Hope Within Critique: Satire and Political Distrust in Indonesian Social Media Comments

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ABSTRACT

In early 2025, Indonesian social media became a major site of public disillusionment, as online expressions of national crisis circulated alongside student demonstrations against budget cuts and growing concern over employment and the country's future. Much of this disillusionment was expressed not through formal statements but through satire, memes, and moral evaluation in short online comments. This study examines how such digital public discourse constructs social uncertainty in response to the 2025 crisis narratives associated with #IndonesiaGelap and #KaburAjaDulu. Combining critical discourse analysis with micro-linguistic description and Appraisal theory, it analyses four hashtags and 33 public comments selected from the comment sections of five political videos on Instagram Reels posted between February and August 2025. The findings show that evaluation is predominantly invoked rather than stated (26 of 33 comments). It is constructed through two repertoires: transnational resources such as popular-culture references, meme templates, and ironic emoji, and Indonesian resources such as reduplication, derivational wordplay, clipping, discourse particles, and formulaic sayings. These resources realize two distinct modes of critique: direct critique addressed to the government, and satirical critique addressed to fellow users, with political distrust common to both. Hope appears only in combination with distrust, satire, or moral criticism, and it is located in citizens, future leadership, or divine judgment rather than in state institutions. Resilience divides between refusal and resignation. No comment reuses the hashtag forms, suggesting that hashtags frame national conditions while comments elaborate on evaluations of specific actors. The study offers a layered, grammar-based account of political emotion in Indonesian digital discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In early 2025, Indonesian digital networks became a battleground between the government's optimistic messaging and widespread public frustration. As students protested budget cuts and austerity, the hashtag #IndonesiaGelap ("Dark Indonesia") became a rallying point for criticism of government policies (Tempo, 2025; Tirto, 2025). At

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the same time, #KaburAjaDulu ("Just Run Away First") spread across microblogging sites, using humor to suggest emigration as a way to escape limited opportunities at home (CNN Indonesia, 2025). This is then contrasted by the pro-government hashtag #IndonesiaTerang ("Bright Indonesia"), turning the debate into a sharp divide over the country's future (Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024). These popular hashtags challenge the government's vision of progress, which centers on demographic growth, stronger democracy, and the goals of Indonesia Emas 2045 (Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2024). These phenomena highlight how popular discontent is now mediated and represented through language in social media.

This clash in online conversations reflects real economic struggles. In 2025, Statistics Indonesia reported that youth unemployment was 23.34 percent for those aged 15–19 and 14.35 percent for those aged 20–24 (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2026). These numbers help explain why so many young people talk about leaving the country (Putri et al., 2025). Although it is hard to know exactly who is posting online, these discussions use humor and slang and express the worries of young people facing uncertain job prospects.

Early research on these hashtags, such as Juditha's (2025) analysis of opinion polarization around #IndonesiaGelap, largely treats digital posts as mere reflections of existing sentiment. Some studies measure opinion division around #IndonesiaGelap (Juditha, 2025), see the hashtag as a sign of youth anxiety (Clairine et al., 2025), or examine the economic reasons behind #KaburAjaDulu (Putri et al., 2025). Even when Critical Discourse Analysis compares #IndonesiaGelap and #IndonesiaTerang (Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024), it usually focuses only on the main hashtags, rather than on the comment threads where real debates occur. Computer-based sentiment analysis also reduces online emotions to just positive, negative, or neutral (Juditha, 2025), missing the complexity of how people express their views. Social media comments often convey complex reactions to political issues in brief expressions that blend sarcasm, disappointment, and demands for accountability. Such meanings are shaped by subtle linguistic choices, including Indonesian discourse particles ('*aja*', '*kan*', and '*deh*'), informal word formations, and recognizable meme patterns (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017; Zappavigna, 2015, 2022). However, much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on identifying general patterns of sentiment, with less attention to the linguistic processes through which online users express distrust, establish solidarity, and challenge political authority.

Addressing this gap, the study analyses 33 comments on short-form political videos associated with #IndonesiaGelap and #KaburAjaDulu. It examines how informal lexis, grammatical patterns, and widely circulated meme conventions express dissatisfaction with political institutions, satirical critique, and hope amid uncertainty. By considering these features together, the study shows how locally grounded linguistic practices intersect with transnational digital culture to transform individual concerns into shared political criticism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and the Problem of the Digital Fragment

Critical discourse analysis has traditionally traced how institutions sustain power through formal channels such as parliamentary records and mainstream news (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). In participatory digital spaces, however, this top-down flow breaks down. Political critique now routinely emerges from everyday, anonymous users challenging authority from below. This shifts the focus from how institutions create agreement to how ordinary people express dissent (Khosravinik, 2017). Even though user comments are short and often use images or emojis, they can still carry strong political messages. Analyzing

these requires a method capable of unpacking complex ideas in brief, multimodal posts (Bouvier & Machin, 2020; Khosravinik & Unger, 2016).

This change in scale brings old debates in the field into sharper focus. Since CDA was established, some have argued that analysts sometimes cherry-pick bits of text to support their own ideas, mixing political opinion with solid linguistic evidence (Stubbs, 1997; Widdowson, 1995). This problem is even bigger in short digital texts. For example, when analyzing hashtags like #IndonesiaGelap and #IndonesiaTerang, there is so little language to work with that researchers must rely heavily on external social and political contexts, which can lead to over-interpretation (Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024). To avoid this, this study uses Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring, 2004), which focuses on clear, observable language features. By connecting political critiques to specific linguistic details, such as modal particles, passive constructions, shifts in who does what, and informal markers, we ensure our claims are grounded in the actual grammar of the data.

Precision matters because how people use words is a key tool for Indonesian digital activists. Online activism in Indonesia happens in a tough environment, with algorithms dividing audiences, activism driven by clicks, government monitoring, and organized groups trying to drown out opposing hashtags (Juditha, 2025; Lim, 2017, 2023; Sastramidjaja, 2021). When organizing in-person protests is difficult, ongoing public criticism relies on language that can be easily shared and reused. Tools like hashtags, meme formats, and ironic word endings spread during political crises and help people show their opinions and connect with others (Zappavigna, 2015, 2018).

This communication setting also shapes how we think about who is speaking. Because social media hides most demographic details, we cannot confirm commenters' ages. Drawing on sociocultural linguistics, we see identity not as a fixed trait but as something created through language choices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Given the limited demographic information available on social media, the comments cannot be taken as evidence that their authors are necessarily young people. Instead, they are examined as examples of youth-oriented digital discourse, identifiable through features such as Jakarta colloquialisms, abbreviated expressions, and references to internationally circulating memes. These informal linguistic practices also provide users with ways to question official narratives and to express criticism of government policies.

2.2 Satire, Implied Evaluation, and Shared Meaning

In Indonesian online political discussions, criticism is not always communicated through explicitly negative language. Users may instead draw on irony and familiar multimodal conventions, including the ✗/☑ correction format, to express disagreement or ridicule. Interpreting these expressions requires attention to the linguistic and contextual cues through which participants recognize evaluative meanings that remain unstated.

Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework offers a useful perspective for examining these indirect evaluations. Within this framework, attitudes are categorized as Affect, which concerns emotional responses; Judgment, which concerns assessments of human conduct, including integrity and competence; and Appreciation, which concerns the evaluation of objects, phenomena, and events. The framework further differentiates between inscribed attitudes, where an evaluation is explicitly expressed in the wording, and invoked attitudes, where evaluative meaning emerges through contextual interpretation rather than direct statement. Recent studies have applied the framework to Indonesian social media. They show that negative Judgement dominates netizens' responses to public

controversies (Auliya & Al Umami, 2024), and that invoked attitudes are common in Indonesian Instagram captions (Himmawati et al., 2022). The framework works well for moral criticism, where comments directly judge officials as dishonest or incompetent. Satirical discourse, by contrast, frequently communicates criticism through implied rather than explicitly stated evaluations. Expressions that appear positive on the surface, such as claims about someone coming to the public's rescue, may carry an underlying message of disapproval. Interpreting these meanings requires careful consideration of contextual evidence, as evaluations that are not supported by identifiable linguistic or situational cues may reflect the researcher's own assumptions.

Studies of internet memes provide a useful perspective for addressing this interpretive challenge. Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) describe memes as recognizable communicative patterns in which established structures and shared meanings are combined with elements that users can modify. Familiarity with these conventions enables audiences to infer attitudes from previously established associations. Consequently, interpretations of evaluative meaning can be grounded in recognizable features of the meme rather than depending entirely on the analyst's personal judgment. Emoji work in a similar way. Recent social semiotic research shows that emojis interact with the words they accompany to signal attitude and build social bonds among users (Logi & Zappavigna, 2023; Zappavigna & Logi, 2024). References to other texts, such as popular-culture characters or ironically quoted official phrases, also bring in meanings that commenters do not need to state (Fairclough, 1992; Zappavigna, 2022). This shared knowledge also explains how evaluations spread: when many users reuse the same template or reference, an individual criticism becomes a recognizable collective stance (Ahmed, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015).

Studies of memes, however, have mostly relied on English-language data and have paid little attention to how other languages build evaluation into word structure. In Indonesian, reduplication can express imitation or pretense (Sneddon et al., 2010). *Pahlawan-pahlawanan* thus means "playing at being heroes," so the word's very form itself carries a mocking effect. Indonesian digital satire, therefore, combines transnational meme templates with local grammatical resources such as reduplication, affixation, and discourse particles. An adequate analysis needs to examine both together.

2.3 Hope and Resilience as Discursive Positionings

The widespread use of *#KaburAjaDulu* reveals conflicting attitudes toward the expectation that citizens should continue enduring difficult social and political circumstances. Linguistically, the expression combines the directive *kabur* ('flee') with the colloquial elements *aja* ('just') and *dulu* ('for now'), presenting leaving as a relatively simple, temporary response to unfavorable conditions. From a sociopolitical perspective, this framing may suggest withdrawal from efforts to address existing problems. More broadly, narratives emphasizing individual resilience can reinforce neoliberal assumptions by placing responsibility for overcoming structural difficulties on individuals rather than public institutions. As a result, challenges that require collective or institutional solutions are increasingly portrayed as personal burdens that people are expected to manage independently (Bryant et al., 2025; Tierney, 2015). In this way, the hashtag turns structural problems into private issues by making political complaints seem like personal decisions to leave. However, if we only see it as depoliticizing, we miss the irony in how it spreads (Putri

et al., 2025). Publicly expressing the wish to escape actually serves as a strong, shared criticism of the conditions that make people want to leave in the first place.

To address this issue, we should see resilience not as a personal trait, but as something shaped by language and grammar. Resilience can be understood not simply as an inherent personal characteristic, but as a position constructed through language. Examining grammatical choices allows us to identify how political agency, responsibility, and opportunities for change are represented in public discourse. When citizens are portrayed as having little control over difficult circumstances, their continued endurance may suggest resignation or reluctant acceptance. In contrast, when online users employ collective sarcasm to question political authority and demand accountability, their expressions of endurance may also function as a form of resistance against existing power structures.

A parallel linguistic ambiguity governs the expression of hope, which digital sentiment models routinely misclassify as the mere positive binary of anger. A similar uncertainty arises in how hope is expressed, which digital sentiment tools often mislabel as simply the opposite of anger (Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024). References to divine judgment, particularly through the religious concept of *hisab* (accountability in the afterlife), illustrate the limitations of interpreting digital political discourse using simple positive-or-negative sentiment categories. Although appeals to justice beyond earthly life may initially suggest acceptance of existing conditions, they can also serve as expressions of moral criticism directed at political leaders. In this context, hope does not necessarily diminish public dissatisfaction; instead, it reinforces demands for accountability by emphasizing the expectation that those in power will ultimately answer for their actions. Examining the interaction between informal linguistic expressions, meme conventions, and religious references, therefore, provides insight into how experiences of social vulnerability can be articulated as political criticism.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative design that combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) with systematic micro-linguistic description. Following Fairclough (1992, 1995), the analysis proceeds in three stages: describing linguistic features, interpreting their evaluative and positional meanings, and explaining these meanings in relation to the sociopolitical events the texts respond to. The model remains widely used in research on Indonesian digital discourse, including analyses of political framing on Instagram (Azhari & Rosyidi, 2025), the contrast between #IndonesiaGelap and #IndonesiaTerang (Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024), and Instagram comments responding to #KaburAjaDulu (Syifa et al., 2026). In response to the methodological concerns discussed in Section 2.1, the descriptive stage is conducted first and is governed by an explicit codebook. Researchers derive interpretive categories, including the affective orientations examined in the research questions, from descriptive coding rather than assigning them in advance (Herring, 2004). The study does not aim at statistical generalization. We examine how linguistic resources construct social uncertainty in a defined set of digital texts.

3.2 Data Sources and Context

The data comprises two types of material with different analytical statuses. The primary dataset consists of 33 public comments posted in the comment sections of five

short-form political videos on Instagram Reels. The videos were published by national news outlets and political commentary accounts between February and August 2025. Each addressed a specific political event or policy controversy: the implementation of the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) program, the February 2025 student-led demonstrations against budget efficiency cuts, the #KaburAjaDulu emigration discourse, the #IndonesiaTerang counter-narrative, and the granting of abolition and amnesty to political figures in August 2025. Table 1 summarizes the data sources.

Table 1
Data sources

Video code	Platform	Account type	Topic / triggering event	Date posted	Date collected	Comments visible at collection	Comments selected	Contextual sources
V-01	Instagram Reels	National news outlet	MBG programme	[17–19] Feb 2025	February 20 2025	412	8	Detik (2025); Tempo (2025a)
V-02	Instagram Reels	Political commentary account	Budget efficiency cuts/student demonstrations	February 18 2025	February 22 2025	287	7	Tirto (2025); Tempo (2025b)
V-03	Instagram Reels	National news outlet	Abolition and amnesty for political figures	August 10 2025	August 15 2025	356	7	DetikNews (2025); VIVA (2025); Transparency International Indonesia (2025)
V-04	Instagram Reels	Political commentary account	#KaburAjaDulu and emigration discourse	March 5 2025	March 10 2025	198	6	CNN Indonesia (2025); Putri et al. (2025)
V-05	Instagram Reels	National news outlet	#IndonesiaTerang counter-narrative	March 12 2025	March 17 2025	224	5	Syadiyah & Hudiyono (2024)
Total						**1,477**	**33**	

The secondary material consists of four hashtags that circulated during the same period (Table 2). Three originated in public digital discourse (#IndonesiaGelap, #KaburAjaDulu, and #IndonesiaTerang), while #PergiMigranPulangJuragan was promoted in government communication on migrant labor (Hasna et al., 2026).

Table 2
Contextual discourse artifacts

Code	Expression	Origin	Approximate Period of Circulation	Documenting Source
D-01	#IndonesiaGelap	Public digital discourse	February 2025	Tirto (2025); Tempo (2025b)
D-02	#KaburAjaDulu	Public digital discourse	January–February 2025	CNN Indonesia (2025); Putri et al. (2025)
D-03	#IndonesiaTerang	Public digital discourse	February 2025	Syadiyah & Hudiyono (2024)
D-04	#PergiMigranPulangJuragan	Government communication	February 2025	Hasna et al. (2026)

The hashtags in Table 2 are treated as contextual discourse artifacts. They document the broader discursive environment to which the comments respond, including the institutional reframing of public grievance, and they are analyzed in Section 4.1 for their lexicogrammatical construction and the extent to which their forms are taken up in the comment data. Their circulation is documented through news reports and prior studies rather than through platform metrics.

3.3 Sampling Frame and Selection Procedure

The sampling frame comprised approximately 1,477 top-level comments retrieved from five Instagram Reels using the platform's default "most relevant" sort order (excluding replies). We systematically reduced this corpus across four stages: first, removing spam, standalone tags, and off-topic posts (retaining 312); second, screening for youth-oriented register markers such as colloquial slang and discourse particles (retaining 147); third, selecting 29 comments across all five videos based on structural elaboration (at least one complete clause or multimodal equivalent); and fourth, integrating 4 contextual comments that, while lacking overt youth markers, directly responded to active youth threads.

We archived the resulting dataset of 33 comments via timestamped screenshots within five days of each video's upload (February 20 – August 15, 2025) to preserve the original texts against platform deletions. Given our purposive focus on satirical nuance, recorded engagement metrics serve strictly descriptive analytical aims rather than population-level statistical claims.

Because social media platforms obscure demographic verification, we draw on Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic framework to treat youth identity as a discursive practice rather than an empirical demographic variable. Accordingly, our dataset is defined by its youth-oriented register—operationalized through Jakarta slang, colloquial morphology, and transnational meme conventions (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017; Zappavigna, 2015) that deliberately counter rigid state rhetoric.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

We analyzed comments using a three-layer coding framework detailed in Table 3, allowing multiple codes per comment to capture multi-clause evaluations. First, we mapped lexicogrammatical and multimodal features (morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and digital semiotics). In the second stage, the comments were examined using the Appraisal framework developed by Martin and White (2005), focusing on three categories of attitude: Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. An evaluation was classified as *invoked* only when its interpretation could be supported by identifiable contextual evidence, such as established meme conventions, distinctive punctuation, or inconsistencies between the comment and the content of the original video. Expressions whose evaluative meanings remained uncertain were not assigned a definitive interpretation. The third stage examined how commenters positioned themselves in relation to political issues by considering representations of agency, modality, and temporal reference. These features helped differentiate expressions of resignation or acceptance from criticism of institutional practices. Where multiple positions appeared within the same comment, their relationships were documented in an interaction matrix.

The analysis did not begin with fixed assumptions about the emotional meanings of the comments, nor did it depend on automated sentiment classification. Instead, affective orientations were developed inductively through the coding framework presented in Table

3. Each orientation was identified by examining recurring combinations of lexical and grammatical features. Direct expressions of anger, for instance, were associated with imperative constructions and rhetorical questions, whereas satirical anger was indicated by recognizable meme patterns and ironic punctuation. Political distrust was identified through constructions such as passives with omitted agents and vocabulary associated with legal or institutional processes. Comments were excluded from the analysis when the available linguistic features or contextual information did not provide an adequate basis for interpretation.

Table 3
Codebook

Layer	Category	Codes
1. Linguistic description	Lexis and morphology	reduplication; nominalization; wordplay; register-marked lexis (legal, religious, slang); discourse particles
	Syntax	imperative; passive with unexpressed agent; parallelism; contrastive construction; rhetorical question
	Pragmatics	directive speech act; irony; implicature; quotation
	Multimodal and intertextual	emoji function (evaluative, ironic, intensifying); capitalization/punctuation; meme template; popular-culture reference; code choice
2. Evaluation	Attitude type	Affect; Judgment (propriety, veracity, capacity); Appreciation
	Realization	inscribed; invoked (cue recorded); unclear
3. Positioning	Agency	citizens; government; God; self; unspecified
	Modality	necessity; possibility; inevitability; none
	Temporal reference	past repetition; present; projected future; none
4. Derived	Affective orientation	anger; satirical anger; moral criticism; political distrust; hope; resilience

Excerpts are presented in their original form, with spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and emojis preserved, followed by an English translation. Examples whose analysis depends on morphological structure are additionally glossed.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To test coding reliability, an independent researcher trained in discourse analysis coded 11 comments (33% of the dataset) using the evaluation and positioning schemes. Initial inter-coder agreement reached 82%, functioning as a diagnostic check on codebook consistency rather than an index of absolute objectivity (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The team resolved discrepancies through discussion, resulting in minor refinements to boundary definitions between categories.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The comments were publicly accessible at the time of collection and addressed matters of public political interest. The study nevertheless treats them as ethically sensitive because they contain criticism of public officials, and follows the Association of Internet

Researchers' ethical guidelines (Franzke et al., 2020). Usernames, profile images, and other identifying information were removed, and comments are referred to by codes (C-01 to C-33). No attempt was made to identify commenters, examine their profiles, or infer their demographic characteristics. Under Universitas Prima Indonesia's institutional policy, formal ethical review is not required for research using publicly available online data.

3.7 Researcher Positionality

The first author is an Indonesian academic whose work concerns linguistics, discourse analysis, and digital discourse. As the analysis concerns public criticism of government policy, the author's position as a citizen and academic within this context is acknowledged as a factor shaping interpretation. The explicit coding criteria and the second-coder procedure described above are intended to limit this position's influence on the analytical claims.

4. RESULTS

This section first summarizes the hashtags and the coded comment data (4.1). It then examines how anger, moral criticism, and distrust are constructed (4.2) and how satire draws on intertextual and morphological resources (4.3), addressing RQ1 and RQ2. Section 4.4 addresses RQ3 by examining the location of hope and resilience and the co-occurrence of orientations within single comments. All counts refer to the purposive dataset described in Section 3.3.

4.1 Overview of the Data

The grammatical composition of these hashtags reflects different perspectives on Indonesia's political and social conditions. #*IndonesiaGelap* portrays a general sense of national deterioration without explicitly identifying those responsible, whereas #*IndonesiaTerang* offers a contrasting representation through the opposite meaning of *terang* ('bright'). Meanwhile, #*KaburAjaDulu* presents leaving the country as a temporary option, with *aja* ('just') and *dulu* ('for now') softening the force of *kabur* ('flee'). A different interpretation of migration emerges in the government-promoted slogan #PergiMigranPulangJuragan, which portrays overseas employment as a legitimate economic opportunity that may lead to improved social and financial standing upon returning home. Interestingly, none of the 33 comments examined in this study directly reproduces or modifies these hashtag expressions, including those posted in discussions specifically associated with them. Instead, the commenters tend to focus on broader concerns about government actions and political accountability rather than responding to the wording of the hashtags themselves. Across the comment data, evaluation is predominantly invoked (26 of 33 comments) and directed at behavior, that is, Judgement (26 comments), rather than at emotions or things.

Table 4 shows the distribution of derived orientations across the five videos. Satirical anger and political distrust are the most frequent orientations, but their distribution differs by thread. Direct anger is concentrated in the MBG thread (V-01), moral criticism in the budget cuts thread (V-02), and pop-culture satire in the abolition/amnesty and #IndonesiaTerang threads (V-03 and V-05), where all nine popular-culture references occur. The #KaburAjaDulu thread (V-04) contains the widest range of orientations, including

both resilience and resignation. [Like counts: e.g., “The most-liked comments in the dataset were C-xx (n likes) and C-xx (n likes), both satirical.”]

Table 4
Evaluative orientations by video (n of comments; multiple coding allowed)

Orientation	V-01 MBG	V-02 Budget cuts	V-03 Abolition/amnesty	V-04 #KaburAjaDulu	V-05 #IndonesiaTerang	Total
Satirical anger	2	1	6	2	5	16
Political distrust	4	4	4	2	2	16
Moral criticism	2	3	0	2	0	7
Exhaustion/ resignation	1	1	1	2	0	5
Anger	3	0	0	1	0	4
Hope	0	1	0	1	1	3
Resilience	1	0	0	1	0	2
Comments	8	7	7	6	5	33

4.2 Directive Anger and Moral Criticism

Direct anger is realized mainly through directives. In (1), the imperative, the rhetorical question, and the intensified punctuation present stopping the program as obvious and urgent:

(1) *STOP MBG, apa susahnya? Demi selamatkan ekonomi*!!! [C-02, V-01]
(STOP MBG, how hard can it be??? To save the economy!!!)

The rhetorical question *apa susahnya* implies that the government’s failure to act reflects unwillingness rather than difficulty, while demi *selamatkan ekonomi* grounds the demand in public interest. In (2), anger is directed at a demand made of the public:

(2) *Rakyat disuruh sabar terus, tapi harga kebutuhan naik tiap hari. Sampai kapan?* [C-04, V-01]
(The people are always told to be patient, but prices rise every day. Until when?)

The passive *disuruh* (‘are told’) leaves the actor who demands patience unnamed. The contrastive *tapi* sets this demand against rising prices, and *sampai kapan* questions how long endurance can be expected. The comment rejects patience as an obligation imposed from above, a point taken up in Section 4.4. Moral criticism relies on abstraction and agentless constructions. In (3), the nominalization *kekuasaan* turns political power into an abstract captor of conscience:

(3) *Nurani sudah tersandera oleh kekuasaan*. [C-13, V-02]
(Conscience has been taken hostage by power.)

Political distrust is constructed similarly in (4), where the agentless passives *dirancang* (‘designed’) and *diselamatkan* (‘rescued’) imply deliberate planning without naming the planner. Legal terms such as *abolisi* and *amnesti p*resent legal mechanisms as instruments of elite protection:

(4) *Kasus2 seperti ini memang sengaja dirancang supaya dia dan kroni2 oligarki... diselamatkan melalui abolisi atau amnesti*. [C-27, V-03]
(Cases like this are deliberately designed so that he and his oligarch cronies... are rescued through abolition or amnesty.)

The epistemic marker *memang* presents this reading as certain. The interpretation aligns with critical commentary at the time, which described the abolition and amnesty as an exchange of political support (Transparency International Indonesia, 2025). Formulaic sayings serve the same function: C-14 invokes the familiar expression *hukum tajam ke bawah, tumpul ke atas* (‘the law is sharp downwards, blunt upwards’) to evaluate the legal system through shared wisdom rather than individual opinion.

4.3 Satire: Intertextual and Morphological Resources

Satire is the most frequent orientation, and it depends on invoked evaluation. In each case, the evaluation is recoverable through a conventional cue rather than being stated. In (5), the intertextual reference supplies the evaluation:

(5) *Homelander telah tiba untuk menyelamatkan kita semua* 😬 [C-17, V-03]
(Homelander has arrived to save us all 😬)

The sentence uses the formulaic language of heroic rescue. Still, Homelander, a superhero known for his public image and moral corruption, reverses his meaning, and the grimacing emoji confirms the ironic reading. C-22 uses a similar strategy in contrasting two characters: Thanos *segera hadir mendadak jadi* Tony Stark (‘Thanos will soon appear, suddenly turned into Tony Stark’). Here, the adverb *mendadak* marks suspicion of a rapid transformation from villain to *savior*.

Satire also relies on Indonesian morphology. In (6), reduplication combined with the suffix -an conveys imitation:

(6) *Main pahlawan-pahlawanan lagi kah* 🧘 [C-18, V-03]
play hero~RED-AN again Q
‘Playing at heroes again?’

The derived form *pahlawan-pahlawanan* means ‘pretend heroes’, so the morphology itself produces the ridicule. The adverb *lagi* marks the performance as recurring. In (7), a correction template combines with derivational wordplay:

(7) *Pahlawan kesiangan* ✕ *pahlawan kemaleman* ✓ [C-26, V-03]
hero KE-midday-AN hero KE-night-AN
(Too-late hero ✕ much-too-late hero ✓)

The idiom *pahlawan kesiangan* refers to someone who acts too late to matter. The commenter extends the ke-…-an pattern to the colloquial *kemaleman* (‘overtaken by night’), intensifying the criticism. The ✕/✓ template frames this intensification as correcting an

inadequate label. Word formation is also exploited in C-29 (*Dracin*, *drako*r, *kalah jauh*, 'Chinese dramas, Korean dramas, far behind'), where clipped compounds for popular drama genres frame political events as more theatrical than television.

4.4 Hope, Resilience, and Layered Affect

Hope appears in only three comments, and in each, it is placed outside current state institutions. In C-11, it is placed in the citizens:

(8) *Saya bangga menjadi WNI karena warganya yang cerdas, bukan pemerintahnya yang cerdas*. [C-11, V-02]
(I am proud to be an Indonesian citizen because its citizens are smart, not because its government is.)

Pride is stated explicitly, but the contrastive *bukan* clause turns it into an evaluation of government capacity. In C-25 (*Konoha butuh Hokage baru*, 'Konoha needs a new Hokage'), hope is placed in future leadership through a reference to the anime Naruto. In C-33, it is placed in divine judgment:

(9) *Hati-hati, semua akan ada hisabnya*. [C-33, V-04]
(Be careful, everything will be accounted for.)

The modal *akan ada* presents accountability as inevitable. Because the comment names no human actor, it can be read as both consolation and a warning to those in power. In all three comments, hope co-occurs with another orientation: political distrust (C-11), satire (C-25), or moral criticism (C-33).

Resilience divides into two contrasting forms, both of which are found in the #KaburAjaDulu thread. In C-23, endurance takes the form of refusal:

(10) *Sudah cukup! Kami bukan budak yang harus diam terus*. [C-23, V-04]
(Enough! We are not slaves who must stay silent forever.)

The first-person plural kami constructs a collective subject, and the negated obligation *harus diam* ('must stay silent') rejects the demand for silent endurance, as C-04 rejects the demand for patience. C-28 expresses the opposite orientation:

(11) *Biarin aja, nanti juga lupa sendiri. Rakyat kan gampang lupa*. [C-28, V-04]
(Just let it be; they'll forget on their own. People forget easily, right?)

The particles *aja* and *kan*, and the predictive *nanti,* also present public forgetting as inevitable. The comment may express resignation or ironically voice the cynicism attributed to those in power, and it was coded as unclear. In either reading, it frames the public as unlikely to sustain criticism. Thus, in the thread about leaving the country, commenters respond with refusal and resignation rather than with plans to leave.

More broadly, 20 of the 33 comments combine two orientations, most often satirical anger and political distrust (8 comments). Layering can occur even within a single sign. In C-01, the sequence 😳😳😂 combines sorrow and laughter after an ironic reinterpretation of the official phrase *investasi jangka panjang* ('long-term investment') as investment in the next presidential election. The comment cannot be classified as either positive or negative; its grief and ridicule coexist.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis focused on three main questions. For RQ1, the texts convey social uncertainty primarily through implied evaluation, using both global elements such as pop-culture references, meme formats, and ironic emoji, and Indonesian features such as reduplication, wordplay, clipping, discourse particles, and common sayings. For RQ2, these tools support two types of critique: a direct approach that uses commands and explicit evaluation, and a satirical approach that uses references to other texts and implied judgment. Both approaches share a sense of political distrust. For RQ3, hope and resilience appear but are rare. Hope is always paired with other ideas and is found outside current state institutions. Resilience is split between rejecting forced endurance and accepting resignation. The next sections discuss these results in light of earlier studies.

5.1 Two Modes of Critique

The data show a clear separation between direct and satirical critique. The four comments that express direct anger do not use satire, and none of the sixteen satirical comments includes a directive to the government. These two modes also differ in grammar. Direct critique addresses the government's use of commands, rhetorical questions, and appeals to public opinion and expertise, as seen in C-02 and C-03. Satirical critique, by contrast, speaks to other users. It portrays political figures as characters in a spectacle rather than urging them to take action.

Looking at how the two modes appear in the videos, it seems that the type of event may influence the style of critique. Direct critique mostly appears in the thread about the MBG program, a policy that can still be changed and is open to demands. Satirical critique is mostly found in the thread about abolition and amnesty, which commenters see as elite self-protection (C-27), and where making demands may seem pointless. Since there are only five videos, this idea needs more data to test. If it holds, it would mean that satire becomes more common when people no longer expect institutions to listen.

This difference does not show up in sentiment-based studies of the same online discussions. Juditha (2025) examines public opinion around #IndonesiaGelap and, in that approach, treats both modes as negative. However, this analysis shows that negative comments can take different forms, each suggesting a different relationship between citizens and the state. The satirical style also helps explain the idea of affective publics described by Papacharissi (2015). Because satire speaks to an audience rather than authorities, it encourages recognition and belonging, helping create a group united by shared ridicule.

Both modes share a sense of distrust, often expressed without naming the responsible party. Agentless passive verbs (such as *disuruh* in C-04 and *dirancang* and *diselamatkan* in C-27) and nominalizations (such as *kekuasaan i*n C-13) describe actions and pressures without specifying who caused them. Fairclough (1992) says these choices usually hide who is acting. However, in these comments, the lack of a named agent suggests a power so widespread or protected that it does not need to be named. In this way, agentless constructions become tools for critique rather than ways to hide responsibility.

This pattern refines international research on humorous political critique. Studies of memes have tended to treat humor as either subversion or depoliticization (Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021; Cui, 2024). Lowenstein-Barkai et al. (2026) identify an intermediate form, quasi-political critique, in which humor allows grievances to be voiced while avoiding

confrontation with institutional power. The Indonesian data suggest that the indirectness of form and the indirectness of target should be distinguished. The satirical comments are indirect in form, yet they target identifiable political actors and events: Homelander, Thanos, and *pahlawan kemaleman* are mapped onto officials involved in the abolition and amnesty decision. Satire in this dataset is therefore not a way to avoid institutional targets but a way to address them before an audience rather than to their faces. The choice between direct and satirical critique may depend less on the risk of speaking than on whether commenters expect institutions to respond.

5.2 Satire as a Local and Transnational Construction

The satirical comments use two types of references. The transnational set includes superhero and anime references, as well as the ❌/☑ correction template. These elements support Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2017) idea that memes get some of their meaning from the template itself. The local set does similar evaluative work using Indonesian grammar. For example, reduplication in *pahlawan-pahlawanan* (C-18) turns heroism into pretense, and the *ke-…-an* pattern in *kesiangan* and *kemaleman* (C-26) strengthens criticism of lateness. In C-26, both types of references appear together: an Indonesian idiom and its extension are used in a transnational template. Earlier Indonesian studies have shown that political satire and memes serve communicative and representational purposes (Sujoko, 2020; Pranata, 2025). This study adds that these functions also rely on morphology, a level of analysis that studies of English memes often miss.

The popular-culture figures in the data show how people connect evaluations to familiar symbols. Homelander, Thanos, Tony Stark, and Ultraman already suggest ideas like corruption, villainy, sacrifice, and failure. Commenters use these associations to describe political actors without saying so directly. This supports Ahmed's (2014) point that emotions build up around certain signs and become stronger through repetition. A similar process appears in C-01, where scare quotes around the official phrase *investasi jangka panjang* make it seem ridiculous, matching Zappavigna's (2022) analysis of ironic quotation in political talk.

The fact that most comments use implied evaluation (26 out of 33) also supports the concern discussed in Section 2.2. Without clear criteria, most evaluations in this dataset would depend only on the analyst's judgment. The recoverable-cue rule helped make these interpretations more reliable, but it has its limits. For example, C-28 has no clue to show whether the comment is sincere or ironic, so it was marked as unclear. These cases show that the analyst cannot resolve some ambiguities in satire, which may be intentional, as it allows writers to criticize while still denying it.

These findings extend international research on language-specific political humor. Language play in Chinese has been described as drawing on specific linguistic properties and paying attention to its socio-political functions (Li & Lee, 2021). In the Indonesian data, the local resource is morphological. Reduplication, *ke-…-an* derivation, clipping, and discourse particles produce evaluation without relying on lexical choice. This suggests that meme theory, which treats templates mainly as visual and phrasal constructions (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017), should also consider morphology as a level at which satirical templates operate. Languages with productive reduplication and affixation offer word-internal templates that users can fill in much like image macros.

5.3 Hope Within Critique

The findings do not support the view that hope is the opposite of anger. Syadiyah and Hudiyono (2024) analyze #IndonesiaGelap and #IndonesiaTerang as competing representations, a binary in which hope functions as a counter-discourse. In the comment data, by contrast, hope appears only in combination with distrust (C-11), satire (C-25), or moral criticism (C-33). Hope is expressed through critique rather than in response to it.

The grammatical location of hope reinforces this interpretation. Hope is placed in citizens (C-11), in a future leader (C-25), and in divine judgment (C-33), but never in current state institutions. The contrast with the government slogan #PergiMigranPulangJuragan is instructive. The slogan offers hope through individual mobility and a promised return, managed through state procedure. Commenters instead place their hope in collective capacity, political change, or moral order. Hope is present in the data, but it is fragile in a specific sense: it does not rely on the institutions under criticism.

Resilience is similarly divided. C-04 and C-23 reject the obligation to endure, whether as patience (*disuruh sabar terus)* or as silence (*bukan budak yang harus diam terus*). These comments articulate, in everyday language, the critique of resilience developed by Tierney (2015) and Bryant et al. (2025): demands for endurance shift responsibility for structural problems onto the public. C-20 and C-28, by contrast, express weariness and predict public forgetting, which corresponds to the adjustment-oriented resilience that this critique describes. Both forms occur in the #KaburAjaDulu thread. Commenters there respond to the discourse of leaving not with plans to leave but with a choice between refusing and accepting the conditions that make leaving attractive. This extends Putri et al.'s (2025) socioeconomic reading of the hashtag by showing how it is negotiated in interaction. It also qualifies Clairine et al.'s (2025) emphasis on anxiety: anxiety is present in the data, but so is explicit refusal.

The co-occurrence of hope with distrust is consistent with survey research showing that anger combined with hope is more strongly associated with protest than anger alone. In contrast, apathy is associated with withdrawal (Bettarelli et al., 2022). The present analysis shows how this combination is realized in language: hope is fused with distrust, satire, or moral criticism in single comments rather than expressed separately, and resignation (C-28) corresponds to the apathy identified in survey research. The religious warning in C-33 also qualifies recent international findings. Lowenstein-Barkai et al. (2026) observe that directing complaints to God tends to naturalize hardship as inevitable. In C-33, however, God is not the addressee of a complaint but the judge of the powerful. The religious idiom does not accept the situation; it asserts that those responsible will be held to account. The political effect of religious language thus depends on its grammatical role: whether God is addressed or whether the powerful are warned.

5.4 Hashtags and Comment Sections

The analyzed comments do not reproduce the linguistic forms of the hashtags, even in discussions associated with videos V-04 and V-05. Instead of engaging directly with the hashtags, these conversations address wider issues concerning government policies and public affairs. This distinction indicates that hashtags and comment sections serve different communicative purposes. Hashtags provide concise interpretive frames for broader national circumstances, as illustrated by #*IndonesiaGelap*, which conveys a perception of widespread difficulties without explicitly identifying the actors responsible. Comments evaluate specific actors and events, and it is in comments that evaluation becomes

grammatically elaborated. Studies that analyze hashtags alone (Juditha, 2025; Syadiyah & Hudiyono, 2024) therefore capture an important level of public discourse, but not the level at which users construct their evaluations in detail. Comment sections provide access to this second level, which justifies their use as data in the present study.

A similar division has been observed in Thailand's 2020 youth protests, where hashtags served mainly to build collective narratives and spread information rather than to organize action (Sinpeng, 2021). In the early stages of digital movements, hashtags function primarily to build collective narratives and circulate information rather than coordinate on-the-ground protest. While our Indonesian data aligns with this broad pro-democracy framing, it shifts analytical focus beneath the macro-level hashtag. Where Sinpeng maps how tags circulate as collective symbols, we examine the comment sections where users actively negotiate specific political events under that banner.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined 33 public comments and 4 hashtags to assess how they shaped social uncertainty in response to Indonesia's 2025 crisis stories. Most comments suggested opinions rather than stating them directly (26 of 33). These opinions were either direct criticism of the government or satirical remarks directed at other users. Only three comments mentioned hope, and even then, it was always mixed with distrust, satire, or moral criticism. Across these comments, expressions of hope were associated with the capacity of ordinary citizens, the prospect of alternative political leadership, or expectations of divine accountability, rather than confidence in existing government institutions.

Three theoretical contributions emerge from the findings. First, the analysis demonstrates how Indonesian linguistic resources, including reduplication, morphological wordplay, abbreviated forms, and discourse particles, contribute to the construction of political satire. This finding highlights the importance of examining word-level structures alongside visual and textual conventions in research on digital memes. Second, the study distinguishes the linguistic strategies used to communicate criticism and the individuals or institutions toward which that criticism is directed. Although satirical expressions often communicate disapproval indirectly, the comments examined here still refer to identifiable political actors and decisions. This suggests that indirect humorous expression does not necessarily imply an indirect political target. Third, the findings indicate that hope and political distrust are not mutually exclusive, as both orientations may be expressed within a single comment. Religious references further illustrate how the interpretation of hope depends on grammatical positioning and the ways responsibility and accountability are represented in discourse. These findings are limited because the dataset is small and was intentionally selected. It comes from five videos on one platform, and the comments were shown in ranked order, which might highlight satirical or popular responses. So, the link between the type of event and the way people criticize is only a tentative finding, not a proven pattern. Further research could build on these findings by examining larger datasets gathered across multiple social media platforms and a wider range of political events. Including user replies and extended comment exchanges would also provide a more detailed understanding of how evaluative meanings develop through online interaction. Comparative studies across languages with similar morphological processes could further explore whether linguistic resources such as reduplication and affixation contribute to the construction of satire in comparable ways.

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Availability of Data and Materials
The data analyzed in this study consist of publicly documented digital expressions and anonymized, screenshot-based public comments. Full screenshots are not publicly shared due to privacy, traceability, and ethical considerations; selected anonymized excerpts are included in the article. Additional contextual information may be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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