental. By portraying political corruption as deeply embedded within the system, the message explains heightened public distrust toward political leadership and constructs corruption as a fundamental threat to democratic legitimacy.

Another notable example, “We need to bring back Guillotine to Corrupt Politicians,” employs the guillotine as a historical symbol associated with the French Revolution. Rather than functioning as a literal call for violence, the guillotine operates metaphorically to express public anger and to demand accountability from those in power. This symbolic reference intensifies the emotional force of the message while remaining within the boundaries of protest

rhetoric. Consistent with this pattern, Baranova (2024) and Tsiplakou (2022) note that protest posters frequently rely on metaphor, irony, humor, intertextuality, and strong evaluative language to challenge authority and contest political legitimacy in public spaces.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that protest posters during the RUU Pilkada demonstrations function as a powerful communicative tool for expressing political criticism in both physical and digital spaces. Using the Linguistic Landscape framework, the findings show that these posters serve an informational role by conveying concerns about nepotism, political dynasties, corruption, and democratic decline, while also performing a symbolic role in constructing collective identities, expressing ideological positions, and challenging power structures. The predominance of Indonesian in the posters highlights its effectiveness in engaging local audiences and reinforcing a shared political identity. In contrast, English and bilingual posters are used strategically to frame domestic political issues in ways that resonate with global audiences, increasing visibility and circulation online. The frequent use of irony, metaphor, satire, and intertextual references demonstrates how protesters position themselves as politically aware and morally engaged citizens. Although this study focuses on a single hashtag and protest context, the findings underscore the broader significance of temporary protest posters as deliberate, strategic, and socially meaningful texts in contemporary political activism. Future research could expand on this by examining multiple movements, diverse platforms, and audience interpretations to better understand how protest language shapes public discourse, civic engagement, and the negotiation of power across different sociopolitical contexts.

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