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# Perceptions of women's leadership in urban governance in the communes of greater Lomé, Togo

Nagbandjoa Dounwourgue<sup>1,2,\*</sup>, Edinam Kola<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Leslie Bertha Mouloungui Kussu<sup>1,2</sup>, Coffi Aholou<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Regional Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Cities in Africa (CERViDA-DOUNEDON), University of Lomé, Lomé 9999133, Togo<sup>2</sup> Research Laboratory on the Dynamics of Environments and Societies (LARDYMES), University of Lomé, Lomé 9999133, Togo<sup>3</sup> West Africa Research Centre on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (WASCAL), University of Lomé, Lomé 9999133, Togo\* **Corresponding author:** Nagbandjoa Dounwourgue, [ndounwourgue@gmail.com](mailto:ndounwourgue@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Perceptions of women's roles and leadership in urban governance vary from country to country and culture to culture. While women are represented and participate fully in political decision-making in some countries, in Togo women's participation in local governance is still limited. The aim of this research is to analyse perceptions of women's leadership in urban governance in the communes of greater Lomé. Specifically, the study of the influence of general perceptions of the role of women on the development of their leadership in the urban governance of greater Lomé (i) and the implications of these perceptions on the participation of women in the urban governance of greater Lomé (ii). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in all the town halls of the thirteen greater Lomé autonomous district communes with 222 women and 162 men, i.e., a total of 384 people. The corpus created from the interviews, which were transcribed in their entirety, was analyzed using the theory of social dominance developed by Sidanius and Pratto to explain power relations and inequalities between social groups. The results show that perceptions of women's participation in urban governance vary and are generally associated with several significant implications. The general perception is that women are not as competent or legitimate as men in political and administrative leadership roles. However, there is a growing recognition of the value of gender diversity in urban governance, with a growing awareness of the importance of including women in decision-making processes. From the point of view of the significant implications of perceptions, positive perceptions favor increased representation of women, innovation, and creativity, strengthening legitimacy, reducing inequalities, and presenting women as positive role models in urban governance.

**Keywords:** urban governance; women's leadership; perceptions; roles; Lomé

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the debate on the decentralization of local government dates to the 1970s, in reaction to the excessive concentration of power within central states and the repercussions of this situation on the management of urban and rural areas (Conyers, 1983; Rondinelli et al., 1983). It benefited from the advocacy of associations and other development and social justice players (Beall, 2005; MacLean, 2003). In the same vein, local government is presented as an important space for women. Indeed, we might be tempted, wrongly, to think that women's presence in the city and their spatial practices are ultimately no different from those of men, or at least that they have access, if they wish, to the various resources of urban life. However, numerous studies (Eagly and Wood, 1991; Pira, 2018) reveal that there is a tendency to overlook gender differences in urban space and women's and men's experience of it. Thus, this

undifferentiation is only apparent and often leads to the reproduction of dominant representations and forms of hierarchization that are based solely on perceptions of the roles assigned to women in urban space. What's more, women's mobility is different, and their trajectories are specific to the roles they play. However, in the history of the world, male-dominated leadership has been preferred because of male protectionism towards citizens (Crowder-Meyer et al., 2020). It has often been a leadership characterized by masculinity (Koenig et al., 2011). However, various demands involving social, cultural, and economic dimensions undermine this male-dominated leadership (Enarson and Pease, 2018). Indeed, compared to male-dominated leadership, women mayors in the USA took far better protective and preventive measures against COVID19 (Funk, 2020). In traditional African societies, women's roles were often defined according to their relationship with men, as wives and mothers, with predominantly domestic responsibilities. This was not seen as discrimination. Nor did women aspire to positions of political responsibility. With the passage of time and events, the situation of women has evolved towards greater political responsibility for them throughout Africa. As of January 10, 2024, there are 26 countries where 28 women are heads of state and/or government UN Women, 2024. Of all national parliamentarians sub-Saharan Africa has 26% women parliamentarians, while the figure is 18% for North Africa (UIP, 2024). As regards elected members of local deliberative bodies, women account for 25% in sub-Saharan Africa and 20% in North Africa.

According to data collected in Djibouti (Djibouti|Assemblée nationale|Données sur les femmes, 2023), this country, which had no women in parliament in 2000, has seen the most spectacular increases worldwide among the lower and single houses. The share of women in parliament rose from 10.8% to 26.2% in 2018 (an increase of 15.4 points), for a total of 15 women, says the report of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) session at UN headquarters in New York in March 2019. It is worth noting that Rwanda, the world leader in the number of women parliamentarians, saw a slight drop, from 64% in 2017 to 61.3% in 2018. According to the report, Namibia (46.2%), South Africa (42.7%), and Senegal (41.8%) are among the other African countries with high percentages of women parliamentarians in 2023.

In terms of ministerial posts, more women in Africa oversee portfolios traditionally reserved for men than in 2017. There are 30% more female defense ministers (17 worldwide), 52.9% more female finance ministers, and 13.6% more female foreign ministers (30 worldwide) (UN, 2019). African countries with the highest percentage of women in ministerial positions include Rwanda (51.9%), South Africa (48.6%), Ethiopia (47.6%), Seychelles (45.5%), Uganda (36.7%) and Mali (34.4%). The lowest percentage in Africa is associated with Morocco (5.6%), which has just one female minister in an 18-member government (UN, 2019). Other countries with less than 10% female ministers include Nigeria (8%), Mauritius (8.7%) and Sudan (9.5%). Ethiopia saw the biggest increase in women's political representation in the executive branch, from 10% female ministers in 2017 to 47.6% in 2019 (UN, 2019).

In Togo, almost two out of three people (65% (Hervé Akinocho, 2019)) feel that, in general, a family lives better when a woman oversees family management (domestic chores and childcare). Togo is among the most conservative of the 34 countries

surveyed by Afrobarometer when it comes to traditional family values. This is explained by the fact that in many patriarchal African societies like Togo, women play a key role in the day-to-day running of the family and the upbringing of children. This perception is stronger among women themselves (74%) than among men (57%), according to Afrobarometer. Those with a non-formal or primary education are the most supportive of such an assertion (74%).

There is also a religious divide, between Muslims, who are the least conservative (60%), Christians (65%), and followers of other faiths and non-believers (69%). At the commune level, only 12 communes, or 10%, are headed by women. At regional level, women hold only 21 of 179 regional councillor seats, or 12% (RTG, 2024) (*Résultats définitifs des élections régionales 2024*, 2024). At national level, 11 out of 33 ministerial posts (33%) are held by women, while 17 out of 91 members of parliament (19%) are women. Today, social inequalities linked to women's occupancy of positions of responsibility are current in Togo and are fuelling research into gender issues as well as urban governance. In an era of galloping urbanization of Togo's towns and countryside, it is therefore necessary to examine current perceptions of women's roles and female leadership in local governance in the communes of greater Lomé.

