

# Petition the Emotion

The Effect of **O**thering in South Korea's Online Petition

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☞ When do ordinary people engage in **formal** politics?

- voting literature
- party membership
- (online) petition

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Much less studied in non-Western, online contexts (except for China)

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## Emotion drives actions

- Beyond cost/benefit; grievance; resource mobilization
- discrete emotion theory: positive  $\leq$  negative
- moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, disgust) help spread narratives
- moral emotion  $\Rightarrow$  group relations: mobilizational potency

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- easy conduit through which negative emotion can be aroused
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- Othering **languages** drive political participation.
- The potency of the corpus is well-documented (e.g., 'dog-whistle words'; 'trigger words')

## Hypothesis: Online Petition

- The use of othering language in online petitions is associated with a higher number of public signatures than in petitions without such language.

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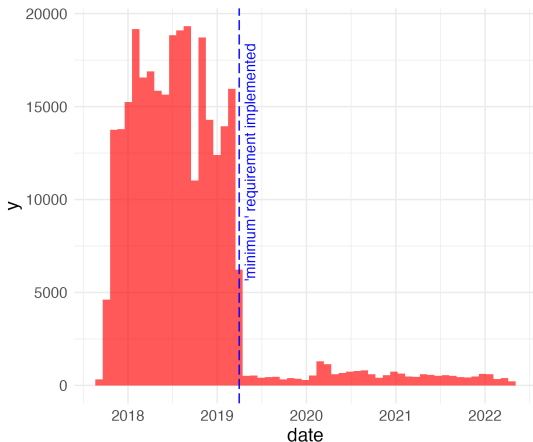
## Hypothesis: Online Petition

- The use of **othering language** in online petitions is associated with a **higher number of public signatures** than in petitions without such language.



# Data: The National Petition in South Korea

- 2017 through 2021
- Directed by the Presidential Office
- ID verification required to 'agree'



# Othering Words (treatment variable)

## translation in the parentheses

- **neighboring countries:** “중국” (China), “일본” (Japan), “도쿄” (Tokyo)
- **migration-related:** “조선족” (Korean Chinese), “동포” (compatriot), “이민” (immigration), “난민” (refugee), “외노자” (migrant workers), “비자” (visa), “추방” (deportation)
- **current event-related:** “불매” (boycott), “시진핑” (Xi Jinping), “사드” or “싸드” (Terminal High-Altitude Aerial Defense, THADD)
- **derogatory terms:** “짱깨” (derogatory term of Chinese), “쪽국” (derogatory word of Japan), “쪽발이” or “쪽바리” (derogatory term for Japanese), “동조선” (East Chosun, satirical term for Japan)
- **contextually demarcating:** “한민족” (the Korean nation), “민족” (nation), “국경” (border), “국군” (Korean Armed Forces), and “수출” (export).

# Model & Variables

$$\log(\text{agreement} + 1) = \beta_1 \text{Othering}_i + X + FE(\text{year}, \text{month}, \text{category}) + \epsilon_i$$

X includes:

- topic scores (structural topic model)
- negative sentiment scores
- $\log(\text{total daily agreements})$

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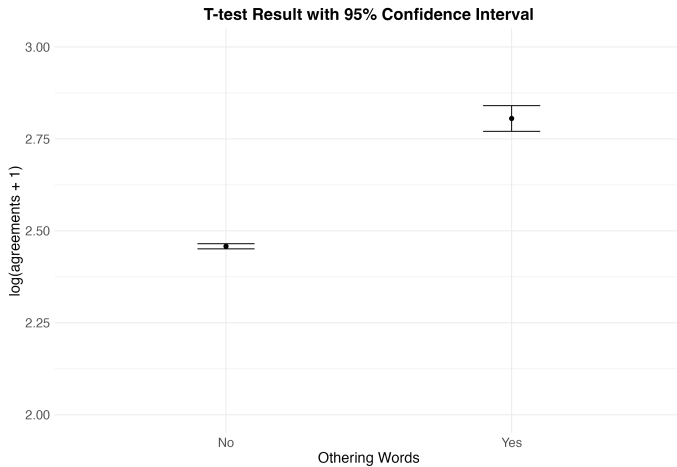
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# T-Test



# OLS Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	no control	no FE	benchmark
othering	0.337** (0.018)	0.227** (0.017)	0.168** (0.014)
Observations	299398	299398	299398
$R^2$	0.001	0.099	0.405
Controls		✓	✓
Category FE		✓	✓
Month FE			✓
Year FE			✓

❖ NB and logit produce similar results, but do not converge.

# Conclusion

- Petitions containing *othering* language received  $\sim 17\%$  more public agreements than those without such language.
- This effect remains robust across model specifications, including controls for topic, sentiment, time, and category fixed effects.
- Demonstrates that minimal linguistic cues can meaningfully mobilize formal political participation.
- Highlights how group-targeted moral-emotional appeals drive political actions.
- Provides evidence from a non-Western context on identity-based language and online civic engagement.



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