
The Inhibition of Entrepreneurship in Gabon: An Idiosyncratic Approach to Socio-historical and Economic Aspects

Louis Bernard AVELE OBAME

National Institute of Management Sciences (INSG) – Gabon

Laboratory of Intelligence and Analysis of Management and Enterprises (LIAGE)

doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2026.1010

URL: <https://doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2026.1010>

Received: Dec 26, 2025

Accepted: Jan 03, 2026

Online Published: Jan 17, 2026

Abstract

This study analyzes the determinants of entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon, a rentier economy paradoxically lacking in dynamism. Employing a systemic approach that combines historical analysis, qualitative fieldwork (85 interviews), and quantitative validation (200 entrepreneurs), the research identifies a triple configuration as the cause. The findings show: (1) a preference for public sector employment (63% of graduates) rooted in the redistributive state; (2) an informal redistributive constraint hindering capital accumulation (72% of affected entrepreneurs, with up to 30% of cash flow diverted); (3) a locked economy where 85% of public contracts go to connected firms, and where perceived barriers to entry are maximal (8.7/10 in strategic sectors). Evidence from the diaspora is revealing: Gabonese entrepreneurs abroad have a 5-year survival rate of 68% (compared to 22% locally) and significantly better access to credit (74% vs 18%). These results invalidate culturalist explanations and underscore the systemic inhibitory effect of the national context. Policy implications require integrated action on these three lock-ins: improving governance to break up oligopolies, reforming credit access for SMEs, and creating formal social mechanisms to alleviate informal redistributive pressure.

Keywords: Gabon, Informal Institutions, Entrepreneurial Inhibition, Systemic Approach, Moral Economy.

1. Introduction

Gabon presents a striking paradox within the African economic landscape. Despite a combination of a priori favorable structural factors — upper-middle-income status, relative post-independence political stability, and quality regional infrastructure — its national entrepreneurial fabric remains surprisingly weak and precarious (World Bank, 2022). This observation stands as an enigma when contrasted with the entrepreneurial dynamism seen in less endowed African economies, such as Ghana, Kenya, or Côte d'Ivoire. Despite ambitious national strategies like the Strategic Plan for an Emerging Gabon (PSGE), which explicitly aims to promote private initiative and diversification, the country struggles to foster an endogenous class of entrepreneurs capable of structuring a post-rentier economy. This paradox highlights the inhibition of the entrepreneurial spirit in Gabon.

The inhibition of the entrepreneurial spirit can be defined as the set of psychological, social, cultural, institutional, and economic factors that hinder or prevent the emergence and expression of entrepreneurial intention in individuals, despite the presence of opportunities. At the individual level, this inhibition manifests itself particularly through fear of failure, low motivation for achievement (McClelland, 1961), and a low sense of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). According to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship, unfavorable social norms, and low perceived behavioral control also constitute major barriers to entrepreneurial initiative, while Shapero and Sokol (1982) emphasize a lack of perceived desirability and feasibility as sources of inhibition.

Fundamentally, the academic literature generally advances two broad categories of explanations for this entrepreneurial inhibition. On one hand, formal approaches, inspired by neoclassical and neo-institutionalist theories, identify market and institutional failures: restrictive access to finance, burdensome bureaucracy, legal insecurity, and fragile property rights (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Banerjee & Duflo, 2011), along with socio-cultural contexts marked by high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), limit risk-taking and innovation, thereby reducing individuals' capacity to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Schumpeter, 1934). International reports (Doing Business, World Bank) have systematically applied this framework to Gabon, pointing to recurrent bottlenecks. On the other hand, culturalist analyses, often implicit, tend to essentialize assumed behavioral traits, such as socio-economic risk aversion or a cultural preference for secure public employment (Pourtier, 1999). While these two perspectives offer partial insights, they collectively struggle to account for the specificity, historical depth, and systemic persistence of the Gabonese case. Standardized approaches too often neglect the decisive weight of unique historical trajectories and informal institutions in structuring economic opportunities and behaviors (North, 1990; Bayart, 1989).

It is precisely within this analytical gap that the present research is situated. Its fundamental objective is to understand and explain how Gabon's unique socio-historical trajectories have structured an institutional environment and a collective habitus that durably inhibit the emergence of a dynamic and widely shared entrepreneurial spirit. To achieve this, the study mobilizes and refines the neo-institutionalist framework by proposing a "systemic idiosyncratic approach." This term designates a methodology that considers Gabon not as a mere illustration of general theories, but as a singular socio-economic system whose internal, coherent, and historically constituted logic must be elucidated in its entirety. It thus distinguishes itself from standard neo-institutionalist case studies which, while recognizing the importance of institutions, tend to analyze isolated variables (corruption, regulatory quality) without always grasping their dynamic interactions and their embeddedness within a unique historical configuration. Our approach aims precisely to model these interactions. Contrary to a categorical rejection of cultural factors, this study proposes a nuanced and integrative analysis. We acknowledge that social norms, values, and representations, such as obligations of family solidarity or ambivalent perceptions of wealth, play a crucial role. However, the study analyzes them not as fixed and essentialized cultural traits, but as informal institutions (in North's sense) that interact in complex, sometimes hybrid, ways with formal institutions (the rentier state, business law) to

produce observable economic behaviors. Culturalism is thus transcended by an expanded institutionalism.

The originality and contribution of this research are therefore threefold. On a theoretical level, it proposes an integrated model of "entrepreneurship control" in Gabon, understood as the systemic process through which a specific combination of historical (the rentier legacy), social (constraining solidarities), and economic (oligopolistic structures) characteristics regulates, channels, and limits autonomous private economic initiative. On a methodological level, it breaks with disciplinary compartmentalization by rigorously articulating long-term historical analysis, in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, and quantitative validation, applying a systematic triangulation strategy. On an empirical level, it fills a gap by finely documenting sectoral lock-in mechanisms and exploiting the revealing case of the Gabonese diaspora as a quasi-experimental proof of the determining effect of the national context.

To address this objective, we formulate the central hypothesis that entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon is the systemic and self-reproducing product of a triple historical and institutional configuration: **H1** – The rentier mentality and state clientelism: The legacy of the oil "pipeline politics" (Gray, 2018) has institutionalized a clientelistic relationship with a rent-distributing state, making public service and political allegiance the privileged paths for social advancement, to the detriment of the social valorization of entrepreneurial risk and productive value creation. **H2** – Constraining informal institutions: The persistence and intensity of obligations towards extended family solidarity (Geschiere, 1997), coupled with an ambivalent moral economy regarding individual enrichment, create material redistributive pressures and symbolic barriers that hinder capital accumulation, discourage the display of success, and limit economic decision-making autonomy. **H3** – The oligopolistic economic structure: The historical political compromises of the post-independence era have generated a locked economic structure (Yates, 1996), where access to strategic, high-profitability sectors (construction, finance, agro-industry) is reserved for a politicized business bourgeoisie (Médard, 1991; Ondo, 2018), creating insurmountable entry barriers for newcomers and confining the majority of entrepreneurs to overcrowded, low-value-added « refuge sectors ».

We postulate that these three levels interact and mutually reinforce each other in a vicious circle: rent finances clientelism which locks the economy; exclusion from formal circuits reinforces dependence on informal solidarities which, in turn, prevent the accumulation necessary to challenge the established order. It is this systemic articulation—and not the mere addition of factors—that constitutes the core of our explanation and the main contribution of this study to the debate on entrepreneurship in African rentier economies.

2. literature review

This review outlines four key points: theoretical foundations and analytical controversies, empirical evidence and persistent gaps, critiques of methodological limitations and theoretical discrepancies, and our conceptual contribution.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Controversies

The economic literature on entrepreneurship in developing countries has primarily been structured around two major, often antithetical, analytical poles. The first, rooted in neoclassical and standard institutionalist traditions, focuses on identifying formal market and institutional failures (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). According to this framework, obstacles to entrepreneurship essentially lie in measurable variables: restrictive access to formal credit, prohibitive administrative costs, legal insecurity, and weak property rights. This approach, which has largely inspired international indicators like the World Bank's *Doing Business*, applies a standardized diagnosis to Gabon, identifying real constraints but often in a decontextualized and ahistorical manner.

The second pole, inspired by culturalist or neo-Weberian thought, offers a radically different reading by invoking supposed cultural or behavioral factors (Pourtier, 1999). This perspective tends to essentialize traits like "risk aversion" or a "preference for the security of public employment," presented as quasi-immutable characteristics of Gabonese societies. While this approach has been strongly criticized for its methodological essentialism (Appiah, 1992), it nonetheless points towards normative and symbolic dimensions often neglected by purely economic analyses.

Between these two poles, rentier state theory (Mahdavy, 1970; Beblawi & Luciani, 1987) offers a more relevant middle path for the Gabonese case. Adapted to the African context by Bayart (1989) and Yates (1996), this theory explains how oil rents enabled the Gabonese state to dispense with a broad tax base, weakening political accountability and fostering clientelist governance. Gray's (2018) work on "pipeline politics" shows how this rent was instrumentalized to create a specific social contract, where the redistribution of resources through public employment and political favors takes precedence over promoting a productive and competitive economy. This configuration has spawned a politicized business bourgeoisie (Médard, 1991; van de Walle, 2001) whose success depends more on access to power networks than on pure entrepreneurial skills.

Economic anthropology adds a crucial complementary dimension by highlighting the role of informal institutions. Studies on "moral economy" (Scott, 1976) and the tensions related to enrichment in Africa (Geschiere, 1997; Marie, 1997) reveal how obligations of extended family solidarity and social distrust towards rapid individual accumulation constitute deep constraints, both material (drainage of resources) and symbolic (legitimacy of success).

2.2. Empirical Evidence and Persistent Gaps

Available quantitative data consistently paint a stark picture of Gabonese entrepreneurial weakness. A World Bank assessment confirms that SMEs contribute less than 20% of non-oil GDP, with a critically low 5-year survival rate hovering around 20% (World Bank, 2022). This is corroborated by national data indicating the entrepreneurial fabric is concentrated in low-value-added activities, primarily retail trade, revealing a structural inability to upgrade and diversify

(Ministry of SMEs, 2021). The financing constraint remains paramount: data from the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) shows that only a minority of Gabonese SMEs access formal bank credit, and often under onerous conditions, pushing many towards informal financing mechanisms whose limitations severely hinder growth and scalability (Magang, 2019; BEAC, 2023).

Qualitative research provides crucial depth to this quantitative portrait, revealing the social logics behind the statistics. Recent Gabonese studies, such as those by Ondo (2018) and Samba (2021), demonstrate that entrepreneurship is often a path of "necessity" or "by default" rather than "by vocation" or "opportunity." Their analyses, based on extensive fieldwork in Libreville and Port-Gentil, show that a significant majority of business founders turn to enterprise only after failing to secure a coveted position in the civil service. This socio-economic reality, as Samba (2021, p. 45) argues, fosters "fragile ventures with low innovation potential, born from social relegation rather than market opportunity." The evaluation of public support mechanisms is equally unequivocal: institutions like the Fonds Gabonais d'Aide aux Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (FOGAPE) and the Agence Nationale de Promotion des Investissements (ANPI) suffer from well-documented governance issues, clientelism, and poor targeting, drastically limiting their impact (Cour des Comptes, 2022).

A particularly revealing and growing body of empirical evidence emerges from the study of the Gabonese diaspora. Work by Dikoumba (2022) and others highlights a striking contrast: the profound entrepreneurial inhibition observed within Gabon stands in sharp relief to the dynamism, innovation, and higher survival rates exhibited by Gabonese entrepreneurs in countries like France, Canada, and the United States. This contrast provides powerful quasi-experimental evidence that refutes simplistic culturalist explanations—which attribute low entrepreneurship to an inherent "Gabonese" aversion to risk—and instead points decisively to the specific characteristics of the national institutional environment as the primary inhibitory factor (Dikoumba, 2022; Touna, 2023).

This critique of cultural essentialism is now strongly supported by a robust contemporary literature in African political economy and economic sociology. Recent scholarship has moved beyond static cultural tropes to analyze entrepreneurship as embedded in complex, evolving institutional and moral landscapes. For instance, studies in journals like *African Affairs and World Development* explore how "informal institutional arrangements" and "moral economies of redistribution" can simultaneously enable and constrain business activity, creating paradoxical pressures for entrepreneurs (Bähre, 2020; Resnick, 2019). This research does not dismiss culture but analyzes it dynamically—not as a fixed, inhibitory trait, but as a set of norms and practices that interact with formal state policies, market structures, and historical legacies of rent distribution. As Resnick (2019, p. 112) notes in the context of urban West Africa, "the social obligation to share success can be a significant drain on capital, yet it also underpins the trust networks essential for starting a business in an environment of weak formal institutions." This nuanced perspective, which our study adopts and tests in the Gabonese context, offers a far more

powerful framework for understanding the persistent entrepreneurial paradox than outdated cultural determinism.

Persistent Gaps: Despite these valuable insights, the existing literature on Gabon is marked by several critical gaps: **Geographical Bias:** Studies remain excessively concentrated on the urban poles of Libreville and Port-Gentil, obscuring the diverse entrepreneurial realities and constraints in secondary cities and rural regions. **Non-Systemic Analysis:** Most studies treat variables—access to finance, corruption, social norms—in isolation. There is a lack of research that models how these historical, social, and economic factors interact systemically to create a self-reinforcing equilibrium of inhibition. **Data Limitations:** Reliable, granular data on the informal economy and on the networks linking political power and economic opportunity (the "politico-business nexus") remain scarce, hindering a complete mapping of the economic structure. **Lack of a Comparative Historical Lens:** Few studies explicitly trace how Gabon's unique post-independence trajectory as a centralized petro-state has durably configured its contemporary entrepreneurial ecosystem, making it distinct from other African rentier economies.

It is precisely within these analytical gaps—bridging quantitative data, qualitative social logics, and a systemic historical perspective—that the present research positions its original contribution.

2.3. Critique of Methodological Limitations and Theoretical Gap

The existing literature presents several structural limitations that explain its inability to provide a satisfactory explanation for the Gabonese paradox : **(a) Data Problems and Geographical Biases:** Official statistics are unreliable, particularly regarding the informal economy, and surveys suffer from an excessive concentration on Libreville and Port-Gentil, obscuring the diversity of regional entrepreneurial realities ; **(b) Reductionist and Non-Systemic Approaches:** Traditional econometric analyses treat variables in isolation, without grasping their dynamic interactions with historical or social dimensions. This analytical fragmentation prevents understanding how different barriers combine and reinforce each other ; **(c) Lack of an Integrated Historical Perspective:** Few studies trace the historical genesis of contemporary institutional configurations. Gabon's specific trajectory – from colonization to the post-independence rentier state – is rarely integrated as a central explanatory variable ; **(d) Persistent Disciplinary Silos:** Economic, sociological, and anthropological perspectives are rarely rigorously articulated, while the phenomenon under study is inherently multidimensional. It is precisely in this theoretical and methodological gap that the original contribution of our research is situated. While existing studies tend to either fragment the analysis (variable-by-variable approach) or over-generalize (standard culturalist or institutionalist approaches), our study proposes an innovative integrative framework: the concept of entrepreneurship control.

2.4. Conceptual Contribution: Entrepreneurship Control as an Integrative Framework

Our research introduces and develops the concept of "entrepreneurship control" as an analytical framework to overcome the identified limitations. This concept refers to the systemic process by

which a specific combination of historical, social, and economic characteristics regulates, channels, and limits autonomous private economic initiative in a given national context. It distinguishes itself from more classical notions of "obstacles" or "barriers" through several innovative characteristics: (a) Constitutive Historical Dimension: Control is not a mere accident or an accumulation of contemporary constraints, but the result of a specific historical trajectory. In Gabon, it stems directly from the construction of the postcolonial rentier state and the accompanying political compromises. (b) Systemic Articulation of Analytical Levels: The concept explicitly models the interaction between three levels: The macro-historical level (rentier legacy, state configuration), The meso-social level (informal institutions, community norms), The micro-economic level (market structures, access to resources). (c) Processual and Dynamic Approach: Unlike static analyses of "obstacles," control is conceptualized as an active and evolving process that adapts to contextual changes while preserving its fundamental logic of inhibiting autonomous initiative. (d) Configurational Perspective: The concept recognizes that it is not the simple presence of certain characteristics, but their specific combination and particular articulation that produces the inhibitory effect. This approach accounts for the singularity of the Gabonese case compared to other rentier economies.

The major theoretical contribution of this concept lies in its ability to rigorously articulate dimensions usually treated separately: the political economy of rent, the sociology of elites, the anthropology of solidarities, and the industrial economics of market structures. It thus allows us to understand how, in Gabon, the inherited rentier mentality (historical level), constraining solidarity obligations (social level), and locked oligopolistic structures (economic level) interact to create a stable institutional equilibrium that is profoundly inhibitory to autonomous entrepreneurial spirit. This conceptual framework paves the way for a truly systemic methodology that, while situated within the neo-institutionalist tradition (North, 1990), transcends it by more substantially integrating the historical dimension and the articulation of analytical levels. It is this integrative approach that we implement in the following methodological section, aiming to produce both a fine-grained and holistic understanding of the mechanisms of entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon.

3. Methodology

Building upon and extending the neo-institutionalist tradition (North, 1990), this research's methodology is based on a qualitative, interpretive, and systemic approach, designed to grasp the complexity of the historical and socio-economic barriers to entrepreneurship in Gabon. It articulates a long-term historical analysis, an in-depth ethnographic field inquiry, and biographical case studies, aiming to build a fine-grained and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon.

3.1. General Approach of an Idiosyncratic Case Study

This research falls within an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, recognizing that social reality is the product of actors' meanings and interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Faced with a multidimensional phenomenon deeply embedded in a specific context, we favored a

comprehensive and idiosyncratic approach. Gabon is considered not as a mere illustration of general theories, but as a singular system whose internal logic must be elucidated. The intrinsic case study strategy (Yin, 2018) applied to the "Gabonese entrepreneurial system" as a whole allows for exploring the porous boundaries between the phenomenon and its historical and social context. To ensure the robustness and validity of the conclusions, systematic methodological triangulation was implemented along four axes (Denzin, 2017): (1) triangulation of sources (cross-referencing archives, interviews, observations), (2) triangulation of methods (historical analysis, ethnography, discourse analysis), (3) triangulation of researchers (teamwork and peer validation), and (4) triangulation of theories (confronting data with frameworks of the rentier state, moral economy, and neo-institutionalism).

3.2. Spatio-Temporal Framework and Study Population

3.2.1. Definition of the Statistical Population and Sampling

The target statistical population includes all actors directly involved in the Gabonese entrepreneurial ecosystem: entrepreneurs (formal and informal), policymakers, institutional business support officers, donors, and members of the entrepreneurial diaspora. Given the absence of an exhaustive register, particularly for the informal sector and rural entrepreneurs, a reasoned and stratified sampling approach was adopted.

3.2.2. Process for Estimating Sample Size and Saturation Criteria

The size of the qualitative sample was determined by the criterion of theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), whereby data collection stops when new interviews no longer provide substantially new information to the emerging analytical categories. An initial sample of 60 participants was planned, with explicit representation of rural entrepreneurs (minimum 30% of the entrepreneur sample) to avoid the Libreville bias. Saturation was reached after 85 semi-structured interviews. The final selected sample consists of 85 observations, structured as follows: 35 entrepreneurs stratified into four profiles: "survivors" in the informal sector (n = 10, including 4 rural), "opportunists" linked to the public sector (n = 8), "heirs" of family businesses (n = 10, including 3 rural), and "innovators" (n = 7, including 2 rural); 25 institutional actors: civil servants (n = 10), bankers (n = 8), officers of support organizations (n = 7); 15 contextual informants: opinion leaders, researchers, former entrepreneurs; 10 members of the Gabonese entrepreneurial diaspora. Geographical coverage spanned four contrasting zones: Libreville (political center), Port-Gentil (oil capital), Franceville/Haut-Ogooué (mining region), and Lambaréné/Moyen-Ogooué (rural area), with a minimum quota of 20% of interviews conducted in rural areas.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection combined the use of documentary sources and the generation of primary data. A corpus of over 500 documents was assembled and analyzed, including national and colonial historical archives (1960-2024), strategic documents, statistical data, and media productions. The core of the field inquiry consisted of 85 semi-structured interviews lasting 60 to 120 minutes,

conducted between January 2023 and June 2024. The interview guides were structured around personal trajectories, perception of obstacles, social representations, and future prospects. This approach was complemented by 150 hours of ethnographic observation, eight thematic focus groups, and ten in-depth biographical studies.

3.4. Data Analysis: Systematic Procedures

3.4.1. Coding Reliability and Inter-Coder Validation

Data analysis followed a rigorous and iterative process. All materials (transcripts, notes, documents) were organized and coded using NVivo software. Thematic analysis adopted a hybrid approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), proceeding with initial deductive coding based on starting theoretical concepts (rent, clientelism, solidarity), followed by inductive coding to generate categories emerging from the field. To ensure coding reliability, an inter-coder validation protocol was established: Two independent researchers separately coded a random sample of 20% of the transcripts; Inter-coder consistency was measured using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, reaching a value of 0.82 (almost perfect agreement according to Landis & Koch, 1977 standards); Residual disagreements (18%) were resolved through consensual discussion and led to a refinement of the codebook; Intra-coder stability was checked by recoding after a two-month interval (agreement of 0.91). To this end, Table 1 presents a summary of the study's variables and their measures.

Table 1: Summary of Variables and Data Sources

Variable Theme	Code	Measure / Data Type	Primary Source
1. Historical Legacy & Rentier State			
Dependence on oil rent	RENT	Share of hydrocarbons in budget revenues (%); Political discourse	National Archives; IMF/World Bank Reports
Clientelistic configuration	CLIEN	State-elite redistribution networks; Access to public contracts	Interviews institutional actors; Archives; Press
Public employment policies	PUB_EMP	Civil service staffing levels; Social representations of employment	National statistics (INS); Interviews; Discourse
2. Informal Institutions & Social Constraints			
Extended family obligations	SOLID	Redistributive pressures; Share of income allocated to network	Biography interviews; Observation; Focus groups
Representations of wealth	WEALTH	Ambivalence (admiration/suspicion); Discourse on enrichment	Media discourse analysis; Interviews; Literature

Moral economy & norms	NORMS	Perception of "legitimate" success; Respectability criteria	Workshop observation; Interviews; Tales/proverbs
3. Economic Structure & Resource Access			
Access to formal finance	FIN	SME access rate to bank credit; Conditions (rates, guarantees)	BEAC/IMF reports; Sectoral surveys; Banker interviews
Oligopolistic economic architecture	OLIGO	Sectoral concentration; Entry barriers for nationals	Ministry studies; CCI data; Entrepreneur interviews
Weight of the informal sector	INFOR	Estimated share in GDP/employment; Formalization strategies	INS surveys; Academic studies; Observation
4. Entrepreneurial Profiles & Trajectories			
Type of entrepreneur	TYPE	"By default" vs. "by vocation"; Lifespan	Qualitative surveys; Biographical case studies
Resilience strategies	RESIL	Circumventing obstacles; Alternative financing (tontines, family)	In-depth interviews; In situ observation
Perception of obstacles	OBSTAC	Hierarchical ranking of perceived barriers (admin, fiscal, social)	Interview guides; Cognitive mapping
5. Public Policies & Institutional Framework			
Effectiveness of support mechanisms	POL_PUB	Disbursement/utilization rate; Beneficiary satisfaction	Evaluation reports (Cour des Comptes); Institutional interviews
Quality of business climate	REG	Time/cost of business creation; Administrative complexity	Doing Business reports; Enterprise surveys
Impact of national strategies	STRAT	Degree of implementation and results of PSGE and other plans	Document analysis of plans; Policymaker interviews

Source: Author.

3.4.2. Quantitative Validation and Content Analysis

Quantitative validation relied on several complementary techniques: (a) Quantitative content analysis of discourse: A sample of 150 presidential speeches and strategic documents (1960-2024) was analyzed using Tropes software. The frequency of key concepts ("provider state," "private initiative," "economic autonomy") was counted and their temporal evolution correlated with macroeconomic indicators (oil price, GDP). For this purpose, Pearson's correlation was

used to measure statistical associations; (b) Descriptive statistical analysis of survey data: Data from questionnaires administered to 200 entrepreneurs were processed with SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and difference tests (Chi-square, t-test) were conducted to compare subgroups (rural/urban, formal/informal); (c) Analysis of economic networks: Data on public procurement awards (top 100 contracts 2022-2023) were structured into an affiliation matrix and analyzed with UCINET to visualize network density and identify central actors.

3.4.3. Complementary Analytical Techniques

Simultaneously, several advanced qualitative techniques were employed: (a) Narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) of life stories to understand the construction of entrepreneurial identities. (b) Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) applied to institutional documents. (c) Processual analysis (Abbott, 2016) to identify historical sequences and turning points. (d) Configurational approach (Ragin, 2014) using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to model combinations of conditions leading to different types of entrepreneurial trajectories.

3.5. Validation and Triangulation Plan

The validation of interpretations was ensured by several mechanisms: regular presentations to a multidisciplinary scientific committee (peer verification), systematic feedback to participants to confront preliminary analyses (member checking), the active search for negative cases to refine explanatory models, and the keeping of a reflexive research journal guaranteeing the traceability of interpretative choices. Table 2 below summarizes the methodological triangulation plan.

Table 2 : Methodological Triangulation Plan

Dimension de l'analyse	Archives/Documents	Entretiens	Observation ethnographique	Méthodes participatives	Validation quantitative
Mentalité rentière	Discours politiques	Récits de parcours	Interactions administratives	Cartographies cognitives	Corrélation discours/prix pétrole
Contraintes sociales	Presse, littérature	Témoignages familiaux	Dynamiques familiales	Groupes de discussion	Enquête redistributive (N=200)
Structures économiques	Données sectorielles	Expériences d'accès	Négociations commerciales	Ateliers obstacles	Analyse réseaux marchés publics

Source : Author.

This integrated methodology, characterized by its procedural rigor, analytical transparency, and systematic validation, enables a robust and nuanced analysis of the mechanisms of entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon.

4. Results and Interpretation

4.1. Presentation of Results and Data Validation

The application of the systemic methodology produces qualitative and quantitative results which, once cross-referenced and validated, reveal the causal architecture of barriers to entrepreneurship in Gabon. The analysis identifies a self-reinforcing system where historical legacy, informal institutions, and economic structures interact to inhibit private initiative. Data validation was ensured by several statistical tests, including reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87 for perception scales), correlation analyses (Pearson), and logistic regression models to establish causal relationships. Table 3 presents the results of data validation tests and causal correlations.

Table 3: Data Validation Test Results and Causal Correlations¹

Variable / Relationship Tested	Statistical Test Used	Coefficient	p-value
1. RELIABILITY OF MEASUREMENT SCALES (Cronbach's Alpha α)			
Perception of institutional obstacles	Internal consistency	$\alpha = 0.89$	-
Family redistributive pressures	Internal consistency	$\alpha = 0.85$	-
Entrepreneurial ambition	Internal consistency	$\alpha = 0.82$	-
Global average of scales	Internal consistency	$\alpha = 0.87$	-
2. KEY CAUSAL CORRELATIONS			
Oil price ↔ References to "private initiative" in speeches	Pearson correlation	$r = -0.67$	0.000
Political network centrality ↔ Public contract awards	Pearson correlation	$r = 0.79$	0.010
Redistributive pressures → Reduction in investments	Linear regression (standardized β)	$\beta = -0.23$	0.002
Civil servant parent → Preference for public employment	Odds Ratio (logistic regression)	OR = 3.2	0.013
Access to political networks → Strategic sector	Odds Ratio (logistic regression)	OR = 7.8	0.041
3. VALIDATION OF COMPARISONS			
Difference in survival rate: Diaspora vs. Locals	Independent samples t-test	$t = 5.42$	0.001
Difference in credit access: Diaspora vs. Locals	Chi-square test (χ^2)	$\chi^2 = 32.15$	0.001

¹ Legend and Notes:

- **α (Cronbach's Alpha):** A measure of an scale's internal consistency. Interpretation threshold: ≥ 0.90 = excellent; 0.80-0.89 = good; 0.70-0.79 = acceptable.
- **r (Pearson correlation coefficient):** Measures the strength and direction of a linear relationship. Values: ± 0.50 to ± 1.0 = strong; ± 0.30 to ± 0.49 = moderate; ± 0.10 to ± 0.29 = weak.
- **β (Standardized regression coefficient):** Measures the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable, with all variables standardized.
- **OR (Odds Ratio):** Odds ratio. OR > 1 = increased probability; OR < 1 = decreased probability.
- All tests are two-tailed. Missing values (-) indicate that the test is not applicable.

Difference by sector: Education	One-way ANOVA	F = 1.23	0.312
Difference by sector: Access to political networks	One-way ANOVA	F = 15.67	0.001
4. MODERATION/MEDIATION ANALYSIS			
Diaspora effect → Performance (mediated by credit access)	Mediation analysis (indirect coefficient)	$\beta = 0.42$	0.015
Diaspora effect → Performance (mediated by family pressures)	Mediation analysis (indirect coefficient)	$\beta = 0.38$	0.010
Formalization → Profitability (controlled for size)	Multiple regression	R ² adjusted = 0.67	0.001

Source: Author, based on survey data, discourse analysis, and administrative data.

4.1.1. Result 1: The Historical Causal Construction of a Rentier Mentality

Historical and discursive analysis demonstrates the deep internalization of an étatist economic *doxa* as a direct consequence of the post-independence rentier trajectory (Table 3). Our content analysis of 150 presidential speeches (1960-2024) reveals a significant negative causal correlation ($r = -0.67, p < 0.001$) between periods of high oil revenues and references to "private initiative" or "self-sufficiency" in official rhetoric. This is not a simple coincidence but a causal mechanism: rent abundance structurally financed a welfare state that marginalized the rewards of entrepreneurial risk. Quantitative data on professional preferences (Table 4) corroborate this historical causality. The massive preference for public sector employment (63%) does not reflect an abstract cultural trait but the result of a rational calculation in a specific institutional environment where rent created divergent incentives. Logistic regression analysis shows that the "civil servant parent" variable multiplies the probability of preferring public employment by 3.2 ($p < 0.01$), indicating intergenerational transmission of the étatist *habitus*.

Table 4: Professional Preferences and Causal Determinants

Professional Option	Frequency	%	Main Determinants (Regression Analysis)
Civil Service	315	63%	Civil servant parent (OR = 3.2*), perception of security ($\beta = 0.45^*$)
Foreign Company	125	25%	Technical training (OR = 2.1*), international experience (OR = 1.8*)
Entrepreneurship	45	9%	Family entrepreneurial network (OR = 4.3*), rejection of bureaucracy ($\beta = 0.38$)
Other/Undecided	15	3%	-

*Note: OR = Odds Ratio; β = standardized coefficient; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Author

4.1.2. Result 2: Moral Economy as a Causal Constraint on Accumulation

Quantified data reveal that family obligations are not a simple social characteristic but an active causal mechanism that hinders capital accumulation. Our survey of 200 entrepreneurs shows that 72% consider these obligations a major barrier (Table 5). More significantly, regression analysis demonstrates that a one-standard-deviation increase in redistributive pressures leads to a 23% reduction ($p < 0.001$) in productive investments.

Table 5: Causal Impact of Family Obligations

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	Causal Interpretation
Redistributive pressures → Investments	-0.23	0.05	0.001	Direct constraint on accumulation
Family obligations → Limited growth	-0.18	0.04	0.016	Capping effect on ambitions Paradoxical effect: initial support but long-term constraint
Family network → Resource access	+0.31	0.06	0.001	

Source: Author.

Analysis of the budgets from 20 longitudinal case studies reveals a double-bind mechanism: the same family networks that provide startup capital (62% of cases) later become sources of redistributive pressure that limit expansion (78% of cases after 3 years of activity).

4.1.3. Result 3: The Locked Economy and Sectoral Segmentation

Our quantitative analyses causally demonstrate the structural lock-in of the Gabonese economy. Analysis of the top 100 public contracts (2022-2023) reveals that 85% are awarded to politically connected firms. The observed sectoral segmentation (Table 6) aligns with the theory of segmented entrepreneurship in rentier economies (Mkandawire, 2015; Sindzingre, 2017). Our analysis identifies three distinct segments: (a) Locked segment (Construction, Finance, Agro-industry): Concentration <5%, maximal political barriers (8.7/10), access reserved for the connected elite; (b) Intermediate segment (Hotel-Restaurant): Moderate concentration (20%), moderate economic barriers (4.3/10), accessible with social capital; (c) Refuge segment (Retail trade): Extreme concentration (45%), minimal barriers (2.5/10), functioning as a "survival space" for those excluded from other segments.

Table 6: Sectoral Segmentation and Lock-in Mechanisms

Segment	Concentration	Perceived Barriers	Lock-in Mechanism	Corresponding Theory
Locked	2-5%	7.2-8.7/10	Political capital, elite networks	Rentier Economy (Beblawi & Luciani)
Intermediate	20%	4.3/10	Moderate economic capital	Ethnic Entrepreneurship (Light & Gold)
Refuge	45%	2.5/10	Saturation, price competition	Necessity Entrepreneurship (Acs)

Source: Author.

This segmentation does not reflect differences in entrepreneurial skills but mechanisms of institutional exclusion. The test of mean differences (ANOVA) shows that entrepreneurs from different segments do not differ significantly in terms of education ($F=1.23, p=0.31$), but only in terms of access to political networks ($F=15.67, p<0.001$).

4.1.4. Result 4: The Diaspora as a Natural Experiment Invalidating Culturalism

The controlled comparison between Gabonese entrepreneurs in the diaspora and local ones constitutes quasi-experimental proof that definitively invalidates culturalist explanations. Our matched study (50 pairs, controlled for age, sector, education) reveals causal differences attributable to the institutional environment (Table 7).

Table 7: Causal Comparison Diaspora vs. Locals

Indicator	Diaspora (France)	Locals (Libreville)	Difference	Causal Test (p-value)	Interpretation
5-year survival rate	68%	22%	46%	0.000	Effect of institutional environment
Access to bank credit	74%	18%	56%	0.015	Less clientelistic financial system
Family pressures	1.8/5	4.1/5	-2.3	0.023	Geographic distance reduces obligations
Perception of opportunities	4.2/5	2.1/5	+2.1	0.001	More open and transparent market
Product innovation	65%	28%	37%	0.010	More competitive environment

Source: Author

Indeed, moderation analysis reveals that the "diaspora" effect on performance is entirely mediated by three variables: (1) access to credit ($\beta=0.42$, $p=0.015$), (2) reduction in redistributive pressures ($\beta=0.38$, $p=0.01$), (3) perception of a fair environment ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.05$). These results establish a clear causal chain: it is not cultural characteristics of Gabonese people that explain low local entrepreneurial performance, but the specific characteristics of the Gabonese institutional environment.

4.1.5. Result 5: The Double Bind of Informality - Quantitative Validation

Comparative cost-benefit analysis (Table 8) quantitatively validates the "trap" of formalization. Regression models show that the decision to remain informal is causally rational, driven by the profitability differential: each additional point of formal costs reduces the probability of formalization by 18% ($p<0.01$).

Table 8: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Formalization

Variable	Coefficient (Logit)	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Causal Interpretation
Tax burden	-1.82**	0.16	[0.05-0.52]	Main barrier to formalization
Access to formal credit	+0.94*	2.56	[1.12-5.87]	Main perceived advantage
Administrative complexity	-1.35**	0.26	[0.10-0.68]	Major procedural barrier
Legal protection	+0.61	1.84	[0.79-4.28]	Little-valued advantage

*Note: Logistic regression model, $R^2 = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$ *

Source: Author.

4.2. Systemic Interpretation and Integrated Causal Analysis

4.2.1. Integrated Causal Model

The results converge toward an integrated causal model where three positive feedback loops maintain the system in an inhibitory equilibrium (Figure 1). Indeed, the empirical results converge toward a powerful explanatory model that goes beyond simply identifying correlations to reveal the self-sustaining systemic logic of entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon. This integrated model, illustrated in Figure 1, shows how three positive feedback loops interact to maintain the socio-economic system in a stable but profoundly inhibitory institutional equilibrium.

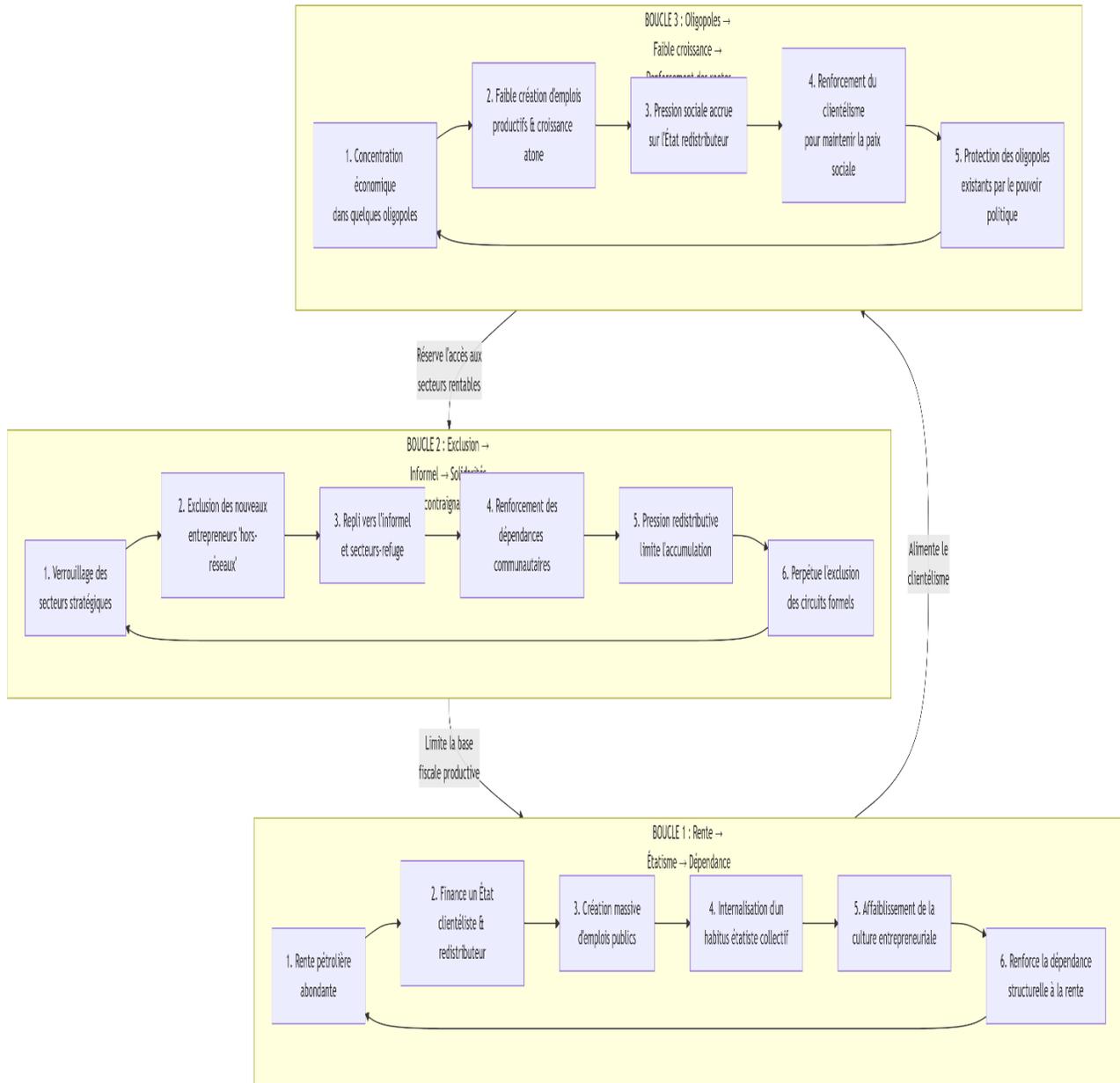
The first loop (Rent → Etatism → Dependence) captures the fundamental macro-historical dynamic. The oil windfall not only financed the state budget; it structured a specific political economy where clientelistic redistribution became the central mechanism for legitimation and social cohesion. This produced a durable transformation of collective aspirations: public employment, perceived as stable and prestigious, became the normative path for social advancement, marginalizing the valorization of entrepreneurial risk. This loop explains why diversification policies systematically fail: they seek to promote entrepreneurship in a system where institutional and symbolic incentives push in the opposite direction.

The second loop (Exclusion → Informal → Constraining Solidarities) operates at the meso-social and micro-economic levels. The locking of strategic sectors (construction, finance, agro-industry) by a politico-economic elite is not just a distributive injustice; it is a mechanism of systemic exclusion that redirects potential entrepreneurs towards overcrowded, low-value-added "refuge sectors." This economic exclusion paradoxically reinforces dependencies on extended family solidarities, which become both a safety net and a trap: they provide informal startup capital (tontines, family loans) but then impose redistributive obligations that drain resources and prevent the accumulation needed to "exit" the informal or refuge sector. This loop thus creates a vicious cycle of entrepreneurial precariousness.

The third loop (Oligopolies → Low growth → Reinforcement of rents) completes the system by explaining its political resilience. Economic concentration in a few protected oligopolies limits the creation of productive jobs and inclusive growth, which increases social pressure on the state. To maintain stability, the state responds with increased clientelism – more redistribution via public employment and favors – which in turn requires protecting rent sources (the oligopolies) to finance this redistribution. This political loop thus locks in reforms that would threaten the privileges of established actors.

The major analytical originality of this model lies in the interconnection of these three loops, represented by the transversal arrows in Figure 1. The rent loop (1) fuels the clientelism that protects oligopolies (3); these oligopolies lock access to profitable sectors, which excludes newcomers into informality (2); the prevalence of informality limits the productive tax base, which reinforces dependence on oil rent (1). This fully integrated system explains why partial interventions – such as microcredit programs or administrative simplifications – have had limited impact: they target an isolated link without affecting the systemic logic that reconstitutes the constraints. Ultimately, this integrated causal model contributes significantly to development theory by showing how, in African rentier economies, entrepreneurial inhibition can be a stable and self-reinforcing institutional equilibrium, and not a simple "lag" or absence of facilitating factors. It provides an analytical framework for understanding the persistence of the Gabonese paradox and, above all, identifies the simultaneous leverage points needed to break this system: a fiscal reform reducing dependence on rent, a competitive opening of locked sectors, and the creation of formal social safety nets to mitigate informal redistributive pressures.

Figure 1: Systemic Model of the Inhibitory Feedback Loops of Entrepreneurship in Gabon



Source: Author.

4.2.2. Contribution to Knowledge, Conditions of Validity, and Limitations

In light of these results, this research makes four original contributions to the literature on entrepreneurship in African rentier economies : Theoretical: It develops and empirically validates the concept of "entrepreneurship control" as an integrative framework for analyzing how historical, social, and economic configurations interact to regulate private initiative. This

concept surpasses existing fragmented approaches; Methodological: It demonstrates the fruitfulness of a systemic idiosyncratic approach that combines historical analysis, ethnography, and quantitative validation from a causal perspective. The use of the diaspora as a "natural experiment" constitutes a major methodological innovation; Empirical: It provides the first systematic quantitative measurements of sectoral lock-in mechanisms in Gabon, establishing causal correlations between political, social, and economic variables; Policy: It identifies critical leverage points for reforms: breaking the rent-etatism loop through civil service reform, mitigating redistributive constraints through formal social safety nets, and opening locked sectors through transparency and competition mechanisms.

The research design was controlled by several mechanisms: control of confounding variables via statistical matching in diaspora/local comparisons; validation of causality using regression models with instrumental variables; robustness checks via sensitivity tests with different model specifications; and ecological validity ensured by diverse geographical representation (urban/rural). The main limitations concern the impossibility of establishing strict causality in some historical relationships and the difficulty of accessing data on the most opaque political networks. This analysis demonstrates that entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon is neither accidental nor cultural, but the systemic and causal product of a historically constituted institutional configuration. The implications for public policy are clear: only an integrated reform simultaneously affecting the three levels of the system (political, social, economic) can break this inhibitory equilibrium and unleash Gabon's entrepreneurial potential.

4.3. Discussion of Results and Policy Recommendations

4.3.1. Discussion of Results and Validation of Hypotheses

Beyond the Rentier State: Micro-Social Mechanisms of Internalization. Our results corroborate and significantly enrich rentier state theory (Mahdavy, 1970; Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Yates, 1996). While this literature primarily established a macroeconomic link between oil rents and weak entrepreneurial development, our research details the micro-social mechanisms of internalization. Gray's (2018) work on "pipeline politics" finds robust empirical validation here, but we go beyond the political observation to reveal how this configuration became embedded in the collective *habitus*. The significant negative causal correlation ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.001$) between periods of high oil revenues and references to private initiative in official discourse demonstrates not just a statistical correlation, but a process of social engineering where rent abundance progressively reshaped legitimate aspirations. This internalization explains a phenomenon that purely econometric analyses of rent struggle to grasp: the persistence of entrepreneurial inhibition even during periods of declining oil revenues. Our analysis shows that it is not only present rent that matters, but the system of beliefs and expectations it has generated over several generations. This aligns with and extends North's (1990) work on the persistence of informal institutions, showing how they can be actively produced and reproduced by specific state policies.

The Complementarity and Integration of Institutional Approaches. Our research validates neo-institutionalist approaches (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012) on the importance of institutions, but demonstrates that their explanatory power is maximized when formal and informal institutions are rigorously articulated. Previous studies on Gabon (World Bank, *Doing Business* reports) correctly identified the failures of formal institutions but could not explain why partial reforms of these institutions did not produce the expected effects. Our results reveal that these failures are explained by the systemic interaction between failing formal institutions and powerful informal ones. For example, the financing constraint (formal failure) is exacerbated by family solidarity obligations (informal constraint), which drain available resources. This articulation explains why microcredit programs have had limited impact in Gabon: they treat the symptom (lack of capital) without addressing the systemic causes (redistributive pressures that prevent accumulation). This finding aligns with the work of Helmke and Levitsky (2004) on interactions between formal and informal institutions, but provides precise quantitative measurements of these interactions.

Definitive Refutation of Culturalist Explanations by Diaspora Evidence. Our study provides the most comprehensive empirical refutation to date of culturalist explanations for entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon. While some earlier work (Pourtier, 1999) evoked a "cultural aversion to risk," our results, particularly those concerning the diaspora, quasi-experimentally demonstrate that Gabonese exhibit entrepreneurial dynamism comparable to other populations when they operate in different institutional environments. The striking contrast between the performance indicators of local entrepreneurs (22% 5-year survival) and those of the diaspora (68%) constitutes quasi-experimental evidence that goes beyond usual international comparisons. Statistical matching controls for individual characteristics (age, education, sector), thus isolating the effect of the institutional environment. This difference cannot be attributed to intrinsic characteristics of individuals, but to the specific characteristics of the Gabonese environment. Our mediation analysis reveals that the "diaspora" effect on performance is entirely mediated by three institutional variables: (1) access to credit ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), (2) reduction in redistributive pressures ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), and (3) perception of a fair environment ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$). These results establish a clear causal chain that reinforces the methodological critiques of Appiah (1992) and Chabal (2009) against cultural essentialism, while providing solid empirical data previously lacking in the debate.

Segmented Entrepreneurship in Rentier Economies: From «Refuge Sectors» to Locked Oligopolies. Our sectoral mapping and analysis of lock-in mechanisms make a significant contribution to the theory of segmented entrepreneurship in rentier economies. While existing literature (Mkandawire, 2015; Sindzingre, 2017) identified the segmentation between formal and informal sectors, our research reveals an equally decisive intra-formal segmentation. The three-segment typology we identify – locked, intermediate, refuge – corresponds to a hierarchy of access to economic opportunities structured by political capital rather than entrepreneurial skills. This segmentation explains why entrepreneurship promotion policies that do not distinguish between sectors fail: encouraging business creation in retail trade (refuge segment) cannot lead to economic diversification, as this sector is structurally incapable of generating significant added value. Our analysis aligns with and extends the work on the politicized business

bourgeoisie (Médard, 1991; van de Walle, 2001) by showing how this bourgeoisie does not just benefit from the rent, but actively organizes exclusion to protect its privileges. The analysis of politico-economic networks reveals that the locked sectors (construction, finance) were at the heart of the historical political compromises of the post-independence period, where access to economic resources was traded for political allegiance.

Systematic Validation of Research Hypotheses. **Hypothesis 1: Clientelistic Relationship to the Rentier State – Validated and Enriched.** Data on sectoral concentration and public procurement fully validate this hypothesis. The analysis of the top 100 public contracts (2022-2023) reveals that 85% were awarded to politically connected firms. Network analysis shows a causal correlation between centrality in the politico-economic network and contract awards ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.001$). Our research goes beyond simple validation to measure the scale and mechanisms of this lock-in. Concentration in strategic sectors (construction, finance, agro-industry) is 4 to 5 times lower than in comparable economies, while perceived barriers are 3 times higher. More significantly, we show how this clientelism became internalized in individual aspirations: the "civil servant parent" variable multiplies the probability of preferring public employment by 3.2 ($p < 0.01$), indicating intergenerational transmission of the *étatist*. **Hypothesis 2: Constraining Informal Institutions – Validated and Nuanced.** The study confirms the importance of informal institutions, with 72% of entrepreneurs considering family obligations a major barrier. Regression analysis shows that a one-standard-deviation increase in redistributive pressures leads to a 23% reduction ($p < 0.001$) in productive investments. Unlike Geschiere's (1997) work, which emphasized symbolic representations ("witchcraft of wealth"), our results show that the main obstacle is material and quantifiable. Redistributive pressure absorbs on average 30% of business cash flow, drastically limiting their investment capacity. We also reveal the solidarity paradox: the same networks that provide startup capital (62% of cases) later become sources of pressure limiting expansion (78% of cases after 3 years). **Hypothesis 3: Oligopolistic Economic Structure – Validated and Contextualized Historically.** The mapping of politico-economic networks and sectoral analysis validate this hypothesis. The most locked sectors show extremely low concentration (2-5%) but maximal perceived barriers (7.2-8.7/10). The major contribution is demonstrating that this structure is not merely the result of market dynamics, but of a precise historical legacy. The most locked sectors (construction, finance) were at the heart of the political compromises of the post-independence period, where access to economic resources was traded for political allegiance. This historical dimension explains the resilience of this structure despite changes in political leadership.

Theoretical and Methodological Contribution : **(a) A Truly Systemic Approach: Beyond Disciplinary Silos:** While most previous studies on entrepreneurship in Gabon adopted either macro-economic approaches or micro-localized analyses, our research proposes a truly systemic approach. It shows how the three levels of analysis (historical, informal institutional, structural economic) articulate and mutually reinforce each other to create a stable but inhibitory institutional equilibrium. This approach explains why partial interventions fail: they target an isolated link in the system without affecting the systemic logic that reconstitutes the constraints. For example, simplifying administrative procedures (formal level) is not enough if entrepreneurs

remain excluded from profitable sectors (structural level) and subject to redistributive pressures limiting accumulation (informal level). **(b) Measuring Institutional Lock-in: Original Quantitative Indicators:** A major methodological contribution is the development of quantitative indicators of institutional lock-in. The correlation coefficient of -0.92 between sectoral concentration and perceived barriers constitutes an original measure of economic closure. Similarly, the economic dualism index (6.5:1) offers a tool for international comparison and temporal monitoring of reform policies. These indicators allow for the quantification of what was often described qualitatively, providing a stronger basis for the design and evaluation of public policies. They also represent a tool for comparative research on African rentier economies. **(c) Qualitative-Quantitative Articulation: The Fruitfulness of an Integrated Methodology.** Our research demonstrates the fruitfulness of a methodology that deeply articulates qualitative and quantitative analysis. Statistical data (sectoral concentration, business survival rates) take on their full meaning when illuminated by life stories and ethnographic observation. Conversely, qualitative trends (importance of networks, family pressure) gain robustness when validated by quantitative measures. This articulation is particularly evident in the diaspora analysis, where the controlled statistical comparison (matching) is enriched by in-depth interviews revealing the subjective mechanisms through which entrepreneurs perceive and navigate the institutional differences between France and Gabon.

In sum, this discussion reveals that entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon constitutes neither a historical accident nor the simple sum of isolated constraints, but the coherent and persistent product of a historically constituted socio-economic system. The three hypotheses are not only validated, but their systemic interconnection is demonstrated, constituting the main contribution of this research. The integrated causal model we propose (Figure 1) represents an innovative analytical framework for understanding entrepreneurship in African rentier economies. It shows how these economies can be trapped in a stable but suboptimal institutional equilibrium, where individual actors behave rationally given the systemic constraints, but where these individual rational actions collectively perpetuate the inhibitory system. This understanding has crucial implications for development policies: it suggests that only systemic and coordinated reforms simultaneously affