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From Italy with love:
Narratives of expat political engagement
in a corpus of Italian media outlets

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Abstract

Political participation of non-resident citizens in their country of origin has become a common practice around the world. The enfranchisement of Italians abroad has allowed the participation of non-resident citizens in the general elections since 2006 (twelve MPs and six Senators). Over the years, electoral results in the foreign constituency have generated an increasing interest within media outlets in Italy due to the impact of the votes in the national elections. The aim of the paper is to understand the way in which Italian newspapers have portrayed the political engagement of Italians living abroad one month before and after the 2018 elections. The paper analyses the narratives offered by these media outlets by means of a specialized corpus composed of Italian online newspapers. Starting from the corpus-based analysis of a selection of terms related to expats, relevant discourse patterns are uncovered showing attitudes and stances towards Italians abroad and their political engagement.

Keywords: migration; external voting; Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies; political discourse analysis; Italy

1. Introduction: the Italian transnational community and the Italian media

Between the 19th and 20th century, Italy experienced significant emigration waves that had long-term implications for the presence of Italians abroad. The first emigration wave, also known as The Great Migration, started in the 1890s and saw Italians leaving their country of origin to relocate mostly in North and South America. Italian emigration

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continued during the twentieth century as a result of the two World Wars and it has been estimated that between 1876 and 1976, almost 26 million Italians relocated abroad (Del Boca and Venturini, 2003: 2).

Over the years, Italians abroad maintained strong connections with their homeland. Because of the large presence of citizens abroad, fostering the connection with Italians living in foreign countries became a matter of interest for Italian policymakers. This resulted in the implementation of policies aimed at maintaining strong socio-economic, cultural and political ties with non-resident citizens. Scholars, including Bettinelli (1995), have argued that Italian policymakers implemented policies targeting the transnational community due to a sense of guilt developed over the years towards Italian citizens because of the forced emigration. In the late 1800s up until the mid-1900s, the relocation of many Italians was a relief for the country due to economic hardship. For this reason, the country had to find a way to reconnect with the emigrant community.

The interest Italy demonstrated towards citizens living abroad and their descendants resulted in very generous policies, such as the 1992 dual citizenship policy. This policy represented a turning point for the Italian transnational community. Based on the *ius sanguinis* principles (the right of the blood), it allows Italian citizens to maintain full citizenship rights, including political rights, and transmit Italian citizenship to their descendants with no limitations in the family tree as long as members can prove they have Italian blood (Zincone, 2006). Because of the nature of the citizenship policy, the transnational community increased significantly in numbers over the past decades, with a presence of almost 5.3 million Italians abroad in 2018. The current figure of Italian expats, however, is also the result of the new presence of Italian citizens who relocated to foreign countries in recent years. Due to the Global Financial Crisis in 2011, many Italians, especially young citizens, relocated abroad starting what has been described by scholars as a new phenomenon of Italian mobility (De Lazzari, 2017).

This paper focuses on Italy since it was one of the first nations worldwide to implement such a generous policy. As a result of it, the transnational community participated in the elections with turnouts of more than 30%, demonstrating the interest Italians abroad have towards politics in their country of origin (De Lazzari, 2019). Moreover, both the large presence of the Italian transnational community and the importance it has gained in the home country, in particular from a political standpoint, make Italy a good case study for the investigation of narratives of diasporic context. In particular, within the Italian (transnational) context and with the increasing pervasiveness of online Italian newspapers and the ability of the transnational community to access information through the

internet, the question of the impact of the Italian media on the preferences of Italians abroad has been raised (especially in the latest general elections in 2018). The narrative offered by Italian media on Italians abroad represents the focus of this paper to understand how these media outlets discussed the participation of Italians abroad and whether they can affect the perception of the external voting in Italy and elsewhere.

As far as methodology is concerned, this study has employed an *ad-hoc* corpus, to uncover the discourses Italian newspapers use in the debate on external voting. This research is based on the assumption that digital media can consistently impact on the political talk, engagement and voting behaviours of the population (Bimber *et al.*, 2014). We have applied these principles by looking at discourses offered by Italian media in relation to external voting in the Italian context. We are well aware that the term *discourse* may be regarded as problematic and, in line with other scholars (Baker, 2006; Partington *et al.*, 2013) within the methodology of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), we understand *discourses* as the "practices that systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49). Language(s) is perhaps the most prominent realization of discourse(s), in that it is through language that discourses create representations of realities and of self, categorize and interpret social situations.

As we need to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to language and discourse, CADS provides a strong methodological framework that employs Corpus Linguistics (CL) as the main evidence-providing tool. Indeed, within the CADS framework, CL allows us to "uncover linguistic patterns which can enable us to make sense of the ways that language is used in the construction of discourses (or ways of construing reality)" (Baker, 2006: 1). A specialized corpus of Italian news outlets built for the purposes of this study (the ItalianMedia Corpus) will be our main evidence provider, and we will use it to explore the narratives of expat political engagement by means of concordances and collocational data, as well as by analysing "the wider context of text production and reception, and, of course, by relying on the researcher's own intuition" (Nasti and Venuti, 2014: 31).

