Nations imagined online: a case study of the Villoux Server System

By

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Online communities have become commonplace in the modern world, developing on nearly every website and application. These communities can develop on a singular website, e.g. forums like Reddit and 4Chan where like-minded people can discuss and share ideas and websites like Facebook and Twitter which capitalize on social interactions; they develop around gaming platforms, e.g. Xbox live chat or Minecraft servers; and they can develop on applications solely developed to engage with other people, e.g. Internet relay-chatrooms and TikTok. The communities formed from these online services may differ in purpose but ultimately all function within the realm of an online community. I pose the question “How do governing structures in online civil society organizations influence individual behaviors?”, and conducted a case study on the Villoux Server System, an online service based on gaming but rooted in community-building that operates within an institutional framework similar to structures among geographically-bound communities.
DEDICATION

The principle focus of this thesis is the Villoux Server System, and I therefore find it no less than fitting to dedicate this project to the Villoux Server System and the thousands of users who have contributed to Villoux’s accomplishments in its near decade of existence. Given the emphasis of internationalism within Villoux which is represented in this study, I would like to recognize all of the countries which have provided Villoux with users since its establishment: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Cabo Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Maldives, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, North Macedonia, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela, Viet Nam, and Yemen.

Villoux is truly community-run, meaning the data, testimonials, and responses discussed in this project simply would not exist without the dedication and loyalty demonstrated by so many
Villouxians. In particular, I would like to thank all Villouxians who have served in executive leadership roles throughout its history and to the memory of Matthew Lecca Riba, a passionate Villouxian who first made me realize the impact a community like Villoux could have. It has been my highest privilege in life to serve as Villoux’s Chief of Staff for the past decade and it is my sincere hope that this work sheds light on the power of online civil society organizations such as Villoux and we begin properly crediting and studying them for their multiplicity of merits.
I offer my heartfelt thanks and everlasting appreciation to the major professor of my thesis committee, Dr. Thessalia Merivaki, for her unwavering support and dedication to the success and completion of this study. Dr. Merivaki’s guidance has been paramount to the direction of this project and I know that I could not have completed it without her. I furthermore thank Dr. Brian Shoup and Dr. James Chamberlain for their academic guidance throughout the process. I offer my thanks to Eric VanHeusdan, Sai Chebrolu, Harry Shaw, Matthew Engels, Charles Powell, and Dillard Snider for sampling my survey questions and to Linda Shi for her assistance in compiling the master census list that was used in this study. I would like to offer special thanks to Brandon Coonradt and Columbus Holt for their assistance in formula-building for my data analyses. Finally, I offer my thanks to Amy Covey, Brian Daniel, Jan Daniel, Larry Daniel, and Marilyn D’Isepo for their support of me during the completion of my degree.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Civil societies” are defined as organizations formed for collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values, generally distinct from government and commercial for-profit actors (World Health Organization, 2007). Defining traits of civil societies include an organized system of collective human experience, encompassing political governance and social relationships. Peterson and Til (2004) note the importance of “public decision-making for all community members through governmental structures” and social relationships characterized by “strong, active, vibrant, diverse, community-based groups and networks”.

These concepts are observed within in-person civil societies; however, the increase in online interactions, structure or unstructured, has led to the creation of online communities which share many properties with in-person civil societies. For example, Facebook pages for posts regarding events in their respective city, sales at local businesses, job postings, and individuals offering their skilled services have risen to replace community bulletin boards in city hall or the local barber shop. This exemplifies how physical geography appears to be the only difference between in-person communities and online communities. I seek to expand that observation to include online civil societies as well, but I argue the conceptual definition of civil society and its accompanying characteristics can likewise be applied to online civil societies. Online civil societies are understudied within the field of political science, and I seek to provide foundational framework through this case study from which future researchers can draw larger, more theoretical
conclusions regarding online civil societies and the similarities or differences from in-person civil societies.

Research has proven an organization’s governing style can induce or discourage specific behaviors (Katz and Kahn, 1966). The Villoux Server System, an online civil society organization based on gaming but rooted in community-building, operates within an institutional framework similar to structures among geographically bound communities. Villoux operates within a robust governing structure, which allows me to assess the impact of institutional structures in an online community on the behaviors of its users. Villoux exemplifies this concept as evidenced by the way in which certain users cease behavior Villoux perceives as negative and are more likely to engage in behavior the system considers positive, e.g. a user is generally less likely to commit the same wrongdoing if they are issued a temporary ban from a Villoux service. Several examples of this occurrence have arisen over the ten years of Villoux’s establishment with highlights being policies of the system aiding users in accepting their own sexuality and/or becoming increasingly tolerant towards those of different sexual orientations, users within Villoux developing senses of connection to countries via their interactions within the system with users from foreign countries they are unlikely to ever visit themselves, and users developing professional skills through their work in Villoux that aided them later in their life, e.g. users who serve in the System Art Design Department being able to hone their skills sharply enough to pursue a fiscal career in graphic work. Villouxians have cited their time in Villoux in an array of mediums, including job applications and college applications, testifying that their experiences in Villoux led them to developing the skills necessary to become viable and competitive candidates.
In this study, I take an in-depth look at the governing structure of Villoux, which combines gaming and interactions among users, providing opportunities to observe social behaviors and how users from different backgrounds interact. I first establish literary support for my hypotheses in Chapter II – Literature Review, then expand upon them in Chapter III – Theory and Hypotheses. Chapter IV – Research Design and Methodology provides a timeline of the study; additional information on the study population, including an elaboration of Villoux’s government; the data collection and analysis methods; and noted ethical considerations and study limitations. Finally, Chapter V – Data Analysis reviews the survey responses and creates tests for suspected relationships between variables.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

A key element in studying online civil society organizations is their governing structure. Civil society organizations are comprised of various governing structures, but a critical element throughout all such structures is the ability of the governing structure to independently make decisions free from the direct control of their host nation (Tomlinson, 2013). Self-governance and the accompanying social transformation are paramount to elongating the successes of civil society organizations (Peterson and Til, 2004). The governing structure can be consistent of elected representatives from the organization’s membership, the founders of the organization, or a number of other variations. The type of governing structure, e.g. power and responsibility sharing, accountability, balance of authority, may be critical even more so in online civil society organizations in determining the longevity of an online civil society organization, the legitimacy with which its members view its governing powers’ authority, and the ability to which the governing powers can influence individual behavior.

The literature has established that an individual’s participation in civil society organizations oftentimes results in said individual becoming more civically engaged and the resulting civic engagement brings positive benefits to the individual’s community (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) establishes a relationship between individuals’ engagement with civil society organizations such as religious organizations, labor unions, and volunteering and duties perceived as civic engagement such as voting, attending public hearings, and working with political parties.
A positive relationship exists between citizens becoming engaged with their community in non-business or -government venues and citizens participating in civic society. Unfortunately, the vast majority of research on civil society organizations exclusively focuses on in-person civil society organizations and how they influence individual behavior, leaving an area of interest relatively unexplored. The research that does exist regarding online civil society organizations predominately surveys the theoretical implications of online communication and participation rather than individual case studies on specific communities. This may be problematic as online communities have arisen to fill the gap between in-person civil society organizations and online civil society organizations. The utilization of online communities is significantly more prevalent now than it was twenty years ago, thereby mandating the necessity for studies on how individuals interact with one another in an online setting.

Researchers argue that communities can foster sentiments of unity. This can translate to nationalism in some cases. One such example is Anderson (1983), who argues that nationalism is socially constructed, meaning it only exists in the minds of those who choose to believe it exists. He argues “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (Anderson, 1983, p. 49) This passage exemplifies his constructivist school of thought, meaning we as individuals can choose to participate or choose to refrain from participating in a community and are thereby constructing how our identity. Anderson’s definition of this constructed nationalism may be likewise ascribed to members of online civil society organizations as these individuals choose to participate in a community and thereby agree to adhere to the community’s rules, adopt the community’s norms, and voluntarily function as part of a larger group.
A potential argument about the negative implications of online communities, at least insofar as they are related to in-person communities, is the decline of social capital, which could measurably decrease one’s participation in civil life. Putnam (2000), who surveys the decline on social capital within the United States, hypothesizes such decline is negative for a democratic society. Putnam (2000) defines “social capital” as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 2000, p. 67). Putnam (2000) argues this lack of social capital is due to an individual’s absence of in-person participation, however, there is significant evidence to suggest that online communities build social capital. Political campaigns use social networks to mobilize and individuals create online groups on social media to discuss mutual interests. These interactions indicate the concept of social capital should not be narrowly understood to only involve physical interactions, for which Putnam (2000) appears to exclusively advocate.

Putnam’s (2000) and Anderson’s (1983) respective work on how communities can foster a culture of unity and increase civic engagement is instrumental in how we understand individual behavior through one’s involvement in online civil society organizations; however, both fail to address explicitly whether, and to what extent, online civil society organizations can influence said behavior. I blend Anderson’s (1983) concept of constructivist nationalism and Putnam’s (2000) concept of beneficial social capital into the idea that individuals construct an identity for themselves in order to gain social capital, exemplified, for the purposes of this thesis, by an individual’s involvement in Villoux. Nationalism is substituted with membership in Villoux and social capital is substituted with individual behavior in order to illustrate this point in my thesis. I argue the governing structure of an online civil society organization is the catalyst through which this “nationalism” (membership) can result in an increase in “social capital” (positive individual
behaviors), and it can also be the catalyst through which said nationalism corrects social deficits (negative individual behaviors).
CHAPTER III
THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Oldenburg (1989) addresses the role of online communities more thoroughly, expanding upon a lacuna I argue Anderson (1983) and Putnam (2000) failed to properly investigate. Oldenburg (1989) establishes an individual spends the majority of their time throughout three basic environments or “places” – work, home, and a place to join others for conviviality. The third environment has traditionally been a place for “idle talk and banter with acquaintances and friends”, e.g. cafes, barber shops, or bars. Oldenburg (1989) recognizes online communities as another example of this third environment due to the comradery that can result from participating in an online civil society organizations. I argue Oldenburg’s (1989) assertion that individuals divide their time between these three environments is exemplified through his research and fervently argue the third environment can include online communities, especially due to the decline in elongated attendance at other alternatives such as shopping malls, libraries, and the other three examples, exemplified by Peoples (2015). Putnam (2000) addresses this third place by hypothesizing the “third place” as solidarity, hence the titular “alone”, but whereas I acknowledge individuals spend less time gathered in communal spaces, I argue online civil society organizations bridge the gap between solidarity and fellowship since one can participate in social engagement online without leaving the comfort of home thereby merging the two environments or making the third environment a subsidiary of the home environment.
I argue a technological evolution in societal communication can be observed through the emergence of online civil society organizations, such as is documented in Chandler (1997). Cerulo (1997) expanded upon this idea by exploring the American Sociological Association’s special session on “technologically generated communities”. Antonucci, Ajrouch, and Manalel (2017) also support this position and recognize positive benefits of said evolution such as the ability to overcome traditional geographic barriers and exchange societal information with individuals from afar but warn this “dehumanization” can also lead to “insensitivity and increase negativity” (Antonucci, Ajrouch, and Manalel, 2017, p. 1). I recognize their concerns of dehumanization encouraging insensitivity and other negative behavior, but I argue the governing structures of online civil society organizations can also correct that behavior and ultimately change an individual’s tendency to engage in such negativity if said governing structures are equipped with the necessary tools, thereby nullifying the concerns regarding negative behavior.

There are two hypotheses I seek to explore in my thesis. Hypothesis 1 posits the governing structure of an online community can influence an individual’s behavior. For the purposes of this study, “behavior” is defined as how an individual user interacts with other users and the system as a whole, specifically encompassing their interactions with users from foreign cultures or countries than their own and their compliance with the Villoux Bill of Ordinances. For the purposes of this study, “governing structures” is defined with relation to Villoux as the system’s governmental bodies, the Bill of Ordinances, and Villoux’s staff hierarchy. Behavior and attitudes towards the governing structure can be observed in the survey responses. Elaborations upon the specific variables defined as governing structures are expanded upon in study and population sampling section of this chapter. I anticipate my research will suggest the governing structure of Villoux inherently influences the ways in which Villoux users, especially those deeply involved with that
system, behave both within and outside of Villoux. This hypothesis is rooted in my personal experiences with a number of Villouxians whom have evolved their behavior in order to comply with Villoux’s governing standards, e.g. users who stops using an offense word because they know it will result in them being temporarily banned. The hypothesis is further supported by Villoux’s ban records, which provide quantifiable evidence for the aforementioned.

Hypothesis 2 postulates the tenure (combined length of time a user has been a user in Villoux) of users increase their likelihood to engage in behaviors their online civil society organization considers positive and refrain from behaviors their online civil society organization considers negative. Katz and Kahn (1966) explicitly observe this in their research. I expect this to be exemplified within Villoux by correlating a user’s tenure with a decrease in negative actions the system takes against the user and the increased likelihood a user holds a respectable position in Villoux the longer their tenure. Again, this hypothesis is based in my personal experience in interacting with Villouxians since their initiation to the present. It is often the case that the longer users remain in Villoux, they more involved they become with the system’s governing structure. This oftentimes translates to them holding leadership positions and deriving respect from other users based on their position and dedication to furthering Villoux’s agenda.

Both hypotheses are derived from my personal experience interacting with Villouxians and witnessing first-hand the impact membership within Villoux can have on an individual. Villoux’s governing powers are structured in a way to inherently promote positive behaviors amongst Villouxians, chief amongst those behaviors are tolerance, internationalism, and collaboration. I argue the fact that the Grand Council, the ultimate ruling authority within Villoux, is diversely comprised of users from a variety of backgrounds with such diversity especially being poignant with regard to sexual orientation, sex, and nationality. Such diversity is not normally present in
other gaming communities, let alone prevalent within their ruling body; indeed, most gaming communities are administered in a totalitarian fashion wherein one single person holds complete authority over all matters. The Grand Council’s diversity both in terms of the composition of membership as well as with regard to the philosophy of oligarchical group rule intrinsically promote tolerance via its diverse membership, internationalism via its range of national representation, and collaboration via the de facto nature of group rule; therefore, Villoux’s government at the highest level establishes these traits as paramount to success within its community. The Grand Council, though, is not the only entity within Villoux to employ these traits. They can likewise be observed in virtually every staff department and gaming department, meaning they impact users at the lowest level of involvement within Villoux.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design & Data Collection

Study Period

To assess the impact of governing structures and tenure on individual behavior in online civil society organizations, I administrated an online survey to members of Villoux’s population in December 2019. Data on Villoux users spans nearly ten years from December 2010 to the present. The September 2019 census data was used for the purposes of this study given it was the most recent data available due to time constraints. All users in the census, except those noted in the “Variable Information” section of this chapter, were sent a link to a Qualtrics survey via direct message on Discord.

Study Population & Sampling

The Villoux Server System was established on December 15, 2010 by four users who regularly found themselves at odds with proprietors of other gaming communities, most notably due to their governing structures. These structures were oftentimes that the proprietor of the community maintained authoritarian control over the community rather than sharing said control with other members of the community. Villoux sought to evolve that form of governance by introducing more democratic norms in an online environment thereby substantially differentiating itself from the overwhelming majority of other online communities.
As this thesis is a case study of the Villoux Server System, the study population will be users defined in Villoux system censuses and users who were substantially engaged with the community during a time in which a census was not conducted. There is a total of 2,521 users that meet these criteria as of May 2019, but the data from the September 2019 census will be used for purposes of this study as they constitute the most recent data available. All users who have been issued a system ban by the Villoux Grand Council are included in the dataset due to the gravity of such action and the sizeable impact it has on the system. Some of these users may have been active in Villoux outside of the census months and would not otherwise appear in their year’s respective census.

**Sample Information**

A total of 106 survey responses of the received 115 responses were usable for the purposes of this study. The 106 respondents represent 18% of the total 601 users eligible to participate in the survey. Respondents who did not fully complete the survey or who answered unsure on all questions were omitted from the responses used to conduct any studies. Additionally, users who are defined in the census but are not connected to Villoux’s Discord Server were unable to be contacted regarding the survey and are therefore not included. Finally, some users declined to take the survey thereby excluding themselves from this study. The total of number of users who are defined in the September 2019 census but are either not connected to Villoux’s Discord Server or declined to take the survey was 289, reducing the census’ recorded users of 601 users to 312 users. This places survey response rate at 34% of users who were able to be messaged.

There is a significant number of users who select the response option “I don’t know what ‘X’ is.” with “X” representing the subject of the question. This is likely due to a degree of disconnect between some of the casual users included in the survey and the bureaucratic intricacies
of Villoux’s government. Responses are generally divided into four categories – positive (high), medium, negative (low), and unsure. Positive responses, which generally represent a high level of support for the question posed, consist of all responses which affirm the respective questions’ inquiry, e.g. responses such as “Very Legitimate”, “Legitimate”, and “Yes”; negative responses represent the converse, e.g. responses such as “Not at All Legitimate” and “No”; medium responses contain the “Somewhat” options, e.g. “Somewhat Legitimate”; and unsure responses only consist of users who answered “Unsure” or “I don’t know”.

Tables 1 – 4 present the demographic breakdowns of the survey. 93% of respondents are male and 7% are female. This is close to representative of Villoux’s total population since 2010; however, only 2% of the total population has been female whereas 97% of the population has been male with 1% representing other sex. Since Villoux does not record users’ ages, it cannot be known how representative the survey sample is to Villoux’s overall population; however, my personal experience with users within the system leads me to argue it is representative. Villoux has hosted users from around six dozen different nationalities since its establishment and around seventy different nationalities were recorded in the September 2019 census. 1 Only around thirty of those nationalities are represented in the survey, however, the survey respondents’ demographic breakdown by continent is almost exactly representative of the September 2019 census. A table listing the September 2019 census nationalities is found in the appendix. The top five nationalities with the highest survey response rate were, in order of responses, the United States of America

1 Recognition of entities as countries in this study are based upon the System Nationality Ordinance of the Villoux Bill of Ordinances, which determines which entities Villoux recognizes as states. Additional information is in the appendix.
(41% of total respondents), Canada (16%), North Macedonia (8%), the United Kingdom (5%), and Poland (3%), respectively. The United States (50% of recorded users), Canada (8%), and the United Kingdom (5%) are among the top five nationalities recorded in the September 2019 census, though Australians (4%) and Russians (3%) outnumbered North Macedonians and Poles (both 2%) in the census. The top five nationalities of survey respondents represent 72% of total respondents.

Table 1  Sex of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of Respondents</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>98 (93%)</td>
<td>7 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Age of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>18 (17%)</td>
<td>36 (34%)</td>
<td>27 (26%)</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3  Nationality of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality of Respondents</th>
<th>North America</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
<th>South America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 2 (2%)</td>
<td>Total: 7 (7%)</td>
<td>Total: 30 (29%)</td>
<td>Total: 3 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4  Top Five Nationalities of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Five Nationalities of Respondents</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>North Macedonia</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43  (41%)</td>
<td>17    (16%)</td>
<td>8    (8%)</td>
<td>5    (5%)</td>
<td>3      (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 76 (72% of total respondents)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16
Villoux Lexicon

Vernacular specific to Villoux has developed within the system, creating a lexicon colloquially understood by Villoux users but would be confusing to those unfamiliar. This paragraph serves as both an introduction to Villoux as a whole as well as an explanation of words assigned secondary meanings within the system. The first example is the term “the system”, which collectively refers to the Villoux Server System in a similar fashion to how “the country” may be used in place of “the United States of America”. “User” refers to any individual who connects to or uses a “Villoux service”, which is defined as any server, guild, tournament, event, or other service offered by the system. Users may also be called “Villouxians”, the demonym Villoux ascribes to its users. Users are assigned a “system-defined name” of their choosing, which is the moniker used to identify them throughout their time in Villoux in the same way a user on Twitter chooses a handle or a user on Instagram chooses a username. Users cannot use the same system-defined name as another user and must choose a different username in the event another user has already used their preferred username. Users may change their system-defined name, though they are bound by restrictions in the System Name Ordinance.

Explanation of Villoux’s Government

The System Name Ordinance exists as one of several ordinances within the Villoux Bill of Ordinances, which functions as the system’s terms of service, similar to a constitution for an online community. The Bill of Ordinances sets forth every provision of regulation within Villoux ranging from the rights ascribed to users to the limitations on the authority of members of staff. Villoux is ultimately governed by a single body, the Villoux Grand Council, which maintains complete administrative control over the system rather than being governed by a single individual in the way most online communities are governed. The Grand Council maintains the right to issue a “system
ban” against a user, which is a permanent ban from all Villoux services. System banned users may appeal their system ban or the Grand Council can pardon their system ban. Server bans may be issued by different authorities on Villoux’s servers and differ from system bans in that they are not universal.

The administration of Villoux is furthermore divided between three bodies on the Grand Council – the Board of Executives, the Chairman Committee, and the Office of the Chief of Staff. The title “Grand Council Member” is given to every user occupying an office in one of the aforementioned bodies but takes secondary status to the title granting the user a right to sit on the Grand Council, e.g. the Executive System Coder is a Grand Council Member but is referred to as “Executive System Coder” since the “Grand Council Member” only holds that position due to their executive office. The Board of Executives consists of departments referred to as “system staff departments” comprising of staff members who aid the system universally whereas the Chairman Committee consists of departments referred to as “gaming departments” which focus exclusively on their respective game and work in unison with the system staff departments to promote their services. Games are considered “sponsored” by the system when they are granted department-status, though they must first meet requirements outlined in the Misc. Gaming Ordinance. Villoux does not own any of the games the system sponsors, but does own servers, guilds, and tournaments within said games. Department Chairmen may issue “department bans” that prohibit users from accessing any service within their respective department, making it a greater punishment than a server ban from one specific server within a department but still not being as universal throughout Villoux as a system ban. The Office of the Chief of Staff exists solely to house the position of Villoux Chief of Staff since the position would not be defined under the Board of Executives nor the Chairman Committee. The Chief of Staff is the head of government of Villoux, acting with
authority bestowed unto it by the Grand Council. The Chief of Staff is subservient to the Grand Council as a whole but outranks the other individual Grand Council Members on the Board of Executives and the Chairman Committee, similar to a parliamentary style of government.

The Villoux House of Players exists as the second tier of Villoux’s government. The House of Players consists of all Grand Council Members and their respective departments’ staff thereby making this body inclusive of all members of staff. The House of Players does not inherently hold any administrative capability by itself but may be delegated that authority on certain items as warranted by the Grand Council. The House of Players’ main prerogative is hosting monthly meetings wherein Grand Council Members update the entire body on the projects on which they are working, ask for feedback, and hear complaints or criticisms. Attendance at House of Players meetings is mandatory for all staff, though participation in the meeting by raising questions, comments, and concerns is voluntary. All positions in Villoux are completely voluntary, with minor exceptions being made on rare occasion to contract users to perform specialized tasks, e.g. graphic design. Any users can freely opt to join the system staff so long as there are vacancies for staff positions and no user is ever forced to hold a staff position against their will.

All communication throughout Villoux is conducted on the voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) application Discord and the VoIP TeamSpeak, though Discord is the system’s primary form of communication. A bot sends a link to the Discord Ordinance on Villoux’s website to users when they first connect to Villoux’s Discord Server. Villoux sponsors three official languages (English, French, and Spanish) and all communication throughout Villoux must be in one of those three languages.
Data Collection & Data Analysis Methods

The user data has been collected over a ten-year period from 2010 to present, with a system census being conducted in the months of January, May, and September every year, except in 2010 since the system was founded in December 2010; the system census for 2010 only includes December 2010 as a result. System censuses record each user’s system-defined name, nationality, and preferred gaming department. Sex is not explicitly recorded in the system censuses, but it can be determined based upon the honorific users opt to employ, e.g. “Mr.” or “Ms.” The dataset I used to analyze Villoux’s collective census data is a compilation of the census conducted from December 2010 through September 2019, totaling twenty-eight individual system censuses. A complete database combining all of the system censuses has been developed for this purpose.

The System Census Ordinance outlines the requirements for a user to be counted in a system census: the user must be active in the system for a minimum of month prior to the census or have been recorded in a previous census and been active at least once in the past three months. “Active” is defined as having connected to a Villoux service, e.g. a server or tournament. Prior to 2017, Villoux’s primary form of communication was a server hosted on the voice-over-IP program (VoIP) TeamSpeak 3 (Villoux’s TeamSpeak Server) and manually connecting to said server was the only means through which an user counted as active enough to be defined in a census; however, Villoux changed their primary form of communication to the VoIP Discord in 2017 and therefore amended the census requirements to include connection to Villoux’s Discord Server as sufficient to be defined as active. Connection to Villoux’s TeamSpeak 3 continues to count towards being defined as active after the integration of Discord. TeamSpeak 3 requires a manual connection each time the application is launched, but Discord automatically reconnects users to servers to which they have previously connected until users manually remove themselves from the server thereby
making it easier for a user to be defined as active since a user can technically not launch the Discord application for several months and still not be removed from Villoux’s Discord Server, meaning they would still be defined as active in Villoux. This change in VoIP has led to an increase of eligibility to be defined in the census and a subsequent continuing positive trend in the total number of users in the system. Neither the TeamSpeak 3 application nor the Discord application are published by the Villoux Server System and merely exist as independent third-party platforms employed by the system.

Users who were not defined in system censuses but are included in this analysis have their information recorded in the System Ban Records or the Villoux User Reports. The System Ban Records consist of biographies of the users’ tenure in Villoux, highlighting the events that led to their system ban and the Villoux User Reports contains miscellaneous information on users, e.g. their system staff positions, server bans, nationality changes, and name changes amongst other information. \(^2\) Cross tabulations were employed to analysis the response data and their relationship with my variables.

\textbf{Variable Information}

Responses to survey question “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals’ behavior?” are used as the dependent variable with users’ support of the governing structure and tenure used as the respective independent variables. Users’ support of the governing structure is measured based on their responses to three survey questions – “Has the knowledge

\(^2\) I have personally gathered all of this data since 2010 and have regularly updated it to reflect notable changes. Other users have contributed to some of the data in small fashions, but I personally reviewed any such contribution.
Villoux has given you about different cultures and countries helped you develop a sense of connection those people and/or places?”; “Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?”; and “Have you ever been issued a system ban by the Villoux Grand Council”? Responses to question #4, “For how long have you been a member of Villoux?”, are used as the second independent variable of tenure.

Users who had a positive response to all three of the aforementioned questions are classified as “high” in terms of their support for Villoux’s governing structure, users who had a negative response for all three question are classified as “low” support, and the “medium” support group is comprised of any other variation of responses. Nine users (9% of respondents) are in the high group, eighty-eight users (85%) are in the medium group, and nine users (9%) are in the low group.

Table 5  Support Group Responses to Question #6, “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals’ behavior?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports Governing Structure</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Response to Question #6</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Response to Question #6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure Response to Question #6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Group Percent with a Positive Response</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 60</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6  Support Group Responses to Question #20, “Has the Knowledge Villoux has given you about different cultures and countries helped you develop a sense of connection those people and/or places?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports Governing Structure</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Response to Question #20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Response to Question #20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure Response to Question #20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Group Percent with a Positive Response</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>N = 60</strong></td>
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</table>

Table 7  Support Group Responses to Question #21, "Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports Governing Structure</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Response to Question #21</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Response to Question #21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure Response to Question #21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Group Percent with a Positive Response</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N = 60</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8  Support Group Responses to Question #24, "Have you ever been issued a system ban by the Villoux Grand Council?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determination</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports Governing Structure</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Response to Question #24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Response to Question #24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Group Percent with a Negative Response</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N = 60</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I argue the three questions used to establish the support group as an independent variable, hereafter referred to as the “support questions”, are among the best options to assess whether or not a user supports Villoux’s governing structure given two of them discuss internationalism and freedom to express and learn about foreign cultures, are among the foremost goals of the Grand Council’s administration of the system and the other question is used for the support group to assess whether or not a user’s support of Villoux’s strides towards internationalism translates to a lack of behavioral issues quantifiable enough to justify issuing a system ban against them.

**Quality of the Study & Ethical Considerations**

I acknowledge a case study consisting of a relatively small sample of the overall population engaged in online civil society organizations will not necessarily be indicative of changes in behavior in said population as a whole, but I argue such a case study can provide foundational framework other researchers can expand upon with larger sample sizes given the lack of literature on this subject. This study has been approved by the Mississippi State University Office of Research Compliance for approval.
CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS

Survey Responses

This chapter reviews the respondents’ answers to the survey and uses select responses to test my two hypotheses. Using Microsoft Excel, I generated cross tabulations (pivot tables) to test survey responses with the two independent variables – support of the governing structure and tenure in Villoux. The first five questions in the thirty-two-question survey collected identifying information of the respondents, e.g. age, sex, nationality, tenure, and contained the required IRB signatures. These responses are discussed in the “Sample Information” section of the previous chapter. The sixth question asked, “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals' behavior?”. The seventh through sixteenth questions asked respondents their opinions on Villoux’s governing structure, including the government bodies, the House of Players, and the balance and distribution of governing authority. The seventeenth through twenty-third questions asked respondents their opinions and experiences with cultural influences within Villoux. The twenty-fourth question asked users if they had ever been issued a system ban and the twenty-fifth through thirty-second questions were only shown to users who said they had been issued a system ban. The system ban questions asked system banned users about their experience in Villoux prior and post system ban.
Governing Structures Questions

42% of total respondents indicated that they had a complete understanding of Villoux’s governing structure, i.e. how the Grand Council, the House of Players, the gaming departments, and the staff departments operate. 41% said they “somewhat understand”, 10% responded “do not at all understand”, and 6% were unsure. This aggregates to 83% of total respondents having a proficient understanding of Villoux’s governing structures and thereby provides validity based on said understanding to the ensuing questions.

76% of respondents who have been in Villoux for over five years indicated a complete understanding of Villoux’s governing structure and 24% indicated a moderate understanding, totaling 100% of respondents in this group having an understanding of the governing structure. This again speaks to the value of tenure in survey responses given those with longer tenures continue to have a positive relationship with the question posed. Still, 82% of respondents who have been in Villoux for less than a year indicated at least a moderate understanding of the governing structure with only 10% saying they did not at all understand and 8% unsure. The highest level of not at all understanding comes from the one- to two-year group with 20% not at all understanding the governing structure. I argue this number is likely higher than the less than one year group given those in Villoux for less than one year have most likely not become familiar with the more intricate bureaucracies of the system whereas those who have been a member for one to two years have experienced said intricacy but have not yet developed a full understanding of it. This theory is supported by the fact that only 7% of the three- to five-year group indicates no understanding of the governing structure compared to 93% who have at least a moderate understanding.
85% of total respondents view the Grand Council as having legitimate authority over Villoux as opposed to any other body or individual. Only 1% of respondents believe the Grand Council has little to no authority, 7% did not know what the Grand Council is, and 7% were unsure. These numbers indicate a firm believe amongst Villouxians that the Grand Council, collectively, is the ultimate authority within Villoux and cannot be superseded by any other body or individual. This again speaks to the uniqueness of Villoux’s governing structure for an online organization wherein a collective group maintains ultimate authority rather than a singular individual. This sentiment is furthermore supported by responses regarding the Grand Council’s oversight of the Villoux Chief of Staff, the chief executive officer within the system. 70% of total respondents believe the Chief of Staff is kept in-check by the Grand Council and only 3% held the converse belief. 9% did not know what the Chief of Staff is and 18% were unsure. The following question, however, suggests an interesting relationship between the Grand Council and the Chief of Staff as only 31% of total respondents believe the Grand Council, collectively, are the owners of Villoux and 38% believe that the current Chief of Staff is the owner of Villoux. 10% believe whomever holds the office of the Chief of Staff is the owner of Villoux, 3% believe someone or something

3 Based on survey responses to question #8, “How legitimate do you view the Villoux Grand Council’s authority over the Villoux Server System?”

4 Based on survey responses to question #9, “Do you feel that the Villoux Chief of Staff operates with oversight from the Grand Council?”

5 Based on survey responses to question #10, “Do you consider the Grand Council, collectively, as the legitimate owners of Villoux?”
else is the owner of Villoux, and 7% do not know what the Grand Council is. This suggests that whereas the majority of Villouxians believe the Chief of Staff can be held accountable by the Grand Council, a significant portion of them indicate that the Chief of Staff elects to be subservient to the Grand Council since, as the owner of Villoux, the Chief of Staff could hypothetically disregard the Grand Council’s authority. This speaks to a trust users hold in the Chief of Staff, whom they believe is equipped with the means necessary to overrule the Grand Council but does not utilize said means out of respect for the Grand Council’s authority. Given respondents’ attitudes towards the Grand Council’s legitimacy and attitudes towards the Chief of Staff being kept in check, the fact that more respondents consider the current Chief of Staff as the owner of Villoux over any other body or individual again speaks to the uniqueness of Villoux’s governing structure.

75% of total respondents indicated that they believe the influence of the House of Players is valuable. Only 1% of respondents said they do not at all consider the House of Players to be influential, 12% did not know what the House of Players is, and 12% were unsure. This means 75% of respondents feel the questions, comments, and concerns they raise in the House of Players do not fall on the deaf ears of Grand Council Members and can lead to action being taken. These responses speak to staff members’ confidence that they have a role in leading the direction of the system alongside the Grand Council. 76% of total respondents indicated they believe anyone can freely express their views within Villoux, regardless of membership in one of the two

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6 Based on survey responses to question #11, “How valuable do you consider the influence of the House of Players?”
governmental bodies. 7 3% of respondents believe that either the governing powers do not listen to users outside of the governmental bodies or that users cannot freely express their views and 22% were unsure. The significant number of unsure responses is most likely due to their lack of experience in attempting to express views within Villoux; however, the fact that 76% believes the governing powers listen to the views of users regardless of their level of governmental involvement attributes a level of concern for user input not often seen in online communities.

Table 9  Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #7, “How well would you say you understand Villoux’s governing structure, i.e. how the Grand Council, the House of Players, the gaming departments, and the staff departments operate?”, and Respondents’ Tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #7</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;1Yr</td>
<td>1-2Yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely understand</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat understand</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not at all understand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

92% of respondents who have served in the House of Players expressed belief that the influence of the House of Players is valuable to the ways in which the Grand Council administers Villoux. Only 1% of respondents who have served in the House of Players do not believe the House’s influence is valuable, 3% do not know what the House of Players is, and 4% were unsure. This supermajority of respondents indicates the House’s influence is, indeed, perceived as valuable and worthy of action by the Grand Council in applicable scenarios.

7 Based on survey responses to question #12, “Do you feel anyone interested in Villoux politics has a means to express their views to the governing powers of Villoux?”
Several respondents submitted text descriptions of their attempts to express views to the governing powers of Villoux. Respondent #34, a male from Finland, detailed two instances wherein he made requests to Grand Council Members. He recounts that one response was accepted and the other was denied “with a valid reason”. Respondent #51, a male from Canada, wrote about an idea for a new gaming department he had which was “heard and enacted upon”. Respondent #54, a male from the United States, recounted that he has contacted the Chief of Staff about issues he has had and appreciated the Chief of Staff responding and “react[ing] accordingly”. Respondent #101, a male from North Macedonia, wrote “The Villoux Grand Council always listens you (sic.) their users for each department. They usually reply quickly with the right answer and always try to help you. The Council always uses their power in the right way.” About a dozen other responses are recorded echoing the sentiments expressed above; however, about three respondents, such as Respondent #67, a female from the United States, detailed that no response was given to her concern regarding the Grand Council’s governance. Experiences such as hers are rare in the survey responses, meaning the majority of respondents believe they have a means to express their views and concerns and have a legitimate opportunity to have any such concerns resolved or new ideas implemented.

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8 Based on survey responses to question #13, “Have you ever expressed a view to the governing powers? If so, please explain your view, how you expressed it, and the response or lack thereof from the governing powers. If you have not, type ‘N/A’.”

9 Referenced responses to question #13 are listed in full in the appendix.
60% of total respondents said their perception of Villoux’s governing structure is influenced by users’ ability to express their views. 10 54% of these respondents stated they felt this way because “it makes Villoux community-run, which is unique for an online community” and 6% stated they felt this way because “it weakens the governing powers’ authority.” 24% responded that the governing structures’ willingness to listen to individual users does not matter to them, 5% responded that they do not believe users can effectively express their views, and 12% were unsure. The fact that 60% indicated the importance of users’ ability to express their views with relation to their perception of the governing structure is significant in that it indicates a necessity for online civil society organizations such as Villoux to ensure members possess the necessary means to ensure their voices are heard.

When asked whether or not the Villoux Bill of Ordinances influences their behavior, 60% of total respondents answered that they try to abide by the Bill of Ordinances, 14% answered that they do not care about the Bill of Ordinances, 16% did not know what the Bill of Ordinances is, and 10% based on survey responses to question #14, “Do users’ ability to express their views to the governing powers affect your perception of the governing structure of Villoux?”

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10 Based on survey responses to question #14, “Do users’ ability to express their views to the governing powers affect your perception of the governing structure of Villoux?”
and 9% were unsure. 11 These responses further support Katz and Kahn (1966)’s findings that an organization’s governing standards generate compliance by membership. Subsequently, 39% of total respondents said that their attempts to abide by the Bill of Ordinances are rooted in their belief that whomever rules Villoux maintains the right to impose ruling standards, 6% responded they try to follow rules regardless of whom wrote them, 23% responded they abide by the Bill of Ordinances because they want to remain in Villoux regardless of the legitimacy of the Bill of Ordinances’ author(s), 13% responded the Bill of Ordinances does not affect their behavior, 15% did not know what the Bill of Ordinances is, and 4% were unsure. 12 The fact that only 39% of respondents abide by the governing laws of Villoux because they view the authors of said laws as legitimate is interesting to note given 85% of total respondents and 60% of total respondents indicated they viewed the Grand Council as legitimate and users’ ability to freely express their views is an important factor in their perception of Villoux’s governing structure, respectively. This may suggest that members’ interactions with the governing powers may be more relevant in their view of legitimacy of the powers than the rules which bind the community. This theory is further supported by the fact that 60% of respondents reported that they actively try to abide by the rules outlined in the Bill of Ordinances, which may imply the reason the remaining 40% of Villouxians

11 Based on survey responses to question #15, “Does the Villoux Bill of Ordinances, e.g. the Discord Ordinance, affect how you behave on Villoux services?”

12 Based on survey responses to question #16, “If the Bill of Ordinances does affect your behavior, is it because you view the authors (the Grand Council) of the Bill of Ordinances as legitimate?”
are not banned from the system is not due to their unwitting compliance with the Bill of Ordinances; rather, it is due to their respect for Villoux’s leadership translating to compliance with the leaders’ governing standards. These standards are, of course, bound by the Bill of Ordinances, however, users may choose to follow the rules due to the leaders following the rules themselves and encouraging members to do the same.

**Cultural Influences**

Whereas Villoux is designed to be a gaming community, a de facto result of interacting with people on a global spectrum is a somewhat politicization of said interactions. Villoux does not inherently seek to politicize interactions amongst users; however, users from a variety of nations spending social time together oftentimes results in discussions regarding foreign cultures and countries that can lead to political discussions. These discussions can be both specifically political as relates to state politics as well as political in the sense of influencing behavior. This manifests itself in a way Villoux did not initially expect when it was established, but has worked to encourage since that time by ensuring the community is inclusive of a global audience from a variety of cultures.

90% of total respondents believe Villoux is structured in a way to be inclusive of a global, international audience. 

Of these 90%, 71% believe Villoux completely succeeds in being inclusive of people from across the globe whereas 19% believe Villoux tries to be inclusive of an international audience but has shortcomings in its approach. 1% of total respondents believe

13 Based on survey responses to question #17, “Do you believe Villoux is structured in a way that encourages international collaboration?”
Villoux gives top priority to one nationality and fails to include others and 9% were unsure. Refer to Table 3 for a complete demographic breakdown of respondents’ nationalities. 100% of respondents in the top five nationalities (the United States, Canada, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom, and Poland, respectively) believe Villoux succeeds in its approach to international collaboration, as do 100% of Africans (2% of total respondents) and South Americans (3% of total respondents). Asians (7% of total respondents), Europeans (29% of total respondents), North Americans (57% of total respondents), and Oceanians (3% of total respondents) widely report that they believe Villoux succeeds, though 29% of Asians say they were unsure, 3% of Europeans were unsure, 12% of North Americans were unsure, and 33% of Oceanians believe Villoux prioritizes one nationality above others. The one Australian respondent who selected this option likely feels this way given Oceania’s drastically different time zone from United States Central Standard Time, the operating time zone of Villoux, though Villoux does host regional events for Oceanic users. Noting this, 100% of total African and South American respondents believe Villoux succeeds in international collaboration alongside 97% of Europeans, 89% of North Americans, 71% of Asians, and 67% of Oceanians. These majorities and supermajorities indicate that respondents widely feel Villoux succeeds in having a governing structure which fosters international collaboration.

The success of Villoux’s governing structure encouraging international collaboration is observed through respondents’ answers to a question regarding whether or not they have learned about new cultures and/or countries due to their membership in Villoux. 64% of total respondents indicated that they have learned about either new cultures or countries due to their membership in
Villoux. Of these 64%, 41% reported that they learned about both new cultures and countries, 18% just learned about new cultures, and 5% just learned about new countries. 28% of total respondents reported they have neither learned about new cultures nor new countries due to their membership in Villoux and 8% were unsure. Subsequently, 67% of total respondents reported that Villoux has helped them develop a personal connection to the cultures and/or countries they have learned about in Villoux through their interaction with individuals from said cultures and/or countries, 8% reported they do not care about the new cultures and/or countries they have learned about through Villoux, and 25% reported they did not learn about any new cultures and/or countries. 15 60% of total respondents reported that they have discussed their culture and/or country with other Villouxians. 16 Of these 60%, 18% confidently report others have learned about both their culture and country, 4% report others have learned about their culture, 4% report others have learned about their country, 16% report whereas their culture has arisen in conversation they were unsure if anyone learned anything about it, 5% report whereas their country has arisen in conversation they were unsure if anyone learned about it, and 12% report whereas their culture and country have arisen in conversation they were unsure if anyone learned about it. 31% of total

14 Based on survey responses to question #18, “Have you learned about cultures and countries during your time in Villoux that you previously did not know about?”

15 Based on survey responses to question #19, “Has the knowledge Villoux has given you about different cultures and countries helped you develop a sense of connection to those people and/or places?”

16 Based on survey responses to question #20, “Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?
respondents do not believe they have taught anyone else about their culture or country and 9% were unsure. With 64% of total respondents reporting they learned about new cultures and/or countries due to their membership in Villoux, 67% reporting they have developed a personal connection to the cultures and/or countries about which they have learned, and 60% reporting they have discussed their own culture and or country with other Villouxians, it is clear Villoux has not just succeeded in its goal of encouraging international collaboration for the purpose of the administration of the system but also in regard to more casual, personal connections amongst its members.

55% of total respondents indicated their membership in Villoux has resulted in them becoming more open-minded about individuals from different cultures and/or countries. 17 39% reported that they were already open-minded about people whom were different from themselves and Villoux did not increase said open-mindedness and 6% were unsure. 0% selected the response option indicating Villoux has encouraged them to become less open-minded about individuals from different cultures and/or countries. This is significant as it again provides support to the argument that Villoux’s governing structure is organized in a fashion that encourages international collaboration and the exploration of new cultures and countries. The responses to the following question likewise support this sentiment. 47% of total respondents reported that they actively attempt to refrain from using words or phrases they have learned are offensive to Villouxians of different cultures or nationalities, 8% reported they are aware they are using offensive words or

17 Based on survey responses to question #21, “Has being a member of Villoux influenced your open-mindedness about people from other cultures and/or countries?”

36
phrases despite learning they are offensive, 27% reported they are not aware of anything they say being offensive, and 19% were unsure. 18 Though it is a relatively low percentage, the fact that 8% of total respondents continue using offensive words or phrases despite learning they are offensive does contradict my previous arguments regarding Villoux promoting internationalism, though I argue it does not defeat that case given its small representation.

**Observations Within Villoux**

The data established in the preceding section firmly suggests a relationship between membership in Villoux and members’ attitudes towards internationalism. This relationship has been observed in Villoux on numerous occasions. One such occasion occurred on March 22, 2016, the day of three coordinate suicide bombings in Belgium by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. At the time of the January 2016 system census, only 0.5% of Villoux’s population was Belgian, though requests by non-Belgians were nevertheless made for Villoux to host an online vigil of remembrance for the victims in order for Villouxians to show solidarity with the Belgian Villouxians. Over twenty users collectively from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States gathered on Villoux’s TeamSpeak Server to pay their respects to the lives lost and to show support to the Belgian Villouxians. 19 Belgian users at the time testified that attendance at the vigil helped them more appreciate their membership in

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18 Based on survey responses to question #22, “Has being a member of Villoux altered the way you speak or think about people from other cultures and/or countries, e.g. have you stopped using certain words or phrases that you have learned others find offensive?”

19 The VoIP TeamSpeak was Villoux’s primary form of communication in March 2016 rather than Discord. See “Explanation of Villoux’s Government” for additional elaborations.
Villoux as it demonstrated that Villoux could stand as more than simply a gaming community and could facilitate feelings which translated to them in-person. This example, therefore, serves to compliment the survey’s findings that Villoux helps its members develop a sense of connection to different countries given the sentiment expressed towards the Belgians by the non-Belgians and the appreciation of the Belgians to the non-Belgians.

Another noteworthy example occurred in late 2019 when a group of North Macedonian users and a Latvian user were confronted by an American Discord Operator for posting memes on Villoux’s Discord Server associating black people with fried chicken. The Discord Operator was able to immediately identify the memes as offensive, though the North Macedonians and Latvian had difficulty understanding the cultural sensitivity of associating the two. This is likely due to the racial demographics of North Macedonia and Latvia, respectively, compared to the United States. People of African descent comprise less than 1% of the population in both North Macedonia and Latvia whereas 13% of the American population is black and race is an often-discussed social issue. 20 21 22 These racial demographic differences likely led to little or no


interaction with black people on behalf of the North Macedonians and Latvian thereby explaining their unfamiliarity with their offensiveness; however, the American Discord Operator, coming from a country with a significant black population, was able to explain the offensive nature of the memes to the North Macedonians and Latvian. Though they had some difficulty understanding why the comparison was insulting, the North Macedonians and Latvian conceded the meme was inappropriate and pledged to refrain from such comparisons in future. This example provides a direct illustration of how, through Villoux, users have learned something they were doing is offensive to another culture and then ceased said action.

**System Ban Questions**

All survey respondents were asked if they had ever been issued a system ban by the Grand Council. A system ban is a permanent ban from all Villoux services issued after multiple warnings for inappropriate behavior have been issued by administrators. More information regarding system bans can be found in the “Explanation of Villoux’s Government” section. 90% of respondents have not been issued a system ban, but 10% had. 23 This 10% of respondents is representative of eleven respondents. One respondent from Belgium answered that they have been issued a system ban, but Villoux has never issued a system ban against a Belgian, so that response was removed from the study of these questions. 80% of the remaining respondents are from the United States, 10% was Canadian, and 10% was Filipino.

23 Based on survey responses to question #24, “Have you ever been issued a system ban by the Villoux Grand Council? Please note that a system ban is a permanent ban from all Villoux services. This ban is different from a regular ban from one of Villoux’s servers.”
When the system banned respondents were asked if they understood why they were issued a system ban, 80% responded they had an understanding of why they were banned and 20% responded they have no idea why they were issued a system ban. When asked if their system ban was justified, 70% responded they believe their actions warranted punishment, 20% did not believe their system ban was justified, and 10% was unsure. All of these users have obviously had their system ban appealed or pardoned given their ability to participate in the survey. 60% of the system banned users surveyed said they are consciously trying to avoid the same behavior which lead to their system ban and 40% said they are still behaving the same way as they were prior to their system ban. I argue this 40% of respondents is at least somewhat mistaken regarding their behavior as Villoux’s standards of inappropriateness have not evolved much since its inception, meaning if these users returned to Villoux and continued behaving inappropriately, they would most likely be issued a system ban again thereby prohibited them from taking this survey given it was only administered to current Villoux users. Nevertheless, at least over a majority of system banned users cite Villoux’s punishment against them as incentive to change their behavior.

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24 Based on survey responses to question #25, “Do you understand why the Villoux Grand Council issued a system ban against you?”

25 Based on survey responses to question #26, “Do you believe the Grand Council was justified in issuing your system ban?”
Descriptive Analysis

Hypothesis 1 – Governing Structure

Hypothesis 1 posits the governing structure of an online civil society organization can influence an individual’s behavior. The survey responses provide support for this hypothesis.

Behavior Question

This hypothesis was directly tested in the form of a survey question. 34% of respondents answered “Yes” to the survey question “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals' behavior?”, 43% responded “Somewhat”, 13% responded “No”, and 11% responded “Unsure”. This aggregates to 78% of total respondents answering that they believe Villoux has at least some power to influence an individual’s behavior and only 13% answering that they did not believe Villoux could influence an individual’s behavior.

All of the users with a high support of the governing structure (9% of respondents) indicated that they believed Villoux could influence an individual’s behavior. 85% of respondents with a medium level of support of the governing structure indicated they believed Villoux has at least some influence over behavior, 7% of this group indicated they did not believe that Villoux could influence behavior, and 12% of this group was unsure. These users represent 85% of respondents. Finally, all of the users with a low support of the governing structure (6% of respondents) indicated that they did not believe Villoux could influence behavior.

A relationship clearly exists between users’ support in the governing structure of Villoux and their belief that Villoux can influence an individual’s behavior, indicated by 100% of

26 Based on survey responses to question #6, “Do you believe has the power to change individuals’ behavior?”
respondents in both the high and low support group believing Villoux can and cannot influence behavior, respectively. Whereas there is an increased variance in responses from the medium support group, the overwhelming majority (85%) expressed that they believe Villoux can at least somewhat influence behavior. In total, the 78% of respondents who answered that they believe Villoux can influence behavior clearly represent support for my hypothesis based upon their responses to this question alone.

Table 11  Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #6, “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals' behavior?”, and Respondents' Support of Governing Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can Villoux Influence Behavior?</th>
<th>Support of Governing Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(51%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 104</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural Influence Questions

As established in the “Cultural Influences” section of the review of survey responses, 60% of total respondents believe other Villouxians have learned about their culture and/or country through their interactions with them in Villoux. With regard to their support of Villoux’s governing structure, 100% of respondents with a high support of the governing structure hold this sentiment and 61% with a medium support hold this sentiment. 100% of respondents with a low
support of the governing structure and 30% of respondents with a medium support report they have not shared anything about their respective cultures or countries. 8% of the medium support group were unsure.

An obvious relationship exists between support of governing structures and responses to this question given 100% with a high support report they have shared their culture or country and 100% with a low support report they have not shared their culture or country. Given the relatively low numeric synonymity between the high and the low support groups, the medium support group is most indicative of the relationship given it holds 85% of total respondents. Given 61% of the medium group indicating they have shared their culture and/or country and only 30% reporting the contrary, this aggregates to 61% of total respondents (the high and medium group) supporting this hypothesis based on survey responses to this question.

Table 12 Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #20, “Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?” and Respondents’ Support of Governing Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have You Shared Your Country / Culture?</th>
<th>Support of Governing Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 104</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As established in the “Cultural Influences” section of the review of survey responses, 55% of total respondents report Villoux has increased their open-mindedness towards individuals from different cultures and/or countries. With regard to their support of Villoux’s governing structure, 100% of respondents with a high support of the governing structure likewise hold this view and 57% in the medium support group are alongside them. 100% of respondents with a low support of the governing structure and 38% of respondents with a medium support report Villoux has not made them more open-minded. 5% of the medium support group were unsure.

Again, an obvious relationship exists between support of governing structures and responses to this question given 100% with a high support report Villoux has made them more open-minded towards different cultures and/or countries and 100% with a low support report Villoux has not made them more open-minded towards different cultures and/or countries. I again argue the medium support group is most representative of the relationship given it holds 85% of total respondents. The 57% support from the medium group coupled with the 100% support from the high group aggregates to 57% total support for this hypothesis thereby suggesting a positive relationship.
Table 13  Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #21, “Has being a member of Villoux influenced your open-mindedness about people from other cultures and/or countries?” and Respondents’ Support of Governing Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has Villoux Made You More Open-Minded?</th>
<th>Support of Governing Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N = 104</strong></td>
<td><strong>9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 2 – Tenure**

Hypothesis 2 postulates the tenure of users increases their likelihood to engage in behaviors their online civil society organization considers positive and refrain from behaviors their online civil society organization considers negative. The survey responses likewise provide support for this hypothesis.

**Behavior Question**

With reference to the behavior question, tenure was less indicative of respondents’ belief that Villoux could influence an individual’s behavior compared to their support of the governing structure, though a relationship can still be observed. 76% of respondents who had been in Villoux for over five years answered “Yes” that Villoux can influence behavior and 19% responded “Somewhat”, aggregating to 95% of users who have been in Villoux for over five years believing that the system can influence behavior and only 5% believing it cannot. This is an extraordinary
number, and I argue it is extremely significant given the longer a user’s tenure in Villoux, the more experience interacting with other users they have. I argue this fact makes the users with a longer tenure the most authoritative respondents given their more extensive experience within Villoux and with its users.

Such high support, however, is not represented amongst the other tenure variables. Those who have been in Villoux for less than a year only have 18% answering “Yes” and 50% answering “Somewhat” for a total of 68% believing Villoux has at least some influence over behavior. 15% of users in this group do not believe Villoux can influence behavior and 15% were unsure. In the one- to two-year tenure group, 24% responded “Yes” and 60% responded “Somewhat”, aggregating 84% of respondents in this group believing Villoux can at least somewhat influence behavior. Only 4% responded “No”. 12% were unsure. The three- to five-year tenure group demonstrated similar results to the one- to two-year group. 40% of this group responded “Yes” and 27% responded “Somewhat”, aggregating 67% support for at least some influence. This group, however, contains the largest number of users who do not believe Villoux can influence behavior – 27%. 6% of this group were unsure.

The most significant response variance to this question with regard to users’ tenure is that the three- to five-year tenure group demonstrates the lowest support for Villoux influencing an individual’s behavior and the highest belief that Villoux cannot influence behavior. This differs from all other tenure groups as an increase in support for Villoux influencing behavior is observed, e.g. 68% support for the less than a year group, 84% support for the one- to two-year group, 95% support for the over five-year group. Likewise, the tenure groups demonstrate a decrease in “No” responses, e.g. 15% opposition in the less than a year support group and 4% opposition in the one- to two-year group. Nevertheless, 73% of respondents to the tenure question believed Villoux can
at least somewhat influence behavior and only 11% do not believe Villoux can influence behavior. These figures support my second hypothesis that tenure can be used as an explanatory for believe that Villoux can influence behavior.

Table 14    Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #6, “Do you believe Villoux has the power to influence individuals' behavior?”, and Respondents’ Tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Options</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>&lt; 1 Yr.</th>
<th>1 - 2 Yrs.</th>
<th>3 - 5 Yrs.</th>
<th>5+ Yrs.</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes – I have witnessed how Villoux can influence people’s behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat – I think Villoux might influence people’s behavior, but I am not sure if it does</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No – I do not think Villoux can influence people’s behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural Influence Questions

Regarding whether or not Villouxians have shared their culture and/or country with others, 37% of respondents who have been in Villoux for less than a year reported they have shared either their culture or country with others, 53% responded they had not done so, and 10% were unsure. The number of respondents who have not shared their culture or country is likely high due to the length of their time in Villoux not being long enough for such topics to arise in conversation as frequently as members with longer tenure. This is exemplified by the number of respondents who selected “No” decreasing as tenure increases. For example, with respondents who have been in Villoux for one- to two-years, 68% have shared their culture and/or country and only 24% had not. 8% of this group was unsure. Respondents who have been in Villoux for three- to five-years saw 87% reporting they have shared their culture and/or country and only 13% responding they had not. 76% of respondents who have been in Villoux for over five years report sharing their culture and/or country compared to just 10% of this group reporting the contrary and 14% being unsure.
This data confirms a positive relationship between tenure and individuals sharing their culture and/or country with other individuals. It suggests the longer a user has tenure in Villoux, the more likely it becomes for them to share their culture and/or country. Sharing culture and/or country always extends upwards with relation to tenure, except in the over five-years group, though the percentage there is still comparatively high. This data, therefore, also provides merit to hypothesis 2 given the previously established fact that the knowledge of new cultures and/or countries can culminate in behavioral change in an effort to be more inclusive and less offensive.

Table 15 Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #20, “Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?”, and Respondents’ Tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have You Shared Your Culture / Culture?</th>
<th>Tenure&lt; 1 Yr.</th>
<th>1 - 2 Yrs.</th>
<th>3 - 5 Yrs.</th>
<th>5+ Yrs.</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes – I have taught people about country by interacting with them in Villoux</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes – I have taught people about my culture and country by interacting with them in Villoux</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes – I have taught people about my culture by interacting with them in Villoux</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat – My country has come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat – My culture and country have come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat – My culture has come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No – I have not taught anyone about my culture or country by interacting with them in Villoux</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked whether or not Villoux has encouraged them to be more open-minded, 42% of respondents who have been in Villoux for less than one year answered that Villoux encouraged open-mindedness, 50% said they were already open-minded, and 8% were unsure. The trend of open-mindedness due to membership in Villoux increasing alongside tenure is observed in every tenure demographic. Amongst respondents who have been in Villoux for one- to two-years, 48% of respondents said their membership in Villoux has increased their open-mindedness, 44% said they were already open-minded, and 8% were unsure. Respondents who have been in Villoux for three- to five-years saw 67% reporting Villoux expanded their open-mindedness and 33%
reporting they were already open-minded. 81% of respondents who have been in Villoux for over five-years indicated their membership in Villoux has increased their open-mindedness with only 14% indicating they were already open-minded.

This cross tabulation provides the most significant relationship between tenure and behavioral change as it is evident that tenure has a positive relationship with increased open-mindedness based on the survey responses. It is again important to note that 0% of total respondents selected the option “No – Villoux has encouraged me to be less open-minded about people who are different from me.” This suggests Villoux has not only succeeded in its goal of promoting internationalism, but it has also definitively eschewed from promoting ethnocentrism. This heavily suggests tenure in Villoux can result in behavioral change towards internationalism.

Table 16  Cross Tabulation of Responses to Question #21, “Has being a member of Villoux influenced your open-mindedness about people from other cultures and/or countries?” and Respondents’ Tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has Villoux Made You More Open-Minded?</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>&lt;= 1 Yr</th>
<th>1 - 2 Yrs</th>
<th>3 - 5 Yrs</th>
<th>5+ Yrs</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes – Villoux has taught me to be more tolerant and understanding of people who are different from me</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat – Villoux has taught me about new cultures and/or countries, but I was already open-minded</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No – I was already open-minded about people who are different from me</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Research on civil society organizations must take into account the growing presence of online civil society organizations in the everyday lives of an ever-expanding number of individuals. The Villoux Server System exists as a ripe field of study for the theoretical implications and influence of online civil society organizations in the lives of these individuals. With its diverse variety of demographics, Villoux is representative of a multitude of individuals from an assortment of backgrounds that can all find a sense of unity in this imagined nation-like community. The new observations researchers can develop are nearly insurmountable given the current negligence of studying such organizations. This study presents itself as a polished yet rudimentary beginning in expanding the amount of literature on the impact of online civil society organizations, especially those with an international audience. The research noted throughout this study illustrates the necessity of additional such studies on different communities to determine if Villoux simply exists as an enigma, though I argue my findings can be replicated in other organizations as well given that whereas Villoux is unique it does not stand alone amongst a plethora of similarly successful organizations.

Analysis of Hypotheses

The most imperative findings of this study stem from the descriptive analysis of my two hypotheses. The survey response data suggest validity for both hypotheses, indicating a critical finding – online civil society organizations can influence individual behavior just as Katz and Kahn
(1966) have found in-person organizations can. Specifically, we can determine that the governing structure of an online civil society organization and the tenure of a member within said organization are explanatory variables for behavioral change. This is demonstrated in the “Descriptive Analysis” section of the data analysis chapter by suggesting a positive relationship between these two variables and change in an individuals’ behavior.

Definitive support for hypothesis 1, the governing structure of an online civil society organization can influence an individual’s behavior, is observed in the survey responses. 100% of users with a high support for Villoux’s governing structure and 85% of users with a medium level of support for the governing structure all answered that they believe Villoux can influence an individual’s behavior. More specifically, they believe Villoux’s governing structure can influence behavior. Given that 100% of respondents with a high support of the governing structure and 57% with a medium support said Villoux has increased their open-mindedness towards individuals from different cultures and/or countries than their own, this suggests Villoux’s governing structure is designed in a way that influences behavior for the better. The 75% of respondents who said they believe the influence of Villoux’s lower house of government, the House of Players, which any member of Villoux can freely join, is valuable furthermore provides support to this hypothesis. Members of Villoux feel confident in their ability to partake in decision-making within the community thereby providing legitimacy to any decisions made regarding the community’s administration, which is also represented in the fact that 76% of total respondents believe anyone can freely express their views in Villoux. I argue this representation is a critical component of Villoux’s governing structure which makes users support the governing structure. Furthermore, 85% of total respondents answered that they respect and acknowledge the Grand Council’s legitimacy in administering Villoux. This oligarchical system of government differs from the type
of totalitarian governance seen in most online civil society organization. I argue this form of group-rule is another major contributing factor to Villoux’s governing structure’s ability to influence behavior given members feel they are represented in a legitimately perceived government. All of these figures firmly suggest profound support for hypothesis 1.

Support is likewise observed for hypothesis 2, tenure of users increases their likelihood to engage in behaviors their online civil society organization considers positive and refrain from behaviors their online civil society organization considers negative, though not as poignantly as for hypothesis 1. 95% of respondents who had been in Villoux for over five years confirmed their belief that Villoux can influence an individual’s behavior, i.e. encourage behavior Villoux considers positive and discourage behavior Villoux considers negative. This belief is represented by 68% of respondents with a tenure of less than one year, 84% in the one to two years group, and 67% in the three to five years group. This belief sees a gradual increase alongside tenure save within the three to five-year group. With the more experience in Villoux users develop, the more evident it becomes to them the system’s ability to influence behavior, presumably based on either their own development or development they have observed in other Villouxians. 81% of respondents with a tenure of over five years indicated Villoux has increased their open-mindedness, representing a tolerance Villoux’s governing structure promotes as positive. This is observed in 50% of respondents with a tenure less than one year, 48% with a tenure of one to two years, and 67% with a tenure of three to five years. This upward trend indicates a positive relationship between tenure and members shifting their behavior to align with a positive behavior Villoux encourages – internationalism.


**Shortcomings of Study**

Though this study successfully analyses both hypotheses and definitively suggests that online civil society organizations such as Villoux can influence an individual’s behavior, there are some specific shortcoming I would like to address. The construction of the support for the governing structures variable was difficult given a lack of uniformity in survey response options. I would have preferred to use different questions than I used for the creation of this, specifically questions within the “Villoux government” survey category, though I am resolved the questions that were used can still adequately gauge support for the governing structure given the Grand Council’s regular goal-setting of international collaboration. Nonetheless, using questions directly from the portion of the survey that asked about Villoux’s government would have undoubtedly been preferential. This, however, could not be achieved given variance of response options with varying degrees of support for questions in this category. For this reason, the uniformity in survey response options cannot be understated.

Response rate is another area wherein I believe this survey falls somewhat short. Whereas there was a total of 601 users in the sample I selected to use for this survey, only 115 responses were received given limitations in contacting hundreds of these individuals. Reasons for this smaller sample are elaborated upon in the “Sample Information” section of the research design and methodology chapter.

Some may argue my personal role in Villoux constitutes a shortcoming in this study given my position and personal relationship with many of the respondents may have influenced their responses. I, however, note that a miniscule number of respondents were consulted during the course of this study and fully understood the hypotheses I was seeking to test, meaning the overwhelming majority of respondents had no knowledge of my hypotheses or how they could
answer the survey to support the hypotheses. Anonymity likewise helps the respondents eschew from any personal influence they may feel from me given I would likely be unable to determine their responses. One interesting case to note on this topic is Respondent #81, a male from the Philippines. I was able to identify this respondent given he reported he has been issued a system ban and only one user from the Philippines has ever been issued a system ban. This respondent currently serves as an advisor in my cabinet, yet his position nor his relationship with me influenced his survey responses to support my hypotheses. Respondent #81 answered negatively on several questions where a positive response was needed to support the hypotheses thereby exemplifying the fact that my personal relationship with him bore no influence on his responses. Respondent #81 is not alone in this regard as other respondents were identifiable and did not provide responses to support my hypotheses, which I argue makes this concern relatively null.

The final shortcoming I will note is that this study was an exclusive case study on the Villoux Server System and included no analysis of other online civil society organizations. In order to ensure the findings within Villoux are not completely unique to the system, additional research on other communities is necessary to provide additional merit to my work.

**Concluding Findings**

The most critical finding of this study, based upon the descriptive analysis of my two hypotheses, is that online civil society organizations poses a comparable ability to influence an individual’s behavior in comparison to their in-person counterparts. Whereas I argue this study successfully proves that point, additional studies are certainly required to ensure this relationship can be observed in other online civil society organizations. Villoux has positioned itself as an ideally diverse platform of study for an international online civil society organization and whereas I posit it will be difficult to find a community as representative of such diversity as Villoux, similar
communities must be studied in order to advance research interests in a world with an ever-growing online presence that has arisen to challenge our traditional conceptions of in-person groups. I firmly believe Villoux is an example of a community which has succeeded in promoting international collaboration, having the support of its membership for its governing structures and those who comprise said structures, and positively influencing the lives of thousands of its members.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY, SURVEY QUESTIONS, AND OTHER INFORMATION
Glossary

Vernacular specific to Villoux has developed within the system, creating a lexicon colloquially understood by Villoux users but would be confusing to those unfamiliar. This lexicon is employed throughout this thesis and this glossary serves as a direct means to understand words with specific meanings in Villoux, though most in-text references to these words are explained in their appropriate location within the thesis.

1. Bans –
   a. Server ban – temporary ban against a user from a singular Villoux service, e.g. one-hour ban from Villoux’s Discord Server; can be issued by any server staff member
   b. Department ban – permanent ban against a user from a specific gaming department, e.g. department banned from the Minecraft Department; can only be issued by the respective department’s Department Chairman or the Grand Council; can be appealed or pardoned by the respective Department Chairman or the Grand Council
   c. System ban – permanent ban against a user from all Villoux services; can only be issued by the Grand Council; can be appealed or pardoned by the Grand Council

2. Bill of Ordinances – governing doctrine of Villoux akin to a constitution or a terms of service; ordinances therein are referred to as “X Ordinance”, e.g. System Name Ordinance; each ordinance is comprised of numerous clauses

3. Chief of Staff – head of government and head of state of Villoux

4. Departments – divisions of Villoux’s staff and users
a. **Gaming Department** – organized exclusively around a singular game, e.g.
   Minecraft Department

b. **Staff Department** – organized to help all gaming departments universally, e.g.
   System Coding Department

5. **Grand Council** – oligarchical governing entity of Villoux outranking any individual user
   a. **Grand Council Member** – title given to every user occupying an office on the
      Grand Council

6. **Staff** – users who volunteer to provide their services to Villoux
   a. **Server staff** – staff members on one, specific server within a gaming department
   b. **System staff** – staff members who serve Villoux as a whole rather than exclusively
      one server within Villoux; **not** mutually exclusive with server staff

7. **System-defined name** – the screen-name a user chooses to use on all Villoux services

8. **The system** – abbreviation of “the Villoux Server System”; synonymous with “Villoux”

9. **User** - any individual who connects to or uses a Villoux service; synonymous with
   “member” and “Villouxian”

10. **Villouxian** – demonym for Villoux users

11. **Villoux service** - any server, guild, tournament, event, or other service offered by Villoux
Survey Questions & Response Options

Personal information:

1. Please identify your sex.
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other

2. Please identify your nationality. If you have a joint nationality, select the nationality of your flag (country code) on Villoux’s Discord Server.  
   a. Argentina
   b. Australia
   c. Austria
   d. Belgium
   e. Bosnia and Herzegovina
   f. Brazil
   g. Canada
   h. Chile
   i. China
   j. Colombia
   k. Croatia
   l. Czechia

27 The list of responses for survey question #2 only include the nationalities recorded in the September 2019 census rather than a compilation of nationalities representative of all users whom have ever been in Villoux.
m. Denmark
n. Dominican Republic
o. El Salvador
p. Estonia
q. Finland
r. France
s. Germany
t. Hong Kong
u. Hungary
v. Iceland
w. India
x. Indonesia
y. Ireland
z. Israel
aa. Japan
bb. Jordan
cc. Kazakhstan
dd. Latvia
ee. Lithuania
ff. Malaysia
gg. Montenegro
hh. Netherlands
ii. New Zealand
jj. North Macedonia
kk. Norway
ll. Nigeria
mm. Oman
nn. Peru
oo. Philippines
pp. Poland
qq. Portugal
rr. Romania
ss. Russia
tt. Saudi Arabia
uu. Serbia
vv. Singapore
ww. Slovenia
xx. South Africa
yy. Spain
zz. Sweden
aaa. Switzerland
bbb. Taiwan
ccc. Tunisia
ddd. Turkey
eee. United Arab Emirates
fff. United Kingdom
United States of America

Viet Nam

Other not listed

3. Have you ever served in Villoux’s system staff?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure / do not remember

4. For how long have you been a member of Villoux?
   a. Less than a year
   b. One – two years
   c. Three – five years
   d. Over five years
   e. Unsure

5. How old were you when you joined Villoux?
   a. Under 13
   b. 13 – 15
   c. 16 – 18
   d. 18 – 21
   e. Over 21
   f. Unsure

Villoux’s behavioral influence:

6. Do you believe Villoux has the power to change individuals’ behavior?
a. Yes – I have witnessed how Villoux can influence people’s behavior

b. Somewhat – I think Villoux might influence people’s behavior, but I am not sure if it does

c. No – I do not think Villoux can influence people’s behavior

d. Unsure

Villoux government:

7. How well would you say you understand Villoux’s governing structure, i.e. how the Grand Council, the House of Players, the gaming departments, and the staff departments operate?

   a. Completely understand
   
   b. Somewhat understand
   
   c. Do not at all understand
   
   d. Unsure

8. How legitimate do you view the Villoux Grand Council’s authority over the Villoux Server System?

   a. Very legitimate – the Grand Council completely controls Villoux
   
   b. Legitimate – the Grand Council controls Villoux within the parameters of Villoux’s Bill of Ordinances
   
   c. Somewhat legitimate – the Grand Council has significant authority, but it is impactfully limited
   
   d. Not at all legitimate – the Grand Council has little to no actual authority
   
   e. I do not know what the “Grand Council” is
   
   f. Unsure
9. Do you feel that the Villoux Chief of Staff operates with oversight from the Grand Council?
   a. Yes – the Chief of Staff is kept in-check by the Grand Council
   b. Somewhat – the Chief of Staff is mostly kept in-check by the Grand Council, but operates with a considerable degree of autonomy that may lead to a lack of oversight
   c. No – the Chief of Staff can do whatever they want without oversight from the Grand Council
   d. I do not know what the “Villoux Chief of Staff” is
   e. Unsure

10. Do you consider the Grand Council, collectively, as the legitimate owners of Villoux?
   a. Yes – the Grand Council has final say over all Villoux affairs, making them the owners of the system
   b. No – the Villoux Chief of Staff is the owner of Villoux
   c. No – Dr. Baskerville is the owner of Villoux
   d. No – someone or something else is the owner of Villoux
   e. I do not know what the “Grand Council” is
   f. Unsure

11. How valuable do you consider the influence of the House of Players?
   a. Very valuable – the House’s opinions are always heard and implemented, when reasonable
   b. Somewhat valuable – the Grand Council considers the House’s opinion but may not act on it
   c. Not at all valuable – nothing recommended by the House has any merit
d. I do not know what the “House of Players is”

e. Unsure

12. Do you feel anyone interested in Villoux politics has a means to express their views to the governing powers of Villoux?

   a. Yes – anyone can freely express their views
   b. Somewhat – certain users seem to get special attention when they express their views
   c. Somewhat – only members of staff get attention when they express their views
   d. No – the governing powers do not listen to regular users
   e. No – users cannot freely express their views in Villoux
   f. Unsure

13. Have you ever expressed a view to the governing powers? If so, please explain your view, how you expressed it, and the response or lack thereof from the governing powers. If you have not, type “N/A”.

   a. Text box

14. Do users’ ability to express their views to the governing powers affect your perception of the governing structure of Villoux?

   a. Yes – it makes Villoux community-run, which is unique for an online community
   b. Yes – it weakens the governing powers’ authority
   c. No – it does not matter to me
   d. I do not believe users can effectively express their views
   e. Unsure
15. Does the Villoux Bill of Ordinances, e.g. the Discord Ordinance, affect how you behave on Villoux services?
   a. Yes – I try to abide by the Bill of Ordinances
   b. No – I do not care about the Bill of Ordinances
   c. I do not know what the “Villoux Bill of Ordinances” is
   d. Unsure

16. If the Bill of Ordinances does affect your behavior, is it because you view the authors (the Grand Council) of the Bill of Ordinances as legitimate?
   a. Yes – the Grand Council rules Villoux and has the right to impose rules
   b. Yes – whomever rules Villoux has the right to impose rules
   c. No – it affects my behavior because I want to remain in Villoux, regardless of who wrote the Bill of Ordinances
   d. No – I always follow rules, regardless of their legitimacy
   e. The Bill of Ordinances does not affect my behavior
   f. I do not know what the “Villoux Bill of Ordinances” is
   g. Unsure

Cultural influence:

17. Do you believe Villoux is structured in a way that encourages international collaboration?
   a. Yes – Villoux is designed to be an international community and succeeds at being inclusive of people from all over the world
   b. Somewhat – Villoux tries to be inclusive of an international audience, but it has shortcomings in its approach
c. No – Villoux gives top priority to one nationality and fails to include others
d. Unsure

18. Have you learned about cultures and countries during your time in Villoux that you previously did not know about?
   a. Yes – I have learned about both new cultures and new countries thanks to Villoux
   b. Yes – I have just learned about new cultures thanks to Villoux
   c. Yes – I have just learned about new countries thanks to Villoux
d. No – I have not learned anything about other cultures or countries because of Villoux
e. Unsure

19. Has the knowledge Villoux has given you about different cultures and countries helped you develop a sense of connection to those people and/or places?
   a. Yes – I care about the new cultures and/or countries I have learned about through Villoux because now I have a personal connection to them through the people I’ve met in Villoux
   b. Somewhat – I have learned about new cultures and/or countries, but I don’t really care about them
   c. No – I do not care about the new cultures or countries I have learned about through Villoux
d. No – I did not learn about any new cultures or countries through Villoux

20. Do you believe other Villouxians have learned about your culture and/or country through your interactions with them in the system?
a. Yes – I have taught people about my culture and country by interacting with them in Villoux
b. Yes – I have taught people about my culture by interacting with them in Villoux
c. Yes – I have taught people about country by interacting with them in Villoux
d. Somewhat – My culture has come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about it
e. Somewhat – My country has come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about it
f. Somewhat – My culture and country have come up in conversation, but I am not sure anyone learned anything about it
g. No – I have not taught anyone about my culture or country by interacting with them in Villoux
h. Unsure

21. Has being a member of Villoux influenced your open-mindedness about people from other cultures and/or countries?
   a. Yes – Villoux has taught me to be more tolerable and understanding of people who are different from me
   b. Somewhat – Villoux has taught me about new cultures and/or countries, but I was already open-minded when it came to learning about people who are different from me
   c. No – Villoux has encouraged me to be less open-minded about people who are different from me
   d. No – I was already open-minded about people who are different from me
22. Has being a member of Villoux altered the way you speak or think about people from other cultures and/or countries, e.g. have you stopped using certain words or phrases that you have learned others find offensive?

a. Yes – I learned something I was saying is offensive to a culture and/or country, and I stopped saying it
b. Somewhat – I learned something I was saying is offensive to a culture and/or country, and I try to stop saying it, but I sometimes slip-up
c. No – I am not aware of anything that I say that before or after joining Villoux that is offensive to other cultures and/or countries
d. No – I still use offensive words and/or phrases despite learning they are offensive to other people
e. Unsure

23. Did you speak English proficiently before joining Villoux?

a. Yes – I am a native English-speaker
b. Yes – I am a native English-speaker, but Villoux has helped me expand my vocabulary
c. Yes – I fluidly spoke English prior to joining Villoux, but it is not my first language
d. Somewhat – I knew some English prior to joining Villoux, but Villoux has helped me improve my English skills
e. No – I learned English after joining Villoux and Villoux helped me learn it
f. No – I learned English after joining Villoux, but Villoux did not help me learn it
g. No – I still do not proficiently speak English

**System ban information:**

24. Have you ever been issued a system ban by the Villoux Grand Council?
   a. Yes
   b. No

25. Do you understand why the Villoux Grand Council issued a system ban against you?
   a. Yes – I fully understand why I was issued a system ban
   b. Somewhat – I somewhat understand why I was issued a system ban, but have questions about the reasons
   c. No – I have no idea why I was issued a system ban
   d. Unsure

26. Do you believe the Grand Council was justified in issuing your system ban?
   a. Yes – I deserved a system ban for my actions
   b. Somewhat – I felt my actions warranted punishment, but a system ban was severe
   c. No – I did not deserve a system ban for my actions
   d. Unsure

27. For how long were you a member of Villoux prior to your system ban?
   a. Less than a year
   b. One – two years
   c. Three – five years
   d. Over five years
   e. Unsure

28. For how long did your system ban remain in effect?

71
29. If you appealed your system ban, what inspired you to do so? Select all that apply.

a. I missed my friends in Villoux and wanted to go back to spending time with them
b. I missed the Villoux community and wanted to spend more time with it
c. I joined other communities and realized how unique and special Villoux was and wanted to return
d. I felt the need to ask for forgiveness for my previous actions
e. My system ban was pardoned; not appealed
f. I don’t remember

30. Have you consciously made an effort to improve your behavior in Villoux after returning from your system ban?

a. Yes – I avoid the behaviors that led to my system ban
b. Somewhat – I am trying to avoid the behaviors that led to my system ban, but sometimes relapse
c. No – I am still behaving as I was before my system ban

31. Have you noticed a change in your behavior, either within Villoux or elsewhere, after your system ban, i.e. have you intentionally started or stopped doing certain things?

a. Yes – I have found that my behavior has changed after my system ban

72
b. Somewhat – I think I have noticed a change in my behavior, but I am not certain

c. No – My behavior has not changed as a result of my system ban

d. Unsure

32. Has the change in your behavior extended to environments outside of Villoux?

   a. Yes – I have noticed my behavior has changed both within Villoux and outside of Villoux
   b. Somewhat – I think I have noticed a change in my behavior, but I am not certain
   c. No – I have only noticed a change in my behavior within Villoux
   d. No – I have not changed my behavior
   e. Unsure

**Notes About the System Nationality Ordinance**

Footnote #1 refers to the System Nationality Ordinance regarding which entities Villoux considers international states. Villoux widely uses the United Nations’ recognition of member states as the determinant of whether or not Villoux likewise recognizes a state as such, though there are two variances from the U.N.’s membership and state recognition by Villoux. The System Nationality Ordinance recognizes Hong Kong and Taiwan as autonomous states from the People’s Republic of China, pursuant to the Seanamnder Clause of the System Nationality Ordinance and the Miyukuti Clause of the System Nationality Ordinance, respectively; therefore, Hong Kong and Taiwan are both counted as individual states for the purposes of this study.

Similarly, the System Nationality Ordinance outlines stylistic standards for reference to certain states. The only insistence of this occurring in this study is references to the Republic of North Macedonia as “North Macedonia” opposed to “Macedonia” or “FYR Macedonia”. Other
references may exist in the list of nationalities in the acknowledgement, e.g. “Viet Nam” and “Cabo Verde”.

**Referenced Responses to Question #13**

Have you ever expressed a view to the governing powers? If so, please explain your view, how you expressed it, and the response or lack thereof from the governing powers. If you have not, type “N/A”.

1. Respondent #34, “I have expressed requests for additional discussion channels for team use and new games. In some cases request was accepted and in other cases denied with a valid reason.”

2. Respondent #51, “I suggested in a House of Players meeting that there be a Rainbow Six Siege section added to the server, which was heard and enacted upon.”

3. Respondent #54, “Observations of various meetings led to me contacting the chief of staff, dr baskerville. He would actually respond and react accordingly, including bringing it up before the council.”

4. Respondent #101, “The Villoux Grand Council always listens you their users for each department. They usually reply quickly with the right answer and always try to help you. The Council always uses their power in the right way.”
5. Respondent #67, “I served as the Rotmg Chairman for a while and in such time I expressed my views on how the grand council operated. No response was given but by that time I had moved on to other servers.”
September 2019 Census Nationality Distribution

Table 17  September 2019 Census Nationality Data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>North America</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
<th>South America</th>
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<td>3 Austria</td>
<td>5 Canada</td>
<td>48 Australia</td>
<td>23 Argentina</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1 Belgium</td>
<td>4 Dominican R</td>
<td>1 New Zealand</td>
<td>2 Brazil</td>
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<td>1 Bosnia Herzegovina</td>
<td>1 Mexico</td>
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<td>Chile</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
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<td>1 Netherlands</td>
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<td>North Macedonia</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total: 4 (1%)  Total: 37 (6%)  Total: 164 (27%)  Total: 356 (59%)  Total: 25 (4%)  Total: 16 (3%)