Regarding women's roles in urban governance, some studies show that despite efforts, women are limited in local administration due to various cultural, educational, and political obstacles (Ouedraogo et al., 2020). Specific research in Niger highlights a low female presence (4%) among mayors, attributed to a lack of access to education and resources, as well as a patriarchal culture. In addition, research in South Africa underlines the importance of prior political training for female candidates, improving their chances of election and performance. Another reality is that while women have made progress in their education (Becker et al., 2010) and economic empowerment (Kristof and WuDunn, 2010), they remain on the margins of the most influential positions of responsibility (Buckley et al., 2000) in urban governance as in other sectors. The present study focuses on perceptions of female leadership in urban governance in greater Lomé. The study hypothesizes that in the urban governance of greater Lomé's communes, women's roles and female leadership are perceived in varying ways. These perceptions range from recognition and acceptance to undervaluation and marginalization, depending on existing attitudes and conceptions in society.

The aim of this study is: to correlate the representations of women's role in the development of their leadership in the urban governance of greater Lomé. Specifically, it aims to (i) show the influence of general perceptions of women's role on the development of their leadership in the urban governance of greater Lomé; (ii) analyse the implications of these perceptions on women's participation in the urban governance of greater Lomé.

### **1.1. Theoretical considerations**

The corpus created from the interviews, transcribed in their entirety, was analysed using a combination of the social dominance theory developed by Pratto et al. (1994) and the leadership categorization theory of Lord and Christy (1986), to explain power

relations and inequalities between social groups.

Social dominance theory has been developed by several researchers over the years. Two of the most influential researchers in this field are Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, who formulated and popularized social dominance theory in their landmark book *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*, published in 1999. Sidanius and Pratto developed social dominance theory to explain power relations and inequalities between social groups. It propagates the idea that society is organized hierarchically, with certain groups dominating and oppressing others according to their social status. This theory emphasizes the systemic inequalities that exist between groups, and how these inequalities are maintained and reproduced. According to this theory, dominant groups benefit from advantages and privileges that enable them to maintain their status of power, while dominated groups are marginalized and suffer forms of oppression. These inequalities are often based on characteristics such as social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other forms of social identity.

Seen as such, social dominance theory is therefore based on the idea that inequalities are not simply the result of particular individuals or groups acting oppressively but are deeply rooted in social structures and institutions. It examines how these structures and institutions favor certain groups and limit the opportunities and resources of dominated groups. One of the major contributions of this theory is the notion of privilege, which refers to the social advantages and opportunities enjoyed by certain groups because of their dominant position in society. Dominant groups may often be unaware of their privileges, as they are regarded as the social norm. Social dominance theory has nonetheless been subject to informed criticism. Indeed, it has been criticized for its simplification of diversity (it encompasses almost everything in the same way) and the complexity of power relations. Some critics point out that the theory fails to take sufficient account of the intersections between different forms of oppression and neglects the specific experiences of individuals belonging to marginalized groups. Authors such as Nancy Fraser: Philosopher and political theorist; Kimberlé Crenshaw: Law professor and feminist theorist; and Patricia Hill Collins: Sociologist and feminist theorist.

About leadership categorization theory, she proposes that people have implicit theories of leadership, such that they possess certain ideas about what most leaders are (prototypes) (Hsu et al., 2022). It is a conceptualization of personality and leadership that suggests that personality traits should influence social perceptions because observers tend to use the personality traits of others to help them organize their lives (Lord and Christy, 1986; Mischel, 1973; Winter and Uleman, 1984). In other words, leaders' personality traits determine how they are perceived by others, and these two variables help to explain the female leadership advantage (Hsu et al., 2022). Current theories on women's empowerment, notably those developed by Naila Kabeer (Kabeer, 2005), offer a more flexible framework for understanding the dynamics of female leadership. Unlike more rigid approaches, these theories focus on the processes by which women acquire power and influence, which may explain why some women leaders succeed despite unfavourable conditions.

Moreover, in the context of our study, the institutional development of the City of Lomé is closely linked to the evolution of urban governance in Togo. According to

the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), “urban governance is the sum of the different ways in which individuals and public or private institutions plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuous process through which diverse or conflicting interests can be reconciled and actions taken in a concerted manner. This process also encompasses informal arrangements and the social capital of city dwellers”. Seen in this light, it is inseparable from the well-being of city dwellers. The needs of urban governance relate to the strategic management of urban development, decentralization, local democracy, citizen participation, the fight against poverty, the control of officials, security, and the protection of individuals, as highlighted by the work of Maman and Magnangou (2019). Urban governance is currently in its infancy in Togo. A system is being put in place, and everything will depend on its effective implementation and the good practices it will inculcate in the various urban players.

## **2. Materials and methods**

### **2.1. Study area**

Togo is a sub-Saharan country in West Africa, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered by Benin to the east, Ghana to the west, Burkina-Faso to the north, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. With a surface area of 56,600 km<sup>2</sup>, the country is shaped like a rectangle, divided into 5 main regions from north to south: the Savanes Region, the Kara Region, the Central Region, the Plateaux Region, and the Maritime Region. Located at latitudes 6°13' and 6°8' North, and longitudes 1°12' and 1°21' East, in the extreme south-west of Togo, in the Maritime Region, along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, Lomé, the capital, is bounded by the marshy valley of the River Zio to the north-east, the Atlantic Ocean to the south and the Togo-Ghana border to the west (Assemblée nationale Togolaise, 2019). Since Law n°2019-006 of 26 June 2019, on decentralization (INSEED-Togo, 2023), the city of Lomé has become the Autonomous District of greater Lomé, a territorial collectivity with special status grouping two prefectures: the prefecture of the Gulf and the prefecture of Agoè-Nyivé. The Gulf prefecture comprises 7 communes (Golfe 1 to 7) and the Agoè-Nyivé prefecture 6 communes (Agoè-Nyivé 1 to 6). Greater Lomé thus comprises 13 communes covering an area of 425.6 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 2,078,182 persons in 2022 (Maman and Magnangou, 2019). The conurbation covers an area of 333 km<sup>2</sup>, including 30 km<sup>2</sup> in the lagoon zone, and extends right up to the border with Ghana, just a few meters from the city center (**Figure 1**).

The communes in the Agoè-Nyivé prefecture, on the outskirts, share the same territorial and social characteristics. The same applies to the communes of the Gulf, which border the coast and share the same territorial and social characteristics.

