Nationalist, anti-foreign protests are often observed on the streets of authoritarian regimes, but their consequences on foreign direct investment (FDI) are not well understood. We build on the signaling theory of social movement to argue that protests signal risks in a market but also contain noises. Nationalism, anti-foreign protests can be especially hard to read due to their complex and transnational nature. We develop a theory of how attending to the openness of protest channel, the existence of political constraint, and the reactions of peers can help decipher the signal. We test our theory by investigating the impact of the 2012 anti-Japan protest and studying 2,174 Japanese FDI entries in China from 2007 to 2017. We find that the number of online posts, rather than that of street demonstrations, is more negatively associated with post-protest Japanese FDI entries in a city. Street demonstrations are influential when there exist social instability concerns so that local government leaders have incentives to suppress street demonstrations. In addition, Japanese FDIs’ withdrawals after the protest constitute a second-order signaling and significantly increase the negative impacts of both street demonstration and online activism on post-protest Japanese FDI entries. We discuss contributions to the literature on social movement, online activism, and FDI.