2. External voting and participation from abroad

To understand the political trends from abroad, it is important to grasp the composition of the Italian transnational community. The nature of the

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new Italian emigration cannot be compared with previous emigration waves since numbers are significantly lower and the profile of current emigrants is very different compared to the Italian Diaspora of the previous century (Tirabassi and Del Prà, 2014). However, the new mobility has also contributed to enlarging the Italian community abroad. Figure 1 shows the increasing presence of Italians abroad over the years as a result of two phenomena: 1) the acquisition of Italian citizenship by Italian descendants, and 2) the new mobility of young Italians.
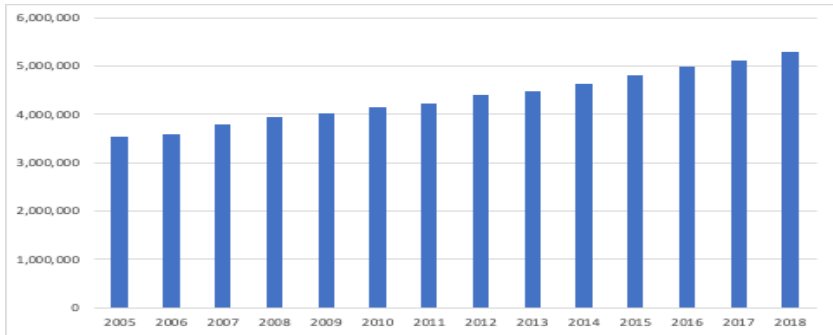
Figure 1. Registry of Italians residing abroad[1]

It is important to mention that, when compared to the official data provided by the Italian Ministry of the Interior through the Registry of Italians Abroad (*Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all'Estero - AIRE*), the number of non-resident Italian citizens was estimated to be higher from the early 2000s since many of them decide not to register at the *AIRE* (Zincone, 2006).

Another interesting aspect to analyse is the country of residency of Italians currently abroad. Figure 2 shows the countries with the largest presence of non-resident citizens. As the data show, Argentina ranks first even though it is not a preferred destination for the current Italian mobility. As a result, these numbers can only be explained through the citizenship reacquisition process of many second and third-generation Italians, particularly those living in Latin American countries.

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[1] Source: Authors' adaptations of data provided by the Ministry of the Interior from 2005 to 2018.
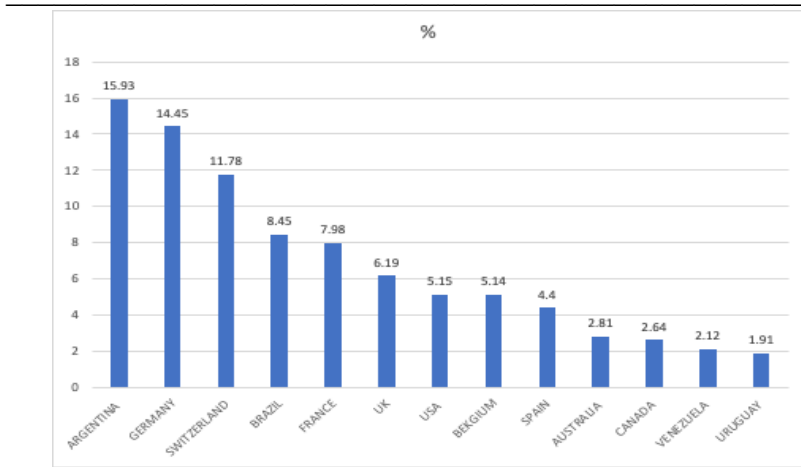
Figure 2. Registry of Italians Abroad in 2018 (percentage based of total residents abroad)[2]

Because of the significant presence of Italians living abroad, policymakers not only decided to support policies for the maintenance of the Italian culture and identity outside the national borders but also allowed Italians abroad to actively participate in the political life of their country of origin. This participation was not only secured through the implementation of this policy, but the Constitution was also changed to include the Foreign Constituency (*circoscrizione estero*), thus guaranteeing the political rights of Italian citizens abroad from a constitutional standpoint. These changes in the Constitution gave significant importance to the vote from abroad, demonstrating the relevance policymakers gave to the political participation of non-resident citizens at that time (Battiston and Mascitelli, 2008).

Based on the external voting policy, Italian citizens who live permanently abroad and are registered at the *AIRE* can cast their vote in general elections and referenda via correspondence from their country of residency. Even though the policy was adopted in 2001, it was tested for the first time in 2006 when the first general elections were held since its implementation. Since 2006, Italians abroad have participated in four

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[2] Source: Authors' adaptation of data provided by the Annuario delle Statistiche Ufficiali of the Ministry of the Interior, Italy (2019).

general elections (2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018) and seven referenda of different nature.

The political participation from abroad attracted significant criticism from scholars, political parties and the media for different reasons. Firstly, in the general elections in 2006, questions were raised about the impact of votes coming from abroad since votes in the foreign constituency significantly contributed to the formation of the government. These results generated concerns about the legitimacy of the inclusion of non-resident citizens in the voting system and the impact Italians abroad can have in homeland politics (De Lazzari, 2019). Secondly, the postal vote method was heavily criticized on the ground of presumed lack of control over the ballot papers. This system, according to some, does not guarantee the secrecy of the vote (Sampugnaro, 2017). This topic was widely covered by the Italian media since the first elections in 2006 proving frauds in the voting system.

Lastly, over the years, political parties and members of Italian institutions have engaged in a debate on whether external voting should be reconsidered. Despite the decreasing participation from abroad, the number of citizens permanently residing in foreign countries has been increasing every year. Because of these trends, some policymakers have questioned the political engagement of Italians living abroad (Sampugnaro, 2017; De Lazzari, 2019).

Table 1 and Table 2 show the number of voters and corresponding percentages in the four elections (2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018).

	2006	2008	2013	2018
Electorate	2,707,382	2,924,178	3,494,687	4,230,854
Votes	1,053,864	1,155,411	1,103,989	1,262,422
%	38.93	39.51	31.59	29.82

Table 1. Participation in the foreign constituency in the 2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018 elections for the Chamber of Deputies[3]

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[3] Tables 1 and 2 - Source: Authors' adaptation of data provided by the Historical Archive of Elections, Ministry of the Interior (2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018).

	2006	2008	2013	2018
Electorate	2,432,340	2,627,832	3,149,501	3,835,780
Voters	962,107	1,059,625	1,009,921	1,160,985
%	39.55	40.32	32.07	30.27

Table 2. Participation in the foreign constituency in the 2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018 elections for the Senate

Despite the increasing number of Italians abroad, data indicate a decrease in the number of votes from abroad since 2013. In particular, in the last general elections in 2018, only 30% of the electorate (29.83% in the Chambers of Deputies and 30.27% in the Senate) cast their vote. These figures have posed questions regarding the current external voting policy and the system in place from a technical perspective (vote by correspondence) and from a more holistic standpoint, such as the legitimacy of the external voting policy for an old emigrant community.

In addition, the results show specific trends in the political preferences of Italians abroad in each district of the foreign constituency. Depending on the geographical areas, Italians abroad have demonstrated specific preferences due to historical factors, composition of the transnational community, influence of non-government actors (including the media), and impact of the transnational actions of Italian political parties.

3. The ItalianMedia Corpus: Design and Components

The ItalianMedia Corpus was built using BootCaT (Baroni and Bernardini, 2004), which is a tool allowing for text search, download and preparation. We chose to consider exclusively online news reports for two main reasons. First, the retrievability of sources: BootCaT allows for automated "quick-and-dirty" corpus building with some parameters to be defined manually by the user. Secondly, the popularity of online news: online news has become increasingly prominent in the last 20 years essentially transforming the news language itself and giving way to new forms of interaction between audiences and journalists as well as new convergent

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platforms, such as social media (Gambier, 2006; Flew, 2009; Zappavigna, 2015).

The text sources composing the ItalianMedia Corpus were selected on the basis of the online presence indicator of Italian newspapers, that also have a printed version. The online presence indicator makes an estimate of the "total digital audience" of a website measuring access to a website through PC and/or mobile devices excluding any possible overlapping. We chose newspapers with both an online and a printed version as, in our opinion, this allowed to strike a balance between the total exclusion of the printed press or the total exclusion of online news. Finally, we established 8,000 as a cut-off value of the online presence indicator and this allowed us to select the newspapers in Figure 3.
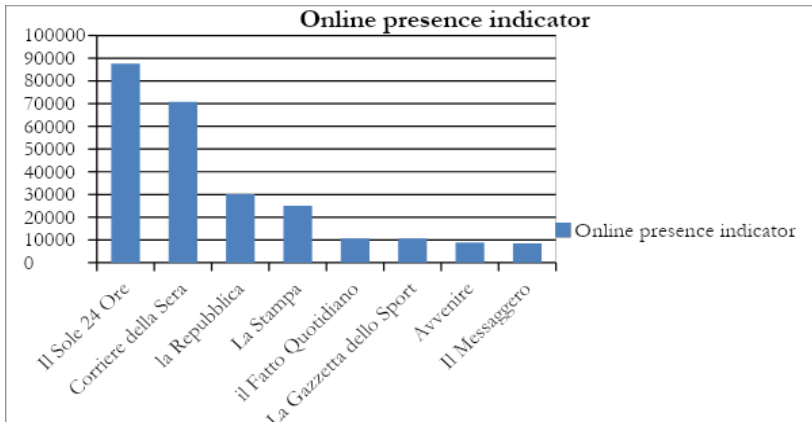
Figure 3. Italian newspapers with online presence indicator >8,000[4]

Once we decided which newspapers to use, we used Google to operationalize the following requests: one website only, restricted time-frame, and restricted number of search words. Based on these requests, we performed searches using the following string and restricted them to the period February 1st to April 1st, 2018:

> site: nameofnewspaperwebsite.it elezioni OR voto italiani
> estero OR elezioni politiche OR circoscrizione OR AIRE

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[4] Source: Authors' adaptation of data provided by *Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa* (http://www.adsnotizie.it/).

This operation was necessary to extract a list of URLs to feed into BootCaT, which then automatically downloaded the texts. Through this process, we obtained eight separate text collections (sub-corpora) and uploaded them onto AntConc (Anthony, 2019), which is the concordancer we used for this study. Table 3 below contains relevant information about the ItalianMedia Corpus and its components.

In line with the CADS methodology, the interaction with the texts was kept to a minimum with the intention of minimizing the "semiotic impoverishment" (Hardt-Mautner, 1995) texts undergo while changing their context of appearance (Partington *et al.*, 2013). Although objectivity is to be regarded more as something to aspire to rather than an achievable goal, the point of using the ItalianMedia Corpus to inform our analysis is indeed to reduce our own biases, "starting (hopefully) from a position whereby the data itself has not been selected in order to confirm conscious (or unconscious) biases" (Baker, 2006: 12). The texts downloaded via BootCaT went through a brief and rough cleaning process, where files not containing any text were eliminated and repeated paratextual information (e.g. buttons, banners and disclaimers) was erased from the text files composing the corpus.

Sub-corpora	Texts	Tokens	Types
Avvenire (AVV)	19	18,629	4,746
Corriere della Sera (CDS)	170	118,230	16,526
Il Fatto Quotidiano (FQ)	205	165,261	17,008
Il Sole 24 Ore (S24H)	120	87,212	13,077

La Gazzetta dello Sport (GDS)	3	9,836	2,283
Il Messaggero (MSG)	10	5,615	1,891
La Repubblica (REP)	232	242,169	22,669
La Stampa (STA)	21	21,467	4,915
Total	**780**	**668,419**	**39,282**

Table 3. ItalianMedia Corpus information

As our focus is on the narrative around expat voters, we started from a concordance and collocational analysis of some selected terms mainly concerning our object of study, thus *voto/i [degli italiani all'] [dall'] [all'] estero* (vote* +[Italians] abroad), *circoscrizione* [*estero/a*] ([foreign] constituency), and *AIRE*, essentially making this a corpus-based analysis in which we look at the contextual information of some lexical items that are relevant according to our research angle.

4. Results and discussion

As mentioned above, we looked at a selection of lexical items, whose raw and normalized frequencies in each sub-corpus are listed in Table 4 below. Due to the sizes of each sub-corpus, we decided to normalize the frequencies using 10,000 words as a baseline. Our methodological take on the data is both quantitative and qualitative. For this reason and because of space restrictions, we provide a representative selection of the results extracted from the ItalianMedia Corpus, which is nevertheless available on request.

	voto + estero		*circoscrizione*		*AIRE*	
	Raw f	fp10,000	Raw f	fp10,000	Raw f	fp10,000
Italian Media	34	0.51	54	0.81	19	0.28
AVV	2	1.07	1	0.54	0	0
CDS	5	0.42	2	0.17	8	0.68
FQ	15	0.91	19	1.15	7	0.42
GDS	0	0	0	0	0	0
MSG	0	0	3	5.34	1	1.78
REP	4	0.16	14	0.58	3	0.12
S24H	2	0.23	12	1.4	0	0
STA	6	2.8	2	0.93	0	0

Table 4. Search terms and their raw and normalized frequencies in the Italian Media corpus

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As we can observe in Table 4, in some of the sub-corpora the terms we looked up are not accounted for. In particular, in GDS none of the search terms is to be found, presumably because this is a popular Italian sports newspaper and the expat vote was not a primary concern of the editors or of their readership. Search terms are also missing from other sub-corpora, like MSG or STA and AVV. In the case of these general-purpose newspapers, we could attribute the absence of some of the search terms to the relatively limited number of texts each of these sub-corpora contributes to the ItalianMedia Corpus. An equally plausible explanation is not available for the acronym *AIRE* missing from the S24H sub-corpus, which is instead one of the most sizable sub-corpora in the ItalianMedia Corpus.

4.1 *Voto + estero*

As expected, the noun *voto* (vote) is very frequent in the ItalianMedia corpus, with an overall frequency of 21.7 p10,000 words and with over 1,000 occurrences. However, a concordance search of *voto* and *estero* (foreign) using AntConc's Context and Horizon function reveals that, in the whole corpus, there are 34 occurrences of the combination *voto* and *estero* with an overall frequency per 10,000 words of 0.51 (Table 4).

A further important aspect to be considered before analysing the concordance lines is that of word plotting, that is the distribution of this word combination across each sub-corpus. Indeed, if a word occurs 100 times in the same text file or 100 times in 100 different text files, its relevance surely changes. The same is true for the output of our concordance analysis: if the same word combination always appears in the same news article, its impact and relevance on the audience and within the newspaper agenda are presumably low. In smaller sub-corpora, such as AVV and STA, we can expect a very uneven distribution, and in fact this is what we actually find: in the AVV sub-corpus the two occurrences of *voto + estero* are found in the same text, whereas in the STA sub-corpus we observe a more varied plotting with occurrences from two different texts (33%-67%). Uneven distributions are found also among larger sub-corpora presenting low frequencies, such as the S24H (all occurrences within the same text) or REP (50% from the same text) sub-corpora. The most evenly plotted sub-corpora are those presenting higher frequencies such as CDS and FQ. The latter in particular shows the most composite plotting among the eight sub-corpora of the ItalianMedia corpus, with occurrences scattered over 6 different texts. This is already an important

result per se, as we can get a hint of the coverage that expat voting in 2018 had in these newspapers.

Concerning the description of the external voting, the concordance lines show two main trends (see also Table 5 for some examples): an "informative" one and one that we could label as "investigative". Only 25% of the concordance lines can be labelled as purely "informative" (of which 66% are from two sub-corpora, S24H and AVV) and all these instances are in reports published either on the election day or afterwards. The concordance line from the AVV sub-corpus in Table 5, for example, contains information about the election results ("Votes from abroad decided on the 12 seats of the Chamber of Deputies, 5 went to the PD [Democratic Party], 3 to the centre-right coalition and one to the M5S [Five Stars Movement]"); the same applies to S24H where information about vote ballots is provided ("Votes from abroad: votes counted in 1 electoral section out of 3. PD leads the way"). This trend provides information about the issue at hand, which in this case is the votes coming from Italians living abroad, without interpreting or judging the fact.

The remaining 75% of the concordance lines of *voto + estero* can be labelled as "investigative" and the object of the inquiry is, in this case, the suspicion of vote rigging in the external voting system which had emerged thanks to an investigation carried out by "Le Iene", an Italian comedy/satirical TV show. The bulk of the debate around this issue in the ItalianMedia Corpus seems to have been primarily after the elections with 42.5% of the occurrences dating March 4th, 2018 or later. For example, the concordance line from the STA sub-corpus in Table 5 contains a headline from *La Stampa* that reads "Votes from Italians living abroad: sold and forged ballot papers, 12 years of investigations and treachery". This news article reports on suspicion of vote rigging not only in the 2018 Italian election, but also refers to previous occasions in which Italians abroad were called to the ballots.

In the ItalianMedia corpus, the context surrounding the word combination *voto + estero* is characterized by terms carrying negative evaluation, with collocates[5] such as *brogli* (rigging), *irregolarità* (invalidity), *schede contraffatte* (compromised ballot papers) or the emergence of new actors like *cacciatori di schede* (ballot paper hunters) involved in the vote rigging scheme. This leads to a negative evaluative prosody pending on expat voting, which is confirmed by the collocational profile of *voto + estero* with collocates generally clustering around verbs of "accusation" and the

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[5] T-Score was used to calculate collocations in this paper.

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area of "exposé", and with few collocates identifying procedures or structures.

Sub-corpora	Trends	Left context	NODE WORDS[6]	Right context
AVV	Informative	alla Camera in base ai risultati delle elezioni politiche aggiornati sul sito del ministero dell'Interno. Dal	**voto all'estero**	i 12 seggi in palio alla Camera, 5 sono andati al Pd, 3 al Centrodestra e uno rispettivamente a M5s. M5S vede finora
CDS	Investigative	schede pronte al voto in serie". Tutto mandato on line. Può succedere ancora? Vedremo. Ma certo anche stavolta il	**voto degli italiani all'estero**	, con la sua fama di carrozzone elettorale dalle mille sorprese, ha visto affacciarsi da tutto il mondo figure di varia
FQ	Investigative	e mando io il voto. non c'è nessun controllo (cerca un servizio fatto dalle IENE e vedrai che merda si sistema è questo del	**voto all'estero**	) – vladimiro policriti (@vladimirobcn) February 20, 2018 A raccogliere altre irregolarità è anche Vito Crimi del
	Investigative	mandato in onda questa sera dalla trasmissione le Iene secondo le quali si sarebbero verificati una serie di brogli nel	**voto all'estero**	. L'acquisizione servirà a svolgere tutti gli accertamenti utili a verificare se si configurano ipotesi di reato.

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[6] In Corpus Linguistics, "node word" refers to the word(s) that are the object of a specific query, whatever comes before that word(s) is referred to as "Left context" (referring to the left of the node word), whatever comes after that word(s) is referred to as "Right context" (referring to the right of the node word).

S24H	Informative	conquista solo Toscana e Trentino Alto Adige.	**Voto estero**	: scrutinate 1/3 sezioni, Pd in testa Il
STA	Investigative		**Voto all'estero**	: schede vendute o contraffatte in 12 anni d' inchieste e tradimenti (U. Magri) Sono circa 4 milioni e 300 mila i

Table 5. Concordance lines exemplifying "investigative" and "informative" trends in the ItalianMedia Corpus

4.2 Circoscrizione

In the case of *circoscrizione* (constituency) a simple concordance search was performed, and then the results were skimmed in order to obtain a list of foreign constituencies only. Although *circoscrizione* can refer to Italian electoral districts, in the ItalianMedia corpus, 65% of occurrences of *circoscrizione* identify one or more of the four foreign constituencies, making this a preferred term for referring to expat electoral districts as opposed to national ones. In Table 6 below, we collected some examples of the concordance lines of *circoscrizione* indicating one or more foreign constituencies in either the left or right context.

Sub-corpora	Trends	Left context	NODE WORDS	Right context
FQ	Investigative	grandissimo. Ciao". La voce è quella – appunto – di Francesca Alderisi, candidata al Senato nella	circoscrizione estera	Nord e Centro America con Forza Italia nonchà© conduttrice di Rai Italia (ex
	Narrative	ella tornata elettorale 2018 spicca senz'altro quella dell'ex deputato messinese Massimo Romagnoli,	circoscrizione estero	, che agli elettori italiani si ripropone con quello slogan: "Coming back". In effetti
	Informative	, non lontano da Roma, si continuano a scrutinare e controllare voti e schede. Nella	circoscrizione	Europa, che è quella che elegge il maggior numero di parlamentari (cinque deputati e
REP	Investigative	ripartizione Asia, Africa, Oceania e Antartide (Aaoa), uno dei quattro collegi che compone la	circoscrizione Estero	, denuncia brogli elettorali nelle recentissime elezioni Politiche. Brienza, barese di 44 ann
	Investigative	, si è candidato - come racconta la Gazzetta di Parma - alle recenti elezioni Politiche nella	circoscrizione degli italiani all'estero	per l'America meridionale. Facile presupporre che, per farlo, abbia
S24H	Informative	di attribuire 607 seggi sui 630 disponibili (232 uninominali, 386 proprorzionali + 12 proporzionali	circoscrizione Estero	), al netto della Valle d'Aosta (circoscrizione a se, elegge solo un deputato
	Informative	singolo seggio diventa dunque decisiva. In questo scenario fanno particolarmente gola i seggi della	circoscrizione estero	: 12 alla Camera e 6 al Senato. Qui i partiti tradizionali se la devono vedere
	Informative	calabrese emigrato a Buenos Aires. Le regole per l'elezione nella Circoscrizione Estero La	circoscrizione Estero	elegge 12 deputati e 6 senatori. A sua volta, questa è divisa in sotto circoscrizioni:
	Narrative	strappare dal 2006 nove seggi. Dal Maie all'Usei Anche per queste elezioni politiche nella	Circoscrizion e Estero	si sono presentati dei movimenti degli italiani residenti oltreconfine che non hanno alcuna

Table 6. Examples of concordance lines of *circoscrizione* referring to one or more of the foreign constituencies

More than 75% of the instances of *circoscrizione* referring to foreign constituencies in the ItalianMedia corpus are contained in two sub-corpora: S24H (31%) and FQ (46%). So, we have fewer sources mentioning this item, even though those who do mention *circoscrizione* do so with a slightly higher frequency (f 0.52 p 10,000w) than, for example, *voto + estero*. Compared to the latter, *circoscrizione* seems to have a more composite pattern both in terms of evaluation and of the discourses it

triggers. By observing and reading its concordance lines, here too we can detect an "investigative" trend (40%), which, however, does not appear to be exclusively related to the "Le Iene" investigation, but it also takes the shape of social criticism, exposing flawed foreign constituency candidates (e.g. the concordance lines from the REP sub-corpus and the first two examples from FQ the sub-corpus).[7] This social criticism dimension remains, however, restricted to a few instances in a couple of sub-corpora; the "investigative" pattern of *circoscrizione* is instead frequent across all the sub-corpora with the only exception of the S24H sub-corpus, which seems to privilege a more informative style.

Finally, in the case of *circoscrizione* we cannot detect a strong negative connotation in the immediate co-text of the node-word. By taking a quick look at its collocations, this impression is confirmed, as most collocates of *circoscrizione* seem to cluster around themes such as geographical areas, instructional and structural features, and only a few can be traced back to the negative evaluative pattern observed in *voto + estero*, with which those collocates are in fact shared.

The "informative" trend accounts for approximately 51% of the concordance lines. However, of these concordance lines the vast majority are from the S24H sub-corpus (61%) while the remaining are from the FQ sub-corpus. In one of the concordance lines of the FQ sub-corpus, we find information about the electoral results from the foreign constituencies and the report identifies those voters as *cervelli in fuga* (brain drain), raising the interesting issue of how expats are generally portrayed

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[7] Backtranslation of REP sub-corpus concordance lines (see Table 6):
Concordance line 1: [...] one of the four foreign constituencies reports frauds in recent elections [...]
Concordance line 2: [...] as reported by the *Gazzetta di Parma*, he stood for the recent elections as representative of the foreign constituency of South America. We can suppose that, in order to be a candidate, he had to [...]
Backtranslation of FQ sub-corpus concordance lines (see Table 6):
Concordance line 1: who's speaking is Francesca Alderisi, she is *Forza Italia*'s candidate for the Senate in the foreign constituencies of North America and Central America and a television host on [the channel] *Rai Italia* [...]
Concordance line 2: the name of former MP Massimo Romagnoli from Messina surely stands out [among the names] of the 2018 election. He continues to present himself to the electorate with that same motto "Coming back". [...]
Concordance line 3: [Poll-watchers] continue counting votes and checking ballot papers in Rome. The European constituency is the one electing the higher number of MPs [...]

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by the Italian press – a further interesting narrative whose analysis would go beyond the scope of this paper.

Despite privileging a more informative and perhaps factual style of reporting, S24H still shows evaluative prosody: in the second example from this sub-corpus (see Table 6 above) we read that the foreign constituency parliamentary seats "are particularly appealing" (*fanno particolarmente gola*). While providing information about how votes in the Senate were going to be distributed, the journalist used evaluation to characterize the electoral results coming from the foreign constituencies.

Finally, a third trend surfaces from the concordance analysis, one that records events around expat vote counting or the electoral campaign overseas. This "narrative" trend is not very frequent, but still presents an instance of evaluative prosody that is worth mentioning. Indeed, by expanding the concordance in the fourth example from the S24H sub-corpus, we can read "in these elections we find once again in the foreign constituency Italian expat movements which do not have any counterpart whatsoever in Italy".[8] We can surely detect some criticism on the part of the journalist here. This criticism, however, cannot be pinned down to a few contextual and co-textual elements around the node-word but rather it spreads across the sentence and is felt through adverbial phrases ("in these elections", "once again") and negations ("do <u>not</u> have any counterpart whatsoever").

A further example of this trend is to be found in the second concordance line from the FQ sub-corpus in Table 6: here the "narrative" trend concerns a candidate for the foreign constituency. Once again, it was necessary to expand the concordance line in order to uncover the evaluative prosody contained in this short text:

> Among the surprising candidates [of the foreign constituency] to the 2018 elections the name of Massimo Romagnoli, former deputy from Messina, surely stands out. He presented himself to the voters of his constituency with the motto: "Coming back". And come back he did. Romagnoli, businessman and politician came back from a very remote place: the Manhattan penitentiary. He came back and ran for elections after 32 months' imprisonment on the count of illegal arms trafficking and international terrorism.[9]

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[8] Anche per queste elezioni politiche nella Circoscrizione Estero si sono presentati dei movimenti degli italiani residenti oltre confine che non hanno alcun corrispettivo nel territorio italiano - Il Sole 24 Ore, February 8th, 2018.

[9] Tra le candidature sorprendenti della tornata elettorale 2018 spicca senz'altro quella dell'ex deputato messinese Massimo Romagnoli, circoscrizione estero, che

As in the previous example, here we observe a "narrative" trend, the journal is indeed telling us some facts about candidates in the foreign constituency, and in doing so a form of social criticism emerges: the candidate's past is sanctionable from a social and moral standpoint.

4.3 *AIRE - Anagrafe Italiana Residenti all'Estero*

As Table 4 above shows, *AIRE* is the term with the lowest frequency (f 0.28 p10,000w) in this study with a very uneven distribution across the sub-corpora (CDS 44.4%, FQ 38.9%, REP 11.1%, MSG 5.6%) and with 89% of the occurrences occurring before the election day. Furthermore, text plotting among the sub-corpora containing the majority of instances of *AIRE* is scarcely varied, with FQ containing over 70% of instances from the same text and CDS with 37.5% of occurrences from the same text and the remaining instances in clusters of 12.5%.

What we can gather from these quantitative results is that *AIRE* is not a preferred term for discussing expat voting habits, even though it is the very institution that allows Italian citizens to cast their vote from abroad. We can hypothesize that newspapers do not employ *AIRE* very often because, being an acronym, it may represent an obstacle to comprehension. The infrequency of *AIRE* in the ItalianMedia corpus is perhaps less surprising if we compare it to a reference corpus of general Italian: for example, *AIRE* in the ItTenTen16 Corpus (Jakubíček *et al.*, 2013) has a frequency of 0.006 per million words, which corresponds to 0.00006 per 10,0000 words. Even though at first sight *AIRE* frequency might suggest otherwise, once put into perspective, it becomes clear that this lexical item covers a relevant yet not principal position in the narrative around expat political engagement.

Sub-corpus	Trends	left context	NODE WORD	right context
CDS	Narrative	non sanno quantificare quanti connazionali	**Aire**	, il registro degli italiani all'estero", spiega l'addetto all'ufficio commerciale. Del resto

agli elettori italiani si ripropone con quello slogan: "Coming back". In effetti Romagnoli, imprenditore e politico, torna da molto lontano: dal carcere di Manhattan. Torna e si candida dopo 32 mesi di detenzione per traffico di armi e terrorismo internazionale. – Il Fatto Quotidiano, February 17th, 2018.

		siano presenti. "Sono tanti, ma pochi si registrano all'	
	Informative	una analisi dei dati statistici	AIRE	aggiornati al 31.12.2015 si evince il seguente andamento:
FQ	Investigative	il fatto che il mio numero lo abbiano ottenuto o dal Consolato o dall'	**Aire**	(anagrafe degli italiani all'estero); che della privacy si ricordano solo quando serve a
MSG	Narrative	proprio i giovani i più assenti: spesso non sanno neanche che dovrebbero iscriversi all'	**Aire**	(Anagrafe degli italiani residenti all'estero) per poter ottenere il diritto di voto.
REP	Narrative	che questi brasiliani! Il voto degli italiani all'estero, non di quelli iscritti all'	**Aire**	, è una vergogna perché diamo l'opportunità a persone che nulla hanno a che

Table 7. Concordance lines of *AIRE* in the ItalianMedia corpus

In Table 7 above, we collected some occurrences of *AIRE* in the ItalianMedia corpus. The conclusions drawn from the quantitative analysis and from the comparison with a larger reference corpus seem to be confirmed by reading the actual text extracts. Indeed, we can see how in several examples the acronym *AIRE* is either preceded or followed by an explanation, thus showing the unfamiliarity of the Italian readership with this term - e.g. in line three of Table 7: "Often they don't even know that they should get registered at the Aire (Registry of Italians Abroad) in order to obtain the right to vote".

Moreover, the verb forms surrounding the node-word are sometimes in the first person singular or plural, and by cross-referencing this information with concordance lines coming from the same source we soon realize that over 66% of the occurrences of *AIRE* are used by expats themselves offering their first-hand experience as Italian emigrants having to cast their vote. Some of them may be critical about the voting or citizen acquisition systems, others mention their experience as *cervelli in fuga;* these examples can often be counted in the "narrative" trend, which by this

token becomes the prominent trend of the acronym AIRE.[10] Interestingly enough, in this scenario, among the top 5 collocates of *AIRE* we do find *expat*, a borrowing. Judging from what we read in the concordance lines above, we can presume that "expat" is a term used by Italians abroad for self-definition as well as by the Italian press in order to alternatively identify the so-called *cervelli in fuga*.

The remaining 34% of the examples[11] of *AIRE* are equally divided between the "investigative", "informative" and "narrative" trends we previously observed. Similarly to what was illustrated above with the "narrative" trend of *circoscrizione*, in the concordance line from the FQ sub-corpus we see that *Il Fatto Quotidiano* reports on a privacy issue that has been raised also within the investigation about vote rigging by quoting an angry Facebook user who is an Italian living abroad: "What pisses me off is that they got my number from the Consulate or the AIRE (the Register of Italian living abroad); they remember about privacy only when they have to protect some corrupt politician or journalist". By reporting someone else's voice, the journalist can build his/her argument and proceed in exposing the faults and the results of the investigation into the Italian external voting system.

5. Conclusion

The data discussed in the previous sections show how the Italian newspapers under study have represented external voting with recurring discursive patterns. In our study, we detected three main reporting trends across the three lexical items under investigation: "informative", "investigative", and "narrative". All patterns presented evaluative prosody

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[10] E.g. in the concordance line from the REP sub-corpus in Table 7, an Italian citizen abroad complains about the external voting policy and says: *Il voto degli italiani all'estero, non di quelli iscritti all'Aire, è una vergogna perché diamo l'opportunità a persone che nulla hanno a che vedere con noi, se non un bisnonno italiano, di decidere per gli italiani, quelli veri* (The vote of Italians abroad – I am not referring to those registered at the Aire – is shameful because we allow the right to vote to people who do not have anything to do with us other than an Italian great-grandfather. We allow them to make decisions for real Italians).

[11] E.g. second concordance line from the CDS sub-corpus in Table 7: "The following trend surfaces from an analysis of AIRE statistics last updated on 31.12.2015", provides information about the number of registered voters in one of the foreign constituencies.

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that verged towards negativity, with *voto + estero* being the most negatively connoted, followed by *circoscrizione*. *AIRE*, on the other hand, did not present strongly negative evaluation and, interestingly enough, we found out that it is a term often used by expats when they are self-defining or explaining their habits as voters, hence the slightly more positive stance. This result has at least two implications. Firstly, the newspapers in the ItalianMedia Corpus tend not to be over-informative about external-voting procedures since they rarely mention the institutions enabling such processes. Secondly, online news and the interaction between users and journalists/newspapers enabled this self-defining function eventually resulting in a convergent type of journalism.

Among the four most sizable sub-corpora of the ItalianMedia Corpus (*La Repubblica, Il Sole 24 Ore, Il Fatto Quotidiano*, and *Corriere della Sera*), *Il Fatto Quotidiano* surely shows more interest in the matter of expat voting habits both in terms of number of reports and of emphasis on its ambiguous aspects. However, we have illustrated how a newspaper like *Il Sole S24 Ore*, which apparently promotes a more informative and factual style of reporting, can present negative evaluation around the issue of external voting (see *fare gola* in section 4.2). Despite the size of the REP sub-corpus, the newspaper *La Repubblica* pays little attention to the issues regarding expat voting, making tREP less impactful than the other "big" sub-corpora in establishing a narrative. Finally, *Il Corriere della Sera* seems to consider the issue of external voting especially from the perspective of expats themselves as we could observe in the section analysing *AIRE* (4.3).

On a final note, we would like to mention the serendipitous discovery (Partington *et al*., 2013) of *cervelli in fuga* that came up as collocate of both *AIRE* and *circoscrizione*, which makes the case for further research into the narratives employed by the Italian press to describe Italian expats, as well as into the meta-discursive narratives used by Italian expats themselves. This also proves the validity of the methodology of CADS, as it triggered a virtuous circle of knowledge that brought up further issues. In turn, these issues pointed our attention back to the corpus with further data to test new hypotheses and intuitions deriving from an approach that is able to be quantitative and qualitative at the same time (Aragrande, 2016).

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