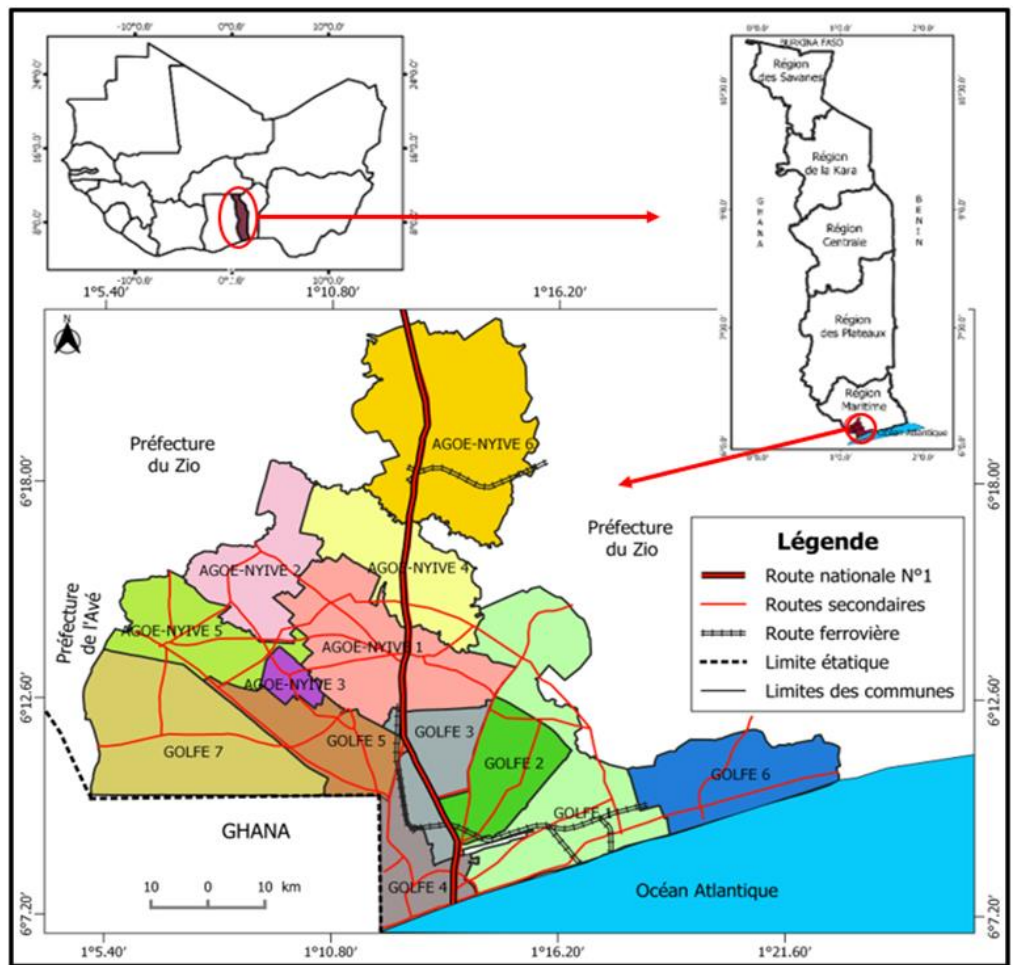


Figure 1. Location of research area.

Source: Author.

## 2.2. Sampling and data collection

The sample was constituted in accordance with the provisions of Law n 2007-011 of 13 March 2007 on decentralization and local liberties, information obtained from documents of the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Local Authorities and the work of Tankpé (2015) (Maman and Magnangou, 2019). To carry out this study, we adopted a methodological approach based essentially on literature exploration, semi-structured interviews (15), and focus groups (4). Thus, the literature review enabled us to highlight similar studies conducted.

Respondents for the semi-structured interviews were recruited for convenience. Each member was interviewed once. However, the snowball effect developed by Wilhelm (2014), based on the networks of the people recruited was used during the interviews with the resource persons. Surveys were carried out with municipal councillors, commune secretaries-general, resource persons, members of civil society organizations, administrative and technical staff, and residents of the said communes. Focus groups were also organized to mirror the information obtained from elected officials. Data was collected between June 2022 and April 2024. The interview guide developed for this purpose includes questions relating to representations of leadership in urban governance (In your opinion, what influences perceptions of female leadership?). The contextual variables are governance and the positions held by

women. The adoption of semi-directive interviews is justified by the fact that the aim is not to ask interlocutors closed questions to obtain precise answers or professed theories (Argyris and Schon, 1994) but on the contrary, to understand the practices, behaviors and perceptions of individuals about the research question (Thiéart, 2014). As in all qualitative research, the best answers are those of theoretical saturation. The qualitative analysis method used was narrative analysis. It consisted of interpreting the data provided by respondents, including testimonials, examples, focus groups, interviews and data from direct observations, using STATA software.

The target population is made up of the inhabitants of the 13 communes of the Autonomous District of greater Lomé. As the survey unit is the commune, all the direct and indirect players in urban governance make up the study's target population. These included elected representatives, administrative and technical staff, heads of associations and NGOs interacting with the communes, resource persons, and ordinary people living in greater Lomé. The questionnaire survey targeted 141 of the 225 elected representatives who sit in the communes of greater Lomé. In addition, the survey covered commune General Secretaries, resource persons, civil society organizations, administrative and technical staff, and commune residents, who numbered 243 out of a total of 384 respondents. Despite the democratic nature of elections for municipal councillors and governing bodies, only the commune of Agoè-Nyivé 5 is headed by a woman.

It should be noted that the collection sheets used for the individual interviews contained information such as:

- Socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, professions, level of education, marital status, etc.).
- The current state of women's participation in urban governance in Greater Lomé, and the population's view of this governance.
- Perceptions of women's roles and female leadership in urban governance.
- Women's contribution to urban governance.

A total of eight (13) focus groups, each comprising between five (5) and ten (10) people, were conducted, with one focus group per commune. The survey population was spread across the thirteen (13) communes of greater Lomé. The simple random sampling method was used to select the populations to be surveyed. The sample size was determined using the Schwartz formula, which allowed us to infer the following for the entire urban population of greater Lomé.

Using the Schwarz formula  $n' = z \times z \times p \times \frac{q}{i \times i}$ , the sample size "n" (384) was determined, at a 5% risk of error ( $i$ ) de 5% for a reduced deviation ( $z$ ) of 1.96 at a proportion ( $p$ ) of 50%. On the other hand, for the smaller target of local elected officials (141), Cochran's formula was generalized as follows:  $n = \frac{n'}{\left(\frac{n'-1}{N}\right)+1}$  where  $N$

represents the number of local elected officials in greater Lomé from which the commune sample is extracted.

- Sampling representing the initial and surveyed populations

**Tables 1** and **2** shows, respectively, the population size per commune in greater Lomé and the proportions of local elected officials per commune in greater Lomé. **Table 3** shows the proportions of elected representatives surveyed by the municipality.

**Table 1.** Population size by commune of greater Lomé.

<b>Golfe</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Agoè-Nyivé</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Golfe 1	351,550	27%	Agoè-Nyivé 1	317,255	36%
Golfe 2	136,153	10%	Agoè-Nyivé 2	128,164	15%
Golfe 3	52,769	4%	Agoè-Nyivé 3	47,554	5%
Golfe 4	155,842	12%	Agoè-Nyivé 4	154,431	17%
Golfe 5	169,993	13%	Agoè-Nyivé 5	125,097	14%
Golfe 6	181,561	14%	Agoè-Nyivé 6	110,194	13%
Golfe 7	257,813	20%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,305,681</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>882,695</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies of Togo (INSEED, 5-RGPH 2022).

**Table 2.** Proportion of local elected representatives per commune in greater Lomé.

<b>Golfe</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Agoè-Nyivé</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Golfe 1	23	16%	Agoè-Nyivé 1	23	29%
Golfe 2	19	13%	Agoè-Nyivé 2	11	14%
Golfe 3	19	13%	Agoè-Nyivé 3	11	14%
Golfe 4	23	16%	Agoè-Nyivé 4	11	14%
Golfe 5	23	16%	Agoè-Nyivé 5	13	16%
Golfe 6	19	13%	Agoè-Nyivé 6	11	14%
Golfe 7	19	13%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Author.

**Table 3.** Local elected representatives surveyed by the municipality.

<b>Prefecture</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Ratio</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Golfe	Golfe 1	23	0.97	22
	Golfe 4	23	0.97	22
	Golfe 5	23	0.97	22
	Golfe 2	19	0.97	18
Agoè-nyivé	Agoè-Nyivé 1	23	0.97	22
	Agoè-Nyivé 5	13	0.97	13
	Agoè-Nyivé 2	11	0.97	11
	Agoè-Nyivé 3	11	0.97	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>146</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>141</b>

Source: Author.

- Justification of the municipalities' choices and study sample

Although the coastal communes share the same territorial and socio-demographic realities, as do the suburban communes of Agoè-Nyivé, the present study has chosen to cover all thirteen communes. This was justified by the desire to remain as close as possible to the reality of the communes, by obtaining everyone's perceptions.

The study sample was made up of municipal councillors, commune secretaries-general, resource persons, leaders of civil society organizations involved in

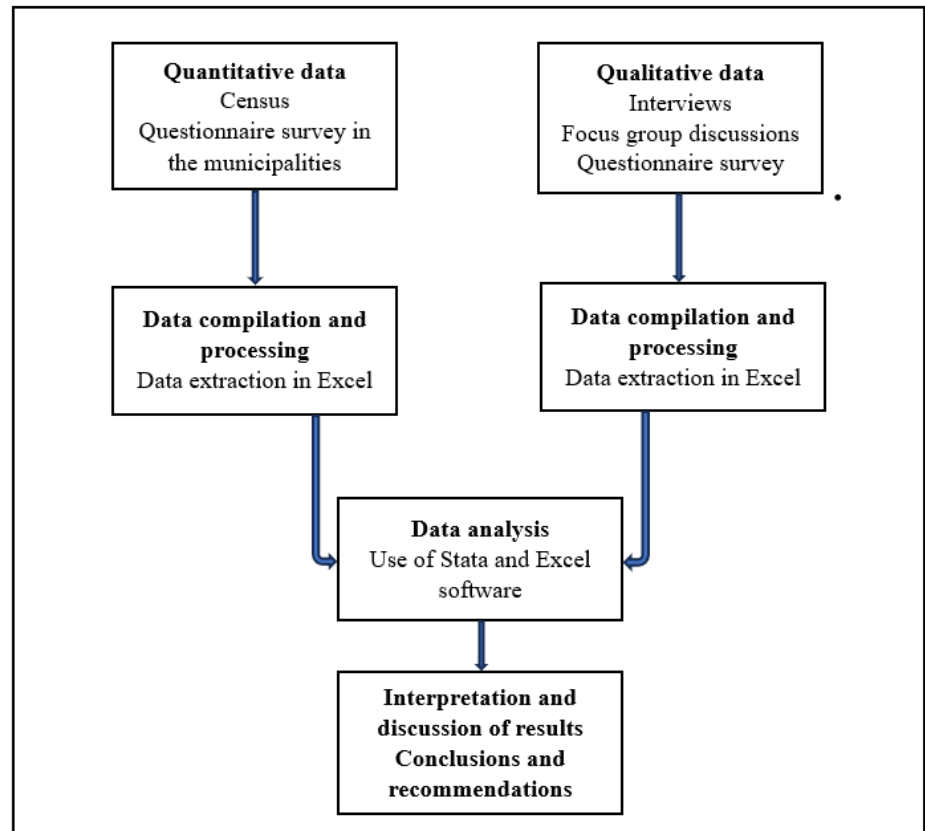


governance and the promotion of women’s leadership, and commune administrative and technical staff. The sampling of communes for the survey of local elected officials was carried out by stratum. Communes representing 37% of targets in the prefecture of Agoè-Nyivé and 63% in the prefecture of Golfe were selected. By applying the ratio of the sample size to the total number of communes selected (the ratio) to the number of elected representatives in these communes, we obtained the number of elected representatives to be reached during the study. **Table 3** shows the breakdown of local elected representatives surveyed by the commune.

The other respondents (general secretaries, heads of civil society organizations, mayoral administrative and technical staff, resource persons, and residents) were distributed evenly across the communes. As for traditional chiefs, they were considered based on their presence in the area.

### 2.3. Data processing and analysis

All data collected using KoboKollect v2022.4.4 were extracted and exported to Excel 2021 (Microsoft Office 365). STATA 14 Statistical Software was then used for data formatting and analysis. Descriptive statistics of socio-demographic parameters (level of education, monthly income, dependents, age, and gender) and hierarchical classification were favored to group respondents on a similar perception of female leadership in urban governance. The following **Figure 2** summarizes the methodological model adopted for data collection, extraction, and analysis.



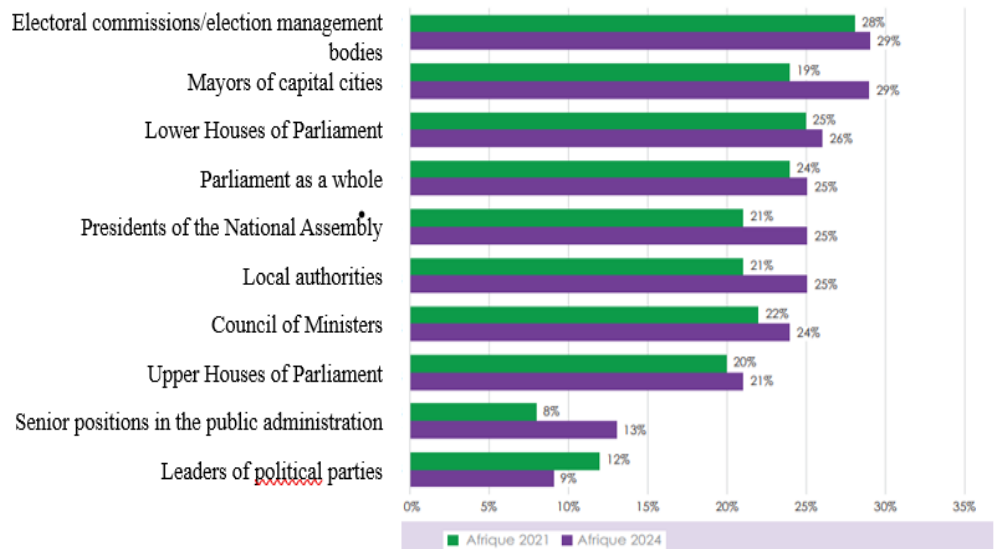
**Figure 2.** Methodological model for data collection and processing.

Source: Author.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Conceptual contribution to the state of knowledge on women’s participation in urban governance

According to the second 2024 Barometer on Women’s Political Participation (WPP) (Participation politique des femmes: Baromètre Afrique 2024, 2024) in Africa, women represent 16 of the 51 mayors of the capital cities where the information was obtained, representing an increase from 19% in 2021 to 30% in 2024. At local authority level, the representation of women is lower than in the lower chambers, with only 25% of councillors being women. **Figure 3** shows that, overall, women now account for 25% of local councillors in Africa, compared with 21% in 2021. Overall, women’s participation in urban governance remains limited by socio-cultural and institutional barriers. Despite better representation in some regions, women are still under-represented in decision-making bodies, particularly in Africa and Asia (Participation politique des femmes: Baromètre Afrique 2024, 2024). Traditional gender norms, male-dominated institutional practices and the violence suffered by women in politics hinder their full participation (Participation politique des femmes: Baromètre Afrique 2024, 2024). However, when women rise to positions of urban leadership, they tend to promote policies that are inclusive and geared towards the needs of marginalised groups, such as improving social services and urban safety.



**Figure 3.** Women’s political participation in Africa at a glance—2021 and 2024.  
Source: Barometer on Women’s Political Participation, 2024.

The analysis of women’s leadership in urban governance is based on key concepts such as empowerment, participatory governance and gendered power dynamics. These concepts are essential to understanding not only how women participate in governance processes, but also how their leadership is perceived within urban structures. Participatory governance theories stress the importance of equitable inclusion of women in decision-making bodies to ensure fair and representative governance. At the same time, female empowerment highlights the need for real

empowerment of women, enabling them to overcome institutional and socio-cultural barriers to effective leadership.

The international debate on women's leadership in urban governance focuses on the importance of gender equality and the positive influence that women can exert in urban decision-making processes. The challenge is how to overcome the socio-cultural and institutional obstacles that limit women's access to leadership positions, how to change traditional perceptions that associate leadership with masculine traits, and how to assess the impact of women in urban governance. On the one hand, advocates of women's leadership point out that the increased participation of women in urban governance promotes policies that are more inclusive, sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups, and focused on sustainability and social equity (Chant, 2007). On the other hand, certain challenges persist, including gender stereotypes, lack of institutional support, and violence against women in politics. The debate highlights the need for concrete measures, such as quotas, capacity-building for women, and community awareness-raising, to promote more representative and equitable urban governance on a global scale. Two notable advocates of women's leadership are Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Executive Director of UN Women and initiator of the 'HeforShe' campaign, which encourages the participation of men in the fight for gender equality, and Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Perceptions of the role of women, often shaped by specific socio-cultural norms, shed light on the challenges and opportunities facing women in urban governance. This study highlights the differences in evaluation criteria and societal expectations, while offering a better understanding of the specific obstacles facing women as leaders in the African urban context. Indeed, perceptions of women's leadership have direct implications for urban governance. If these perceptions are influenced by negative biases or stereotypes, they can limit women's ability to take on leadership roles and influence urban policies in a meaningful way. Conversely, recognising and valuing women's leadership could lead to more inclusive and equitable policies, thereby improving the quality of urban governance. This is why integrating the criteria of women's participation in the assessment of their leadership is important for formulating relevant policy recommendations and encouraging governance that truly reflects the diversity of urban voices.

### **3.2. The gender profile of leaders in urban governance in greater Lomé**

Leadership can be understood as the way of behaving to influence or change others and situations. Leadership is a process of influencing oneself, others, and the environment. When asked about the qualities or character traits of a leader in the field of urban governance, it emerged from the field surveys that a leader is a *chef de file*. Indeed, the leader prepares the way for those who come after or follow him. He is a pioneer who opens or traces a path toward an ideal, a path that others will follow. The leader influences and changes a situation, and a way of thinking.

As far as the qualities themselves are concerned, 98% of those surveyed said that they should possess determination, a sense of human relations, objectivity, dedication, patience, personality, perseverance, charisma, vision, bravery, loyalty, tenacity,

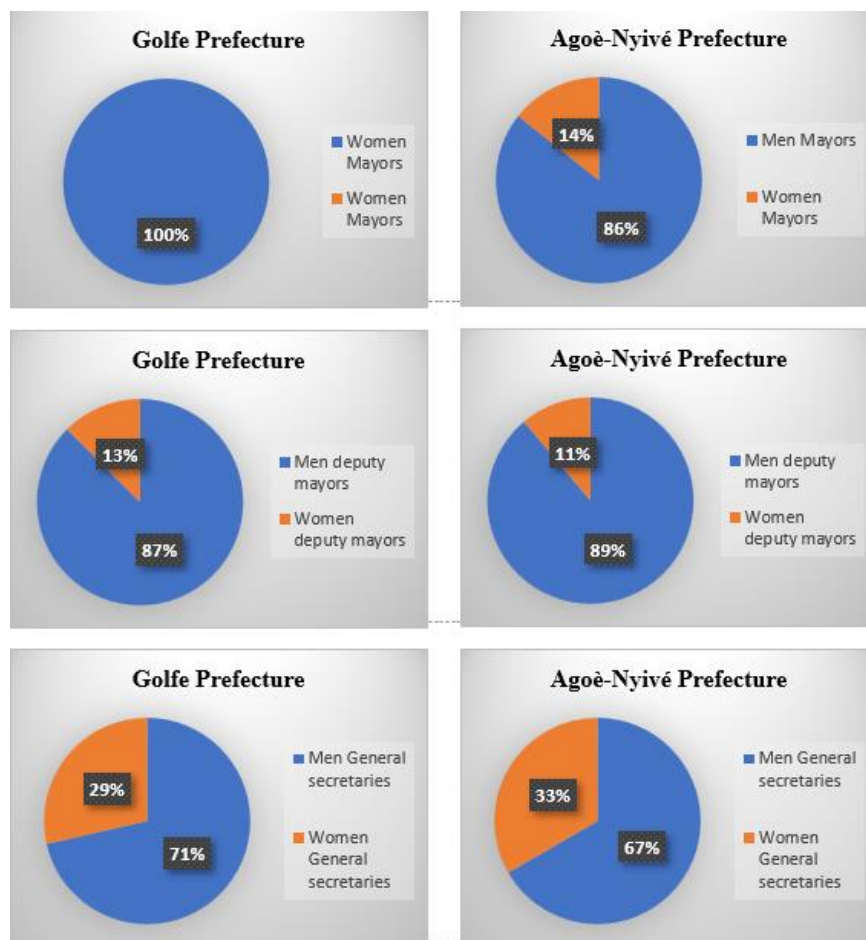
courage, honesty, intelligence, boldness, a sense of responsibility, simplicity, a spirit of initiative, a taste for risk and commitment.

Leadership requires the same qualities in both men and women. In urban governance, where it is a question of representativeness, the number of representatives of one gender influences the leadership that can be asserted and on the municipal policies deployed. The equitable representation of women in urban planning is an essential element of Development Goal 11 (Ensure that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable).

### **3.3. General perceptions of women's participation and their implications for urban governance in greater Lomé**

Drawing up an inventory of women's roles in urban governance in the communes of greater Lomé involves exploring the various functions, responsibilities, and contributions of women within municipal bodies. According to the National Report on Human Development in Togo (PNUD-TOGO, 2019), women account for around 26% of elected municipal councillors in Lomé, compared with a national average of 6.25%. However, according to INSEED-Togo (2023), women account for 51.6% of the population, or 1,127,872. Within municipalities, they occupy several specific roles, including the mayor (7%), deputy mayor (16%), and chair of technical committees. The areas covered by these committees include the budget, public procurement, social affairs, property affairs, civil status, technical services, etc. The remaining women are employed in sanitation, building maintenance, and street sweeping. The following **Figure 4** shows the distribution of mayors and deputy mayors in the thirteen communes of greater Lomé.

The figure clearly shows that the leading roles held by women are relatively less responsible than those held by men. There is only one female mayor in greater Lomé, and she occurs in the prefecture of Agoè-Nyivé. The only woman of the 6 mayors in this prefecture, she represents only 14% of the heads of municipal executives. As for deputy mayors, there are 3 (13%) in the Gulf and only one in Agoè-Nyivé, representing 11% of the total. However, the trend in the number of posts of Commune Secretary General held by women is relatively upward, but low compared with that of men. In the municipalities covered by this study, there are more women than men. This is because women are almost always the ones responsible for collecting municipal taxes and maintaining urban public spaces (**Table 4**).



**Figure 4.** Distribution of mayors and deputy mayors in greater Lomé.

Source: Author.

**Table 4.** The proportion of women collecting taxes and maintaining public spaces.

Total number of women	The proportion of women responsible for collecting municipal taxes	Proportion of women responsible for maintaining urban spaces <sup>1</sup>
492	27	398

Source: Author.

<sup>1</sup>The workforce is constantly changing as people come and go. There is no employment contract between the municipalities and the workers.

In the table above, we see that the number of women responsible for maintaining urban spaces and collecting taxes is much higher than that of women in jobs requiring intellectual leadership. This is largely due to the low educational level of these women. According to the survey data, most of the women stopped at primary school (**Table 5**). They therefore represent less than half of the workforce involved in management. In fact, according to the heads of the communes:

‘The level required for tax collection or maintenance tasks is low. But if we leave them and just stick to municipal administration, the men outnumber the women. Women represent 40%. But that’s still not negligible’ (Remarks by a local authority mayor, 17 October 2022).

This assertion is borne out by the results of field research, which confirm that women are for the most part less educated than men. Their level of education in general is lower than that of men. Even if they apply for positions of responsibility, the

difference in levels between women and men applying for the same positions puts women at a disadvantage. **Table 5** below shows the average level of education of the women surveyed.

**Table 5.** Breakdown of women by level of education.

Superior	Secondary	Primary
5.26%	6.57%	46.05%

Source: Author.

The results presented in the table above show that the level of education is a socio-demographic characteristic that has an impact on women's leadership. The less educated they are, the less likely they are to attain leadership positions.

The better educated they are, the more likely they are to have a positive and accepted leadership style. It is therefore a variable that helps to determine women's participation in urban governance.

Perceptions of women's roles in urban governance vary according to several factors, including cultural logic, individual experiences, and societal constraints. The results of this research provide a holistic view of perceptions of women's roles and women's leadership. The various aspects concerned show that progress is being made, in the face of no less significant challenges. Indeed, there has been a notable increase in the representation of women in urban governance bodies, particularly in appointment positions. The number of female secretaries-general (5 out of 13) and the positions of committee chair, director, division head, and department head held by women are evidence of progress. This presence, far from reflecting recognition of the need for gender-balanced participation in urban decision-making, is rather the result of political activism. The process for appointing a candidate to a competitive post is not at all complicated. There are calls for candidates, followed by applications. It is very often specified that the position is open to both sexes. The calls even go so far as to state that 'women are strongly encouraged to apply'. As a major obstacle to their candidacy for positions of responsibility, 96% of female respondents said that the fact that they have a double workload, combining their professional responsibilities with domestic and family tasks, is an additional burden that makes it difficult to devote the time and energy needed for an electoral campaign or effective preparation. In addition, 22% of respondents felt that the lack of female role models and mentors in politics or influential positions was a factor deterring women from pursuing an ambitious career. The lack of female representation in elected office creates a vicious circle in which women do not see themselves represented and therefore do not take the plunge. The results of our study show that 56% of respondents know women leaders or role models who inspire them, compared with 44% who feel they do not.

We also found that women do not occupy as many elected positions as appointed positions. Nominative positions are generally awarded by appointment at the discretion of the holder of this power, while elective positions are those for which members are elected. According to one respondent who holds a nominative post, it is social barriers that prevent most women from gaining access to elective posts. She spoke.

If we want gender equality, if we can try to put them (women) at certain levels

so that, at some point, we are obliged to include women in decision-making, in decision-making positions, if we can also have quotas, that would be a good thing. To do this, we need to raise girls' awareness from primary school onwards and get away from the old-fashioned education that we still have, where the man is the master, the leader. We need to change our mentality. And I think that an education program from primary school or nursery school onwards is necessary. Also, a stream on gender equality from an early age is important to improve things' (Comment by a local councillor, 11 July 2023).

This assertion also justifies the objectives of this study, as it shows how this imbalance affects representativeness and diversity within municipalities, and how over-representation of women in appointed positions could influence the decisions taken and policies implemented. According to the Afrobarometer 2022 survey, 89% of Togolese believe that a woman standing for election is likely to gain in reputation. But many believe that she will be criticized, insulted, or harassed (55%) and that she will have problems with her family (42%). A situation that discourages many women from standing for election at any level.

In addition to this, social perceptions of women's abilities are forged independently of their level of education. Thus, for equal levels of education, men are favored over women in the allocation of positions. In this sense, there are policies for the promotion of women that require women to be given preference for equal skills. However, this measure is not often applied given social attitudes and expectations. The following **Table 6** shows the distribution of positions of responsibility between men and women with the same level of education.

**Table 6.** Distribution of respondents by level of education.

Level of education	Women (%)	Men (%)
Elementary	46.05	0.01
Secondary	6.57	3.95
Superior	5.26	38.16

Source: Author.

On another note, despite their presence, female leadership faces challenges in terms of recognition. Gender stereotypes (a woman does not govern well, a woman leader is not a good housekeeper, etc.) and societal barriers (the weight of cultural traditions, the mentality of men, jealousy and unhealthy competition from other women, lack of training, lack of self-confidence, lack of resources, national policies, etc.) persist, sometimes negatively influencing the perception of women in positions of responsibility. In terms of women's leadership, the constant is that women are less predisposed to be leaders. This lack of female leadership arises from several social factors, including a lack of charisma and a lack of risk appetite. Added to this is their attitude to opportunities. Lack of self-confidence or self-esteem, due to the way society looks at them, which engenders fear, is another factor influencing the emergence of a new class of female leaders (Djore and Nantob, 2019). According to the survey data in this study, 55% of respondents believe that social expectations are an obstacle to the emancipation of female leadership, while 88% believe that gender stereotypes are the main challenge facing women seeking leadership positions. Lack of self-

confidence was highlighted by the secretary-general of a municipality in greater Lomé, who said:

For example, here at the municipality, we put out a call for applications to recruit the coordinator and rapporteur of the Citizen's Bureau. For the coordinator, out of ten applications, only one was from a woman. I don't know whether it was the profile or the obligations of the post that discouraged them, but there were fewer women. Worse still, for the rapporteurship, there were no women at all. No women, I say. I regretted it, but there were none. To the point where we had no choice, it was two men who were chosen. Afterward, they'll come back and say that the gender aspect wasn't considered, even though we didn't have a choice (Interview with a commune secretary-general, 11 July 2023). The situation described by this interviewee is not isolated. Similar accounts were heard in other municipalities for various posts subject to competition. One may well wonder about the conceptualization of the post itself. Why call it 'Co-ordinator' rather than 'Co-ordinator', when it is open to both sexes? This masculine word is regularly used, and this can be a discouraging factor for potential female candidates. However, the results of the study contrast this slightly. Indeed, 100% of the women surveyed thought that they should get involved in public affairs by being elected or by participating at all levels of governance, 67% openly declared that they had particular ambitions for involvement in the management of their commune, but only 6% saw their ambitions at the highest level of the commune's executive. However, 78% of those surveyed thought that women's roles had changed over time.

When the difficulties do not emanate from the women themselves, it is the environment that is less conducive to the emergence of female leadership. This is the case when women are confronted with sexist, marginalizing, or degrading behavior. A local mayor made the following comment:

I don't know if that's really what it is, and I wouldn't want to be judged either and then have words attributed to me. But I have noticed, for example, that when a woman takes the floor, a man can cut her off or say no, no, no, no. But she doesn't leave any time. But she doesn't leave the time, she reacts to come back to it by asking if they are prevented from expressing themselves? That implies that somewhere it exists, because it's our African upbringing that wants women to be relegated to the background, not to take the lead in things, and it does exist, even if it's not as pronounced as that, it still exists in a form that doesn't say its name (Remarks by a commune mayor, 27 July 2023).

These comments from the field surveys raise the challenge of recognition. But in the same way that a woman can speak without being interrupted is a leadership value. However, we need to look at what weakens women's position about men when it comes to winning socio-professional positions. When women occupy positions of governance, they are judged to be incapable of carrying out their missions. Yet women make an enormous contribution by assuming their positions and carrying out their duties as men would. They sometimes do it better even when they are not in these positions. Indeed:

They're really good, I tell you. For example, the case of the manager and the woman who was also capable of holding this position. In the end, the woman is below the manager, but she would have been better at the job if she hadn't given up in the



first place if she hadn't been afraid. In any case, she takes full responsibility. Does that mean she's asserting her leadership? In any case, they are doing it, but there aren't many of them (Interview with a commune secretary-general, 11 October 2023).

After this interview, a meeting with the woman mentioned by the interviewee made it clear that she had instead been subjected to injunctions from her home group not to apply. Negotiations had taken place between party headquarters to share the post. She had therefore been sacrificed.

Analysis of the perceptions of women's roles and women's leadership in urban governance in greater Lomé, therefore, reveals a complex dynamic, but positive signs are also emerging (more women taking part in elections over time, more and more women standing for elective or competitive posts, widespread awareness of their positive role in city management, etc.), illustrating a gradual change in attitudes and recognizing that a diversity of perspectives enhances the quality of decision-making and promotes inclusive development.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this study, socio-demographic considerations such as level of education and socio-economic position explain the general perception of women's roles and leadership in urban governance in greater Lomé. People in the 'secondary school level and below' and 'income below the minimum wage' groups do not have confidence in women's leadership in urban governance in greater Lomé. This is primarily a question of mentality, of social constructs. Indeed, considering the results of this study, they believe that women are not always up to the task of assuming leadership responsibilities. These results support those reported by Hervé Akinocho (2019), who found that 74% of people with a non-formal or primary education believe women are more useful in the home. Secondly, on the cultural issue, the results of our research show that women with the same level of education do not always occupy positions of as much influence as men. The work of Pira (2018) in a comparative study between France and Gabon had already come to the same conclusion that the cultural variable, i.e., the contextual variable, plays a part in determining perceptions of female leadership. The same observation was made by Teko et al. (2010) and Buckley et al. (2000), who had also reached the same conclusion two decades earlier. This also implies that the situation has not changed. However, the principle of equal responsibility for men and women at the same level does occur. If our results show that education and financial autonomy help position women at influential levels, it follows that the rules of social reproduction and stratification in today's societies determine the place of women in urban governance. If they are reinforced, they will give them a better and irreversible position. This corroborates the fact that the ratchet effect of Duesenberry (1967) in urban governance can lead to progress in women's leadership which will not be easily reversed. In the same vein, Liao and Luo (2021) have argued that political leadership is considerably modulated by education, which has a definite effect on attitudes, albeit on different scales. But once women are educated and empowered, they demonstrate enlightened and accepted leadership. As our results show, women leaders have the advantage of being more competent, having relevant experience in interpersonal relations, being more inclusive in decision-

making, and, above all, being committed to sharing power (Grant, 1988). These results fit in perfectly with the work of Eagly and Carli (2003); Vecchio (2002). The latter also suggests that women have a leadership advantage.

The data collected shows that the negative perception of women's leadership is linked to a lack of confidence in their ability to manage public affairs. This perception can be explained by theories of social exclusion (Dequiré and Jovelin, 2009), which highlight how marginalised groups are often perceived as less capable due to their historical exclusion from spheres of power. The results of our work show that perceptions have significant implications for women's participation in urban governance in greater Lomé. They show that women have an ambitious vision, but others' perceptions of their capacity to be leaders destroy their momentum. Women's ambitious but stifled vision leads to a lack of self-confidence. However, these socio-cultural constraints must be dissociated from tradition, which is not incompatible with development. African culture is in the limelight today, after having been scorned for centuries and considered an obstacle to development (Barry, 2007). As has been observed elsewhere in the world, neither Japan, India nor China have deprived themselves of their culture to develop. Nevertheless, practices that tend to exclude or marginalize women do not allow them to fully assume their roles in society and have drastic consequences for their participation in urban governance. Women's participative leadership is emerging as a skill that enables them to embody a shared vision or to be guided toward common objectives. Much more than a simple skill, women's leadership in greater Lomé is one of the essential elements that can underpin sustainable development. However, women's leadership, which faces little recognition from subordinates, as the results of this study show, also weakens women's participation in urban governance. Thus, the absence of powerful and influential female role models is an obstacle to those who would like to take the plunge. This weakness is justified by the fact that the notion of female domination is not assumed by subordinates (Pira, 2018).

One might think, as Tchafaram (2012) does, that the situation of women in the urban space is still unclear, even confused. He rightly believes that 'women are still lagging in public decision-making. Dominated in the private sphere, they are marginalized in the political arena, which remains largely the preserve of men. The various conventions signed, and conferences held on this subject struggle to translate their commitments into reality, which seem like seductive rhetoric masking a bitter reality' (Tchafaram, 2012). However, this perception could be positively influenced by various socio-cultural upheavals, because in the urban governance of the communes of greater Lomé, the roles of women and women's leadership are perceived in varying ways, ranging from recognition and acceptance to undervaluation and marginalization, depending on existing attitudes and conceptions in society.

Another significant implication of the perceptions derived from our results is that education, awareness, and the presence of role models emerge in this study as the most important factors in shaping public opinions directly, but also in influencing attitudes indirectly. These findings support recent earlier research on how the wider social context conditions the impact of local institutions on gender attitudes (Cha and Thébaud, 2009). Implying this, this is truly a consecration of (Lord and Christy, 1986)'s categorization theory of leadership, explaining power relations between social

groups and precisely the conceptualization of personality and leadership that holds that personality traits influence social perceptions.

Taking all the above factors into account, we can see that women's leadership in the governance of greater Lomé is appreciated in a variety of ways, ranging from recognition and acceptance to under-appreciation and marginalization, depending on existing attitudes and conceptions in society, even though for some stakeholders, women's leadership is currently difficult to appreciate in urban governance. However, perceived as a leitmotiv for achieving gender equality, it is necessary to increase awareness-raising and training so that women and men develop mutual trust for mixed leadership. The results of our research show that women are perceived as more transformational leaders in various spheres, but only to a very small extent in politics. This position is defended by the work of Hsu et al. (2022) who came to the same conclusion.

In the final analysis, it should be recognized that this is a question of the social dominance that men have over women, as explained Pratto et al. (1994). This creates an image in society of women as insufficiently competent to be leaders at the head of municipal executives. At the same time, there has been a consistent trend in recent years to assert that women can have a leadership advantage in society. This is explained by the fact that there is already a gender difference in leadership style, as demonstrated by the work of Eagly and Johnson (1990), who found that on average women had a slightly higher interpersonal style than men, the same level of task style, but a more democratic leadership style than men. The authors Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) also revealed that women are perceived as being slightly more effective leaders.

For the situation to change, and for cultural and social norms in greater Lomé to evolve towards greater gender equality, an upheaval is needed, which is why we are making the following recommendations. Firstly, to bring to the forefront the few deserving women who are present in decision-making bodies (they would be role models for other women and examples of successful female leadership for subordinates); the significant presence of women in positions of responsibility to stimulate a positive image of female leadership in urban governance. Secondly, encourage and promote the only female mayor of greater Lomé, the various deputy mayors, and councillors as individual success stories of women leaders in urban governance (this will help to change the way they are perceived and highlight the tangible achievements and skills they have demonstrated, and reinforce positive perceptions of female leadership). Thirdly, making people understand that tradition is not incompatible with democracy and the full participation of women, including their leadership, is a way of creating positive perceptions of women's roles and female leadership; women leaders must adopt an inclusive and collaborative leadership style to contribute positively to their perception; role-playing and leadership games must be taught to girls and boys from childhood.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study on perceptions of women's roles and female leadership in urban governance in the communes of greater Lomé in Togo highlights complex dynamics

ranging from recognition and acceptance to undervaluation and marginalization, depending on existing attitudes and conceptions in this geographical area. Despite progress in the representation of women in these spheres of responsibility in Togo, challenges remain in terms of the recognition and acceptance of female leadership in greater Lomé. Cultural norms, some surviving gender stereotypes, and social expectations continue to influence how women leaders are perceived. Nevertheless, the growing presence of women in positions of governance offers an opportunity to reshape these perceptions and promote equitable participation. This situation underpins the hope of creating more inclusive and dynamic urban communities in greater Lomé. To foster positive transformation, it is essential, alongside the recommendations made above, to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and actively support female leadership in urban governance, to realize women's full potential as key actors in local development. Those involved in urban governance see the role of women as a key factor in management and development. They play a leading role in governance. It is easy to see that once women understand a project, they get involved, raise awareness among their colleagues, and work towards its success. However, their roles are less recognized in urban governance structures, where they are under-represented. Yet they are the key to good, participatory, and inclusive local governance.

This study provides an in-depth analysis from a variety of perspectives of the challenges and perceptions of women's leadership in urban governance in greater Lomé. However, there are some limitations. Firstly, the findings of the study are based on data specific to greater Lomé and may not be generalizable to other urban contexts in Africa given the socio-cultural and political dynamics that may vary. Although it refers to previous comparative work between North and South, it does not offer a comparative analysis with other African regions or other similar urban contexts. Secondly, perceptions of female leadership and women's roles may be influenced by individual biases and pre-existing cultural norms. They may therefore not objectively reflect reality or be subject to long-term change. Other challenges include the unavailability of some councillors due to their work commitments, such as qualitative data on women's numbers. Added to this was the difficulty of accessing human resources databases. As far as the analysis challenges were concerned, it was a question of being able to correct the aberrations in the database and the assignment of codes. Finally, this study has chosen to identify practical recommendations for improving perceptions of women's leadership without addressing in depth the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate gender inequalities in urban governance. This aspect of the problem could be the subject of another study.

This research highlights the importance of perceptions of women's leadership and their impact on women's participation in urban governance, particularly in the context of greater Lomé. By analysing these perceptions, it shows how socio-cultural norms influence the development of women's leadership and, consequently, women's ability to participate actively in decision-making processes in municipalities. This research proposes that strengthening women's leadership is an essential alternative path to resolving the challenges of political decision-making in Togo. This is why it is emphasised that integrating women could lead to more inclusive and representative decision-making. The main argument in support of this hypothesis is that such

participation is not only crucial to improving urban governance but can also transform existing structures by making institutions more legitimate and capable of effectively managing urban resources and sustainable development in the greater Lomé Autonomous District.

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