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From Pop Culture to Political Symbols: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue in Indonesia

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Abstract: *In August 2025, Indonesia witnessed one of the largest protest waves in its history, sparked by public anger over elite privilege, detrimental policies, and government inaction. Amid this upheaval, three colors: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue emerged as a symbolic repertoire that unified diverse demands. This article employs a qualitative case study that integrates semiotic analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and theories of soft power and people power. It asks: How did this color-based symbolic repertoire function to challenge state power and construct a new political reality? The analysis reveals that these colors were not incidental but were consciously deployed to build a counter-discourse. Brave Pink embodied women's civil courage, Hero Green signaled solidarity and collective mourning for the working class, while Resistance Blue revived historical democratic struggle. By synthesizing the attractive force of soft power with the mobilizing energy of people power, this repertoire forged new cross-class political identities and expanded the protest arena into the digital sphere. Crucially, the aesthetic softness of Brave Pink and Hero Green did not dilute political confrontation but instead operated as its precondition, transforming moral attraction and collective empathy into the coercive pressure embodied by Resistance Blue, where legitimacy hardened into organized defiance and direct political demand. The study concludes that this phenomenon illustrates how a simple, shared visual language can dismantle official narratives and construct an alternative "regime of truth" grounded in empathy and justice, marking a significant evolution in the grammar of political contestation.*

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INTRODUCTION

Social movements in Indonesia have long existed and demonstrated the capacity of society to create political change through collective mobilization. For example, the 1998 reform movement was sparked not only by the economic crisis but also by the accumulation of public dissatisfaction with authoritarian practices, leading to massive demonstrations by students and civil society. Two decades later, the 2019 protests over a draft bill demonstrated how visual symbols, slogans, and digital narratives can consolidate diverse groups with divergent goals into a single resistance movement. As DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2020) explain, visual political symbols act as "mobilizing images" that

condense complex grievances into simple, emotionally charged cues that enable rapid alignment across diverse social groups. This phenomenon demonstrates that symbols are not merely ornaments but are part of a political instrument with mobilizing power.

In August and September 2025, Indonesia experienced another wave of protests, explicitly stated as one of the largest and most significant mass mobilizations since the Reformasi movement in 1998. This wave arose from the accumulation of public disappointment with officials/elites, government policies deemed unpro-people, and the government's failure to respond to the cost-of-living crisis that was pressuring the wider community. In this tense situation, three color symbols emerged that became visual markers of the movement: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue.

The emergence of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue was triggered by a convergence of contentious policy developments and governance crises in mid-2025, including the passage of austerity-oriented economic regulations, revisions to labor and digital economy protections perceived as favoring corporate interests, and the government's failure to mitigate escalating food, fuel, and housing prices. These policy shifts were accompanied by high-profile corruption scandals involving political elites and a securitized response to public criticism, which intensified perceptions of democratic backsliding and elite detachment from everyday struggles. As formal channels of representation appeared increasingly unresponsive, civil society actors, online communities, and diaspora networks turned to symbolic expression to articulate urgency and dissent, allowing color-based symbols to rapidly crystallize shared grievances and moral claims across fragmented social groups.

Although not designed as a unified symbolic framework at the outset, the three colors gradually coalesced into a shared symbolic repertoire through strategic amplification and circulation by civil society actors, digital activists, and diaspora networks. This repertoire functioned as an emotional and visual bridge that transcended previously fragmented social boundaries, enabling women, working-class groups, and pro-democracy activists to converge into a new cross-class political identity.

Brave Pink emerged as a representation of women's civic courage; Hero Green emphasized the solidarity of digital economy workers and symbolized collective grief, while Resistance Blue emerged to revive the historical memory of the struggle for democracy in Indonesia. Together, these three colors suddenly formed a repertoire that brought together various interests and social identities in a single protest space.

Papacharissi (2015) argues that digital platforms cultivate "affective publics," where emotions circulate through images and colors, shaping political meaning-making and strengthening symbolic repertoires in online mobilizations. Despite this significance, existing studies on soft power and protest movements remain predominantly state-centric, often neglecting the agency of non-state actors and the role of symbolic repertoires, particularly in the Southeast Asian context.

This study, therefore, aims to analyze how Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue functioned as symbolic repertoires of protest domestically. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1.Analyze how the symbolic repertoire of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue operated as a form of soft power by generating emotional appeal, cultural resonance, and moral legitimacy within the 2025 Indonesian protest movement.

2. Examine how the integration of this color-based symbolic repertoire with mechanisms of people power facilitated mass mobilization and the formation of new cross-class political identities during the 2025 Indonesian protests.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous literature on symbolism in social movements has shown that visual signs play a significant role in strengthening solidarity and expanding resonance. Tilly and Tarrow (2015) emphasize the importance of contestation repertoires as a form of cultural tool that enables collective mobilization. Building on this, this study analyzes the symbolic repertoire of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue not just as static signs, but as dynamic tools for identity formation and power contestation. This dynamic character becomes especially salient in digitally mediated environments, where symbols circulate rapidly and acquire emotional meaning through public interaction rather than centralized coordination.

Existing studies on color symbolism in social movements, both globally and within Indonesia, have demonstrated that colors often function as powerful markers of collective identity and political visibility. Research on movements such as the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Arab Spring, and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong illustrates how color operates as a unifying visual shorthand that enhances emotional resonance and public recognition (Gerbaudo, 2012; Jasper, 2014). Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics further explains that in networked media environments, political engagement is increasingly organized through shared emotions that circulate via images, hashtags, and visual aesthetics rather than through formal ideology alone. In the Indonesian context, however, the Reformasi movement of 1998 relied predominantly on verbal slogans, student identity, and moral narratives of resistance, with color symbolism playing a marginal and largely unstructured role. Similarly, the 2019 protests showed an increased reliance on digital visuals and political memes, yet color functioned mainly as an issue-specific marker rather than as an integrated symbolic repertoire capable of bridging social cleavages.

In contrast, the 2025 protests marked a significant departure from these earlier patterns: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue operated as a consciously circulated and emotionally layered color repertoire that articulated gendered courage, labor solidarity, and historical memory simultaneously. Through social media platforms, these colors became affective cues that amplified collective emotions particularly anger toward political elites and grief over economic precarity, transforming individual sentiments into shared public moods. This study therefore contributes a novel perspective by demonstrating that color symbolism in 2025 Indonesia functioned not merely as an aesthetic or identificatory device, but as a dynamic repertoire that actively synthesized grassroots soft power and people power to produce a new cross-class political identity within an affective public sustained by digital circulation and emotional alignment.

To analyze how these symbols operate, this research constructs an integrated framework that unites three core concepts: the adaptation of soft power at the grassroots level, the mobilization of people power, and the formation of a cross-class political identity. This framework is further informed by the concept of affective publics, which explains how emotional expression and symbolic communication on social media intensify these processes.

First, this research adapts Joseph Nye's (2004) concept of soft power, traditionally understood as a state's ability to influence through attraction to the level of social movements. We argue that non-state actors can generate their own 'grassroots soft power'. This is achieved using symbols that project compelling universal values like justice, empathy, and courage, creating an attraction and moral legitimacy that becomes their initial source of power. Within affective publics, this attraction is amplified as emotions attached to symbols, such as anger at injustice or grief over social loss are continuously circulated, reinterpreted, and reinforced through digital visual practices.

Second, this attractive force then serves as a catalyst for people power. Drawing on social mobilization theories (Castells, 2012; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), people power is defined as the capacity of networked citizens to create political change through collective action and solidarity. In this framework, grassroots soft power is the 'pull factor' (the moral attraction), while people power is the 'push factor' (the drive to mobilize) that transforms sympathy into concrete action. Affective publics function as the emotional infrastructure of this transformation, enabling feelings of anger and grief to shift from personal affect into collective motivation for participation and protest.

Finally, the successful synthesis of soft power and people power facilitates the creation of a cross-class political identity. This is a collective identity that transcends traditional social cleavages such as economic class, gender, profession, or formal political affiliation. This identity is not built on rigid ideologies but on a foundation of shared emotions and a common visual language, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to see themselves as part of a single, unified struggle. Color aesthetics play a crucial role here by offering a visually accessible and emotionally resonant language through which affective publics recognize themselves as political subjects.

Thus, this integrated framework provides the analytical foundation for understanding how the 2025 Indonesian protest symbols operated as two things at once: as attractors of moral legitimacy (soft power) and as engines of mass mobilization (people power). By situating these processes within affective publics, this approach clarifies how digitally amplified emotions especially anger and grief were transformed into visual solidarity and sustained collective action. This approach allows us to analyze how that process ultimately gave birth to a new, unified political subject capable of challenging dominant power structures through visual and emotional solidarity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research introduces a novel perspective by examining the rise of three distinct colors that concurrently signify a symbolic repertoire of protest in Indonesia and connecting it to the global impact that was generated. The study utilizes a qualitative case study approach, facilitating a thorough analysis of the 2025 protest wave as a defined case linking local mobilization to global spread (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure methodological clarity, this research constructs a concrete data corpus consisting of: (a) approximately *6 social media materials* including posters and digital artwork that explicitly represent Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue; and 1 leading Indonesian media. These are selected through purposive sampling to represent the most widely circulated, cited, and symbolically influential materials. These materials are selected through purposive sampling to represent the most widely circulated, publicly discussed, and symbolically influential references during the protest period. The intention of this study is not to produce statistical generalization, but to conduct an in-depth

interpretive reading of key symbolic artefacts that were central in shaping public meaning. Therefore, a focused and highly curated corpus allows the research to capture the core narrative, emotional resonance, and discursive power of the symbols more precisely, consistent with qualitative case study logic and visual discourse scholarship.

The data analyzed using a framework that integrates semiotic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Semiotics used to deconstruct the symbolic meanings of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue. This involves analyzing both their denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative analysis will identify the literal or dictionary meaning of each color. The connotative analysis will then explore the layered, socio-cultural, and political associations that these colors acquired during the protests, treating them as signs produced and circulated within specific contexts (Barthes, 1977). After the semiotic mapping is completed, the analysis then transitions technically into discourse analysis by (1) recontextualizing the symbolic meanings into narrative texts found in news media and public commentary; (2) examining who produces the meanings, how the meanings are framed, and which actors attempt to legitimize or delegitimize them; and (3) identifying how these colors function as instruments of symbolic power in shaping legitimacy, resistance, and public perception. Within this stage, the research explicitly analyzes power relations embedded in both textual and visual narratives by applying a critical perspective informed by Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge and governmentality. Power is examined as a relational and discursive process that operates through language, framing, and symbolic representation rather than as a solely coercive mechanism (Foucault, 1980). Linguistic features such as evaluative labels, modality, attribution patterns, and visual framing are analyzed to identify which actors are positioned as legitimate authorities, moral arbiters, or disruptive subjects, and how certain interpretations are normalized while others are marginalized (van Dijk, 2008).

Concurrently, critical discourse analysis will be applied to examine how these symbols are framed within the narratives of news media and social media content, revealing the underlying power dynamics and ideological positions being communicated (Fairclough, 2013). The analysis also pays particular attention to discursive attempts at disciplining and counter-narrative construction by state authorities and allied institutional actors. These attempts are identified through strategies of depoliticization, moralization, and securitization, which frame protest symbols as issues of public order, emotional excess, or threats to national stability rather than expressions of political dissent (Foucault, 1977; Huysmans, 2011). At the same time, the study captures counter-hegemonic responses articulated by activists and civil society actors who reclaim Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue through irony, repetition, and transnational framing that invokes universal norms such as democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. This dynamic highlight the contested nature of symbolic power and reflects a Gramscian understanding of hegemony as an ongoing struggle within the discursive arena (Gramsci, 1971; van Leeuwen, 2008).

This dual method will ultimately broaden the examination of contestation politics by linking it to theories of transnationalism, soft power, and norm diffusion within the realm of international relations. Validity is ensured through triangulation by cross-checking meanings across different data types (social media posts, journalistic narratives, and diaspora records), ensuring that interpretations are not based on a single text source but supported by multiple converging discourses. To guarantee validity and reliability, the

research employs triangulation by verifying accounts from social media, local reports, and global media, thus minimizing bias and enhancing the strength of conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To analyze the meaning of political symbols in brave pink, hero green, and resistance blue, researchers used Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. In this semiotic analysis, Barthes emphasizes three core elements: denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. The first level of meaning is called denotative, and the second level is called connotative (Wibisono & Sari, 2021). Denotative reveals the meaning that is clearly visible, meaning that denotative meaning is the actual meaning, while connotative or second-level meaning reveals the meaning contained in the signs (Gunawan & Junaidi, 2020). Unlike myths, which exist and develop in the minds of the community due to the social or cultural influence of the community itself on something, by paying attention to and interpreting the correlation between what is visible or denotative, and the signs implied by the connotation.

After conducting a semiotic analysis, the researcher used Foucault's critical discourse analysis to explore how symbols are used in public narratives or the media to shape political opinion and identity. It was also used to examine how these meanings are formed, disseminated, and used in political discourse and the media. After that, Joseph S. Nye's soft power synthesis is used to assess how the power of these symbols produces cultural and political influence without coercion. After that, people power analysis is carried out, using social mobilization theory (Castells, Tilly) to see how these pop symbols drive public participation and political solidarity.

At this stage, the result is not merely a description of what each color "means", but an understanding of how meanings became political power. The colors function as symbolic infrastructures that convert attraction (soft power) into mobilization (people power), thus bridging emotion, identity, and political action in a coherent chain of influence. In doing so, the symbols move beyond semiotic objects and operate as performative political technologies that shape conduct, perception, and collective agency.

1. Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis

Since August–September 2025, Indonesia has witnessed the emergence of new color symbols in public and digital spaces, namely Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue. These colors emerged from specific moments: a woman wearing a pink headscarf standing up to the police; the death of online motorcycle taxi driver Affan Kurniawan, who wore a green jacket; and the color blue used in the "emergency warning" movement and other protests as a symbol of defiance against authoritarianism. These colors spread rapidly on social media: profile filters, graphic posts, posters, and merchandise. This movement is not merely pop aesthetics: they have become tools of collective representation and public mobilization at a time of increasing distrust of political institutions.

Researchers collected social media materials such as posters, memes, and digital artwork shared during the protests, as well as coverage from global news organizations and records of diaspora activism, including demonstrations and initiatives overseas.

1.1 Brave Pink

Figure 1. A Woman Wearing a Pink Headscarf at a Demonstration
Source: @menjadimanusia.id Instagram account

The denotative or literal meaning in the image is the bright pink color of the woman's hijab (Ibu Ana) seen at the August 28 protest, standing facing a line of police. The color pink is often associated with femininity, gentleness, and love.

Then the connotative or cultural meaning is the courage of individuals who are considered gentle but able to withstand pressure, who have empathy, and non-violent resistance. As a representation of women as a symbol of public morality who have a sense of protection towards the vulnerable. The color pink, which is traditionally associated with gentleness or femininity, is then reclaimed to show that gentleness can also mean resistance.

Jasper (2018) emphasizes that protest symbols gain political strength when they translate personal emotions such as fear, empathy, or righteous anger into shared motivations for collective action, which is evident in the rise of Brave Pink. The myth or ideological or political narrative is that the pink color has changed from a symbol of femininity and beauty to a symbol of strong morality, as a myth that ordinary people have power, that courage lies in those who are silent but forced to speak. Brave Pink becomes a myth that resistance can come from ordinary people, not political figures or militants.

As written (Young & Popovski, 2024) in Signifying Dissent: The Sensory Semiotics of Protest, color and the human body in the context of protest create "sensory signs" that build affective solidarity, connecting individual experiences with collective consciousness. In the Indonesian context, Brave Pink became a signifier of conscience, a symbol of the people's conscience. On social media, the hashtag #BravePink peaked as a national trend, transforming individual photos into political icons that spread across social classes. Her actions inspired the public to adopt the color pink as a symbol of social activism, voicing injustice and resistance against tyranny. This can be seen from various posts on social media, as follows:

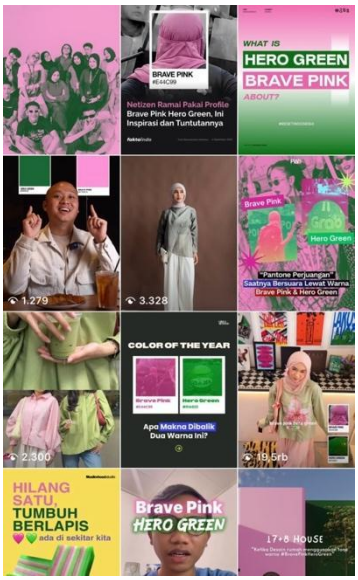

Figure 2. Various Posts by Netizens on Instagram Using Brave Pink Tones
Source: Instagram

Figure 3. Satirical Poster Targeting Corruptors
Source: Instagram

Figure 4. Artist Using a Profile Photo with A Brave Pink Hero Green Theme
Source: @sherinamunaf Instagram account

Beyond its symbolic strength, Brave Pink demonstrates how emotion-driven attraction generates political legitimacy, echoing Nye's proposition that legitimacy stems from moral resonance. Pink mobilizes empathy rather than fear, signaling what Gill (2018) terms "affective empowerment," where individuals feel morally compelled to participate. This is where soft power transitions into people power: the symbol not only attracts but obligates action through shared moral consciousness. The popular appropriation of #BravePink therefore illustrates how aesthetic softness can become political hardness, reshaping agency especially among groups traditionally perceived as apolitical, such as mothers, workers, and everyday citizens.

1.2 Hero Green

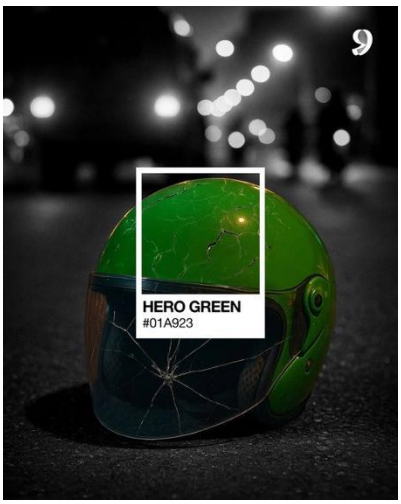

Figure 5. Helm Affan, A Green Motorcycle Taxi Driver as A Symbol of a Hero
Source: @menjadimanusia.id Instagram account

The denotative meaning is the green color of the jacket or attributes of an online motorcycle taxi driver worn by Affan Kurniawan, helmet, delivery jacket, or work identity. In late September 2025, a quiet tragedy unfolded amid the chaos of a street protest in Jakarta. Affan Kurniawan, a ride-hailing driver wearing his familiar green jacket, was fatally struck by a police vehicle while trying to cross the road through a mass demonstration. He was neither a political figure nor an activist, simply a worker caught between the machinery of state power and the struggles of ordinary life. The image of his green jacket, once a marker of urban labor, became a haunting reminder of how vulnerability and dignity coexist in the lives of the working class.

The connotative meaning is worker solidarity, the working class, poverty, death as a catalyst for justice, the representation that ordinary work and hard work have value, the identity of workers as political subjects, and a sense of loss and anger that is then transformed into a heroic symbol.

Then the myth is that "unseen hard work" becomes a source of aspiration. Hero Green is a myth that ordinary people who work and even those who do not sing on the podium have dignity and that death must not be forgotten, a narrative of justice and respect for lost souls.

Rifka Sibarani (2023) in the Journal of Communication Science asserts that color in Indonesian politics is not neutral; it "becomes an ideological arena where the people negotiate the meaning of struggle." Hero Green expands on that concept: from the color of a party to the color of worker solidarity (Sibarani, 2023).

In the days that followed, Affan's death transformed into a powerful cultural symbol. The color green, once associated with mobility and service, evolved into a sign of resistance and remembrance. Across social media, candles, flowers, and digital art circulated under the banner *Hero Green*, turning personal grief into a collective moral awakening. Through this transformation, Affan's story revealed not only the fragility of human life under structural violence but also the profound capacity of people to turn loss into solidarity to speak truth through color when words no longer suffice.

Hero Green further demonstrates how tragedy is transformed into collective moral force. The color becomes what Butler (2009) calls "grievable life" the recognition that certain deaths demand public response. The emotional appeal embedded in grief strengthens solidarity while enabling what Castells (2012) frames as "networked indignation," where outrage travels across platforms as a mobilizing narrative. In this sense, Hero Green acts as soft power grounded in mourning, but evolves into people power as grief crystallizes into protest demands, vigils, fundraising, and political advocacy.

At the same time, Hero Green challenges the class invisibility of workers. It democratizes heroism by relocating moral virtue from elites to ordinary laborers. This symbolic relocation produces discursive power: it reframes who counts as "the people," expanding the moral constituency of protest and strengthening its legitimacy across social strata.

1.3 Resistance Blue

Figure 6. "Peringatan Darurat as Indonesian Protest Symbol Against a Legal Revision Considered to Weaken Democracy
Source: @vivamd Instagram account

The denotative meaning of the "Resistance Blue" symbol refers to its literal and observable components. This includes the image of the Indonesian national emblem, the

Garuda Pancasila, set against a solid dark blue background. Also present is the explicit text *Peringatan Darurat* (Emergency Warning), a direct linguistic signifier that gained traction on social media following a standoff between the Indonesian House of Representatives and the Constitutional Court. The accompanying text further clarifies that the symbol was introduced in August 2024 as a protest against a legal revision perceived to undermine democracy. Denotatively, it is simply a graphic combining national iconography with specific text on a colored field.

The connotative meaning encompasses the rich layer of socio-cultural and political associations these elements evoke, drawing power from a deep-seated history of civic resistance in Indonesia. According to analysts, colors in protest movements serve to "construct intangible struggles by transforming what is invisible like anger, grief, solidarity, and hope into visible and evocative symbols". In this case, using the national Garuda symbol is a powerful connotative act, re-appropriating patriotism to suggest that the people are the true defenders of democracy.

The choice of dark blue creates a "people versus elite" narrative by contrasting with the colors of established political coalitions, signifying a grassroots movement against the abuse of power. This is amplified by the phrase *Peringatan Darurat*, which connotes an immediate crisis that demands an urgent response.

The mythical meaning elevates Resistance Blue beyond its immediate protest context, embedding it within a longer ideological narrative of Indonesian democracy. Rather than functioning merely as a contemporary sign of dissent, Resistance Blue operates as a political myth that condenses historical memory, civic morality, and democratic vigilance into a single visual form. Resistance Blue resonates with Indonesia's historical memory of civic resistance, particularly in relation to the student-led Reformasi movement of 1998, which is widely recognized as a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic transition (Indonesia's 1998 reform movement; Rustamana et al., 2023). During Reformasi, students and civil society mobilized in unprecedented numbers to challenge authoritarian rule, ultimately contributing to the resignation of President Soeharto and opening a space for democratic reform (Rustamana et al., 2023; Trisakti shootings, 1998). Although that movement did not foreground a single color as its unifying symbol, it cultivated a cultural legacy in which visual markers of resistance (posters, banners, emblems) became enduring tools for collective identity and democratic critique, an enduring practice for later generations of activists.

In the contemporary context, Resistance Blue diverges from its Reformasi antecedents by explicitly linking color imagery with political critique. The blue color in the 2024–2025 protest wave has been widely reported as a symbol of resistance against perceived democratic erosion, particularly around debates over constitutional revisions and responses to political decisions thought to undermine democratic norms (e.g., the "Emergency Warning" visual campaigns). This reactivation of blue transforms it from an institutional or procedural sign associated with formal politics into a popular signifier of democratic engagement and accountability. In doing so, Resistance Blue collapses temporal distance by reconnecting present-day resistance with the ethos of Reformasi-era activism, but with a distinctly digital and participatory modality that draws on social media and grassroots networks rather than solely on street mobilization. As a result, Resistance Blue functions not only as a sign of dissent but as a temporal bridge linking Indonesia's democratic past with its contested present, signifying that democracy remains an ongoing, negotiated project rather than a closed institutional achievement.

The emergence of this symbolic trio illustrates a key function of protest visuals. Colors can be used to signal a person's political identity, motivate resistance across large groups, and construct intangible struggles by transforming what is invisible like anger, grief, solidarity, and hope into visible and evocative symbols. In this movement, Brave Pink, inspired by the mother who faced down police, visibly manifested the "invisible" emotion of civil courage. Hero Green, honoring a fallen motorcycle taxi driver, transformed collective "grief" into a powerful call for solidarity and justice. Resistance Blue then provided a symbol for direct political "anger" and uncompromising opposition to perceived authoritarianism.

In the months following its introduction, "Resistance Blue" did not stand alone but merged with "Brave Pink" and "Hero Green" to form a cohesive symbolic repertoire for the "17+8 People's Demands" movement. Together, they became what has been described as a "visual vocabulary of resistance". This color palette allowed individuals to signal their dissent across different platforms and social classes, often in a way that felt safer than direct verbal criticism under restrictive laws. The transformation of these three distinct colors into a unified movement identity reveals the profound capacity of a society to build solidarity and articulate complex political demands through a simple, shared, and deeply resonant visual language.

Resistance Blue functions as a "memory device," linking contemporary resistance to Indonesia's democratic struggles. By embedding the Garuda and national imagery, the symbol contests the state's monopoly over patriotism and reframes dissent as the true defense of the nation. This reflects Foucault's idea of "counter-conduct", citizens challenging imposed truths by producing alternative moral orders. Blue therefore synthesizes national identity and resistance, offering not simply opposition but a normative claim to represent true constitutionalism and democratic guardianship.

2. Foucault's Discourse Analysis

The massive protests that swept across Indonesia in 2025 were defined not just by what people said, but by what they showed. A powerful visual language emerged, with three colors: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue becoming the symbols of a new era of resistance. By looking at this movement through a Foucauldian lens, we can see that this color palette was more than just a matter of aesthetics; it was a dynamic space where power was challenged, political identities were reshaped, and social reality was profoundly renegotiated. Here is how this color symbols appear in public discourse and how power relations and political identities are produced through the use of symbols:

2.1 Discourse Production Situation

National and international media outlets have reported extensively on the powerful visual language that defined the 2025 Indonesian protests, with three colors: Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue emerging as key symbols. As reported by Antara News (Wicaksono, 2025), these colors flooded the digital space, representing solidarity and hope. Within the framework of the "17+8 People's Demands" discourse, these symbols became the visual identity of the public movement, as noted by Social EXpat (2025).

Figure 7. "17+8 Movement" as A Form of Public Confrontation Against the Government
(Source: Tirto.id)

Each color carried a distinct meaning rooted in the movement's narrative:

a. Brave Pink was inspired by the viral image of a woman named Ana who bravely confronted authorities, and it came to symbolize courage and empathy.
b. Hero Green honored Affan Kurniawan, a motorcycle taxi driver tragically killed during the unrest, representing solidarity with the working class and hope born from tragedy.
c. Resistance Blue completed the trifecta, re-emerging from earlier pro-democracy protests in 2024. Originally used to signal a "Democracy Emergency Warning," this dark blue came to signify widespread public opposition to perceived government overreach and the weakening of democratic institutions.

Together, this palette of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue created a unified and resonant visual language, transforming individual acts of courage and loss into a collective symbol of resistance and a call for profound political reform.

2.2 Power Relations and Normalization

According to Foucault, power is not exclusively held by a single entity, such as the state; rather, it is a diffuse network of relationships that circulates throughout society. Power operates through "discourse," accepted ways of thinking and speaking that produce knowledge and define what is considered "normal". The state exercises power by establishing a "regime of truth," a dominant discourse that frames its actions as legitimate and labels dissent as deviant, chaotic, or a threat to order.

The tension during the protests arose between this official discourse and the experiences of ordinary people, as represented by figures such as a mother and an online motorcycle taxi driver. Resistance, in a Foucauldian sense, emerges wherever power is exercised. The color symbols became the vehicle for this resistance, creating a counter-discourse that challenged the state's monopoly on truth. The movement's success lay in its ability to normalize a new set of values and narratives, directly opposing the state's framing.

Brave Pink: The state's discourse seeks to portray protesters as aggressive and irrational. Brave Pink, born from the image of Ibu Ana confronting the police, directly countered this by normalizing resistance as an act of moral courage and empathy. This symbol reclaimed the color pink from a sign of gentleness to one of tenacious, non-violent strength. This act subverted the power dynamic, creating a new "truth" where a mother's protective instinct is a legitimate form of political defiance. The narrative shifted from "protesters are a threat" to "mothers are not afraid," a sentiment much harder for the state to discredit.

Hero Green: The official discourse often renders victims of state action as anonymous statistics. Hero Green, honoring the slain driver Affan Kurniawan, resisted this by normalizing the idea that the life of an ordinary worker has immense political value. As reported by Wicaksono (2025) for Antara News, this color became a symbol of solidarity and hope. The movement created a powerful myth: "the unseen hard work" and "the victims must not be forgotten." By elevating a worker to a hero, the movement challenged the state's power to define who is worthy of remembrance and normalized the working class as central subjects in the fight for justice.

Resistance Blue: Governments often justify controversial policies by presenting them as "normal" and necessary for stability. Resistance Blue, by reviving the "Democracy Emergency" slogan, acted as a discursive tool to de-normalize these state actions (Wicaksono, 2025). It framed government policies not as normal governance but as a dangerous overreach that threatened democratic principles. This color normalized public vigilance and historical memory as essential tools of resistance, reminding citizens that opposition to authoritarian creep is a civic duty.

This dynamic aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, where competing narratives seek to define legitimate interpretations of social reality, allowing protest symbols to challenge the state's authority over political meaning. By deploying this symbolic repertoire, the movement did not just oppose the state with force but contested its very power to define reality. The colors enabled the public, through media and online networks, to establish an alternative "regime of truth" where the core values were not order and submission, but empathy, justice, and accountability.

2.3 Subject and Political Identities Produced

The movement's power lay in its ability to create political actors out of everyday people. The figures at the heart of the color symbols: a mother and a motorcycle taxi driver were not formal activists, but ordinary citizens caught in the struggle. This narrative inspired a broad coalition of individuals to see themselves as part of the resistance. The political identity that emerged was inclusive and diverse, bringing together:

a. Mothers and women, represented by Brave Pink, who embodied moral courage and non-violent resistance.
b. Urban workers, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and the working class, symbolized by Hero Green, which stood for solidarity and justice for the common person.
c. Digital youth and a new generation of activists who fluidly combined online and offline protest methods, using the colors as a unifying visual language.

This movement marked a significant shift away from traditional identity politics, which often revolves around formal political parties, religious affiliations, or established ideologies. Instead, the colors created an informal, public, and collective identity that was accessible to anyone. This new form of identity was:

a. Decentralized: It was not controlled by any single leader or organization. Anyone could "wear" the identity by adopting the colors, whether by changing a social media profile picture or wearing a colored ribbon.
b. Symbolic: The identity was built on shared emotions and values—empathy, courage, solidarity, and a demand for justice—rather than rigid political platforms.
c. Unifying: The colors provided a common banner under which diverse groups with different specific grievances could unite. This symbolic repertoire brought together various interests and social identities into a single protest space.

In addition to producing inclusive political subjects, the emergence of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue also raises the question of whether these symbols developed purely through organic, grassroots processes or were shaped by the intervention of intellectual actors and public figures as opinion leaders. Empirically, the initial formation of these symbols was largely bottom-up. They originated from unplanned, everyday encounters involving ordinary citizens a mother, a motorcycle taxi driver, and digitally networked protesters responding to perceived democratic threats. Their early circulation relied on horizontal sharing through social media, peer networks, and citizen-generated content rather than centralized political coordination.

Nevertheless, the consolidation of these symbols into a nationally recognizable political identity was accelerated by the participation of cultural figures, journalists, artists, academics, and digital influencers who adopted and reframed the colors in public discourse. Rather than acting as originators, these actors functioned as discursive amplifiers, stabilizing meanings and extending symbolic reach across class, generational, and transnational boundaries. In Foucauldian terms, power here operated through dispersed nodal points rather than hierarchical command. The legitimacy of the symbols remained grounded in their popular origins, while opinion leaders enhanced their visibility and interpretive coherence. This hybrid process underscores how contemporary political identities are produced through an interaction between grassroots affect and mediated amplification, enabling ordinary citizens to emerge as political subjects without surrendering symbolic ownership to elites.

2.4 Power, Determination of Reality, and Government Response

In the struggle to determine reality, the government's response to the Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue symbols highlighted a contested power dynamic. Authorities attempted to control the official discourse by framing the colors as provocative or divisive and threatening legal consequences.

However, this strategy largely backfired. As noted in analyses of the protests (e.g., Kurniawan, 2025), official criticism inadvertently provided the symbols with more publicity, amplifying their message to a wider audience. Furthermore, the movement's digital nature created a powerful resilience. Citizens who feared the risks of physical protest could still participate safely online by using color filters and profile photos. This decentralized form of expression proved impossible for authorities to completely suppress, demonstrating that while the state may control physical space, its power over the symbolic and digital realms is far more limited.

While the symbolic power of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue expanded rapidly, the Indonesian government and security apparatus did not remain passive observers. Instead, they actively engaged in a discursive battle to neutralize, reinterpret, and delegitimize these symbols. This aligns with Foucault's argument that wherever resistance emerges, power simultaneously reorganizes itself to maintain dominance through new truth claims.

Government responses emerged in multiple layers. First, through public communication strategies, state officials attempted to frame the protests as chaotic, politically motivated, and driven by misinformation rather than legitimate civic grievance. Presidential and ministerial statements emphasized stability, order, and "national responsibility," attempting to shift the moral high ground away from protesters toward the state (Kompas, 2025; BBC Indonesia, 2025).

Second, law-enforcement actions functioned as instruments of symbolic control. Reuters reported disciplinary and dismissal measures toward officers involved in violent incidents, including the case connected to Hero Green, as a form of "corrective accountability" meant to project state responsiveness rather than guilt (Kurniawan, 2025). At the same time, authorities intensified surveillance, digital crackdown, and selective censorship of protest imagery, including attempts to block hashtag circulation and moderate protest visuals on certain platforms. This demonstrates what DeLuca (2020) calls visual governance, the state's attempt not only to control bodies in physical space but also to regulate symbols in discursive space.

Third, the state attempted to reclaim patriotic legitimacy from Resistance Blue. Statements from political elites framed democracy not as perpetual confrontation but as institutional obedience, subtly positioning dissent as a threat to national unity (Antara, 2025). This rhetorical maneuver sought to reassign patriotism from citizen resistance back to state authority, attempting to delegitimize Blue's claim as the "true defender of democracy."

However, many of these strategies proved ambivalent. Instead of diminishing symbolic power, state reaction often amplified visibility. Government criticism unintentionally generated further circulation of protest colors, strengthening what Gerbaudo (2012) calls "affective contagion." Diaspora activism and international media coverage further weakened attempts to centralize narrative control. In Foucauldian terms, this moment illustrates a contested regime of truth, where the state no longer monopolizes the capacity to define political reality. The rise of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue demonstrates that symbolic power can rival institutional authority, and that people power today is not only enacted on the streets but also in the discursive struggle over meaning, legitimacy, and truth.

3. Synthesis of Soft Power and People Power

From the semiotics and discourse analysis above, we can draw conclusions about how these symbols work as a form of soft power and an expression of people power.

3.1 The Influence of Soft Power

The colors functioned as a potent form of soft power by deploying visual and emotional communication that effortlessly transcended verbal barriers, social class, and even physical geography. Disseminated virally through social media filters, memes, and posters, these symbols offered a powerful moral and aesthetic appeal that was difficult to ignore. Many individuals who were not directly involved in the physical street protests felt compelled to show their support by adopting the colors in their digital presence or on their clothing.

This soft power was crucial in shaping the public image of the protesters. Instead of being portrayed merely as victims of state action, they were elevated to the status of moral heroes: figures like the mother standing defiant against police or the fallen worker became symbols of a dignified demand for justice and fairness. This aligns with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which he defines as the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). The symbols garnered widespread support not through force, but through their compelling and attractive moral narrative.

Beyond this, these colors did not only create "liking" but also produced what Nye calls *legitimacy attraction*, where moral resonance turns public sentiment into moral obligation. In other words, individuals did not merely sympathize; they increasingly felt responsible to participate, donate, speak up, or align themselves publicly with the movement. This marks the stage where aesthetics and empathy began transforming into collective political energy.

3.2 People Power

Simultaneously, the color symbols were instrumental in catalyzing people power by facilitating mass mobilization on an unprecedented scale. They significantly lowered the barrier to participation, allowing anyone to visually and publicly align with the movement by simply wearing a color or using a digital filter. This inclusive approach expanded the arena for political action beyond the streets and into the vast public and digital spheres.

This symbolic identity fostered a profound sense of solidarity and heightened political awareness across the nation. It brought together disparate groups: uniting them across class, gender, age, and location, under a single, shared visual banner. As a result, the public's demands became more pronounced and unified. The movement was no longer framed as a series of rational or legal claims, but as a collective with a strong emotional and moral foundation, demanding not just policy changes but fundamental justice and respect for humanity.

In this sense, people power did not emerge spontaneously; it was "engineered" through affect. The symbols structured emotional engagement into coordinated action, echoing Castells' (2012) argument that digital-age mobilization is built through "networked indignation." The repertoire of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue therefore served as emotional choreography, guiding how citizens should feel, identify, and act. These colors effectively acted as political scripts that told people: who the heroes are, who deserves empathy, what must be defended, and why resistance is morally justified.

3.3 How Soft Power Becomes People Power: The Mechanism

The synthesis of soft power and people power in this movement can be traced through three sequential mechanisms:

First, affective attraction. Colors generated aesthetic appeal and moral warmth, making people *want* to be associated with them.

Second, identity formation. Repetition of colors in digital and physical space transformed individuals into political subjects, mothers as moral guardians (Pink), workers as dignified citizens (Green), and patriots as democracy defenders (Blue).

Third, mobilization pressure. Once identity is internalized, symbols begin to *demand* action. Participation became an ethical act, and silence increasingly resembled complicity. At this point, soft power had effectively converted into people power.

Through this chain, attraction evolves into alignment, and alignment evolves into collective pressure. What starts as soft power ultimately materializes as political force on the streets, in institutions, and within the public sphere.

3.4 Limitations and Challenges

Beyond the conceptual and practical challenges above, this study also acknowledges several methodological limitations that must be critically addressed. First, the analysis relies heavily on visual data, digital narratives, and secondary media reports rather than systematic ethnographic engagement with protest participants. Although this approach successfully captures symbolic circulation, affective resonance, and discursive contestation, it inevitably risks overemphasizing digitally visible actors while potentially underrepresenting grassroots organizers, offline participants, and communities with limited digital access.

Second, the study does not include in-depth interviews with activists, movement coordinators, or state actors. As a result, while the paper can rigorously analyze symbols, meanings, and narratives, it cannot fully uncover the strategic decision-making, emotional labor, and organizational dynamics behind the adoption and diffusion of the color repertoire.

Third, the research remains primarily interpretive and discursive in nature, thus prioritizing meaning-making over causal measurement. This means the study maps how symbols shape legitimacy and mobilization, but it does not quantitatively assess the extent to which color symbolism directly correlates with participation levels, policy influence, or long-term institutional change.

Finally, the temporal scope of the study focuses on the peak protest period, meaning long-term transformation of these symbols whether they sustain, fade, or institutionalize, remains beyond the current analytical frame and requires future longitudinal inquiry. Recognizing these limitations is not meant to weaken the findings, but to situate them within a realistic methodological horizon and to open space for future research that combines discourse analysis with interviews, participant observation, and mixed-method mobilization studies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the emergence of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue during the 2025 Indonesian protests signifies a profound evolution in the nation's landscape of political contestation. This symbolic repertoire was not merely decorative but functioned as a sophisticated political instrument that successfully challenged the state's dominant discourse. By grounding the movement in a visually resonant and emotionally compelling language, protesters forged new, inclusive political identities that transcended traditional class and ideological lines. The analysis reveals how these colors masterfully synthesized the attractive force of soft power garnering widespread support through moral appeal with the raw, mobilizing energy of people power, expanding the battlefield from the streets into the vast and uncontrollable digital sphere.

Ultimately, the 2025 movement demonstrates how a simple, shared visual language can dismantle official narratives and construct a powerful, alternative "regime of truth" grounded in empathy, solidarity, and a collective demand for justice. While the long-term impact of these symbols will depend on their ability to resist commodification and misappropriation, their rise marks a definitive shift in the grammar of social movements. It serves as a compelling reminder that in our hyper-connected, digital age, the most potent challenges to state power may not arise from formal political opposition, but from the spontaneous and viral adoption of symbols that give voice to the shared conscience of a nation.

To evaluate the sustainability of Brave Pink, Hero Green, and Resistance Blue as oppositional identities, future research should examine whether these symbols persist beyond the immediate protest cycle or fade once political demands are partially or fully addressed. This can be achieved through longitudinal analysis of digital and offline practices, tracking the continued use, reinterpretation, or disappearance of these colors in social media, commemorative events, civil society campaigns, and subsequent protest moments. Particular attention should be paid to processes of institutionalization and co-optation, assessing whether the symbols are absorbed into mainstream political discourse, commercial culture, or state narratives, thereby losing their critical edge. Equally important is analyzing symbolic reactivation: whether these colors re-emerge during later democratic crises, functioning as mnemonic devices that link new mobilizations to the moral legacy of 2025. Such an approach conceptualizes sustainability not as permanence, but as symbolic adaptability, revealing whether these colors endure as living repertoires of resistance or conclude their political life as situational artifacts tied to a specific moment of contestation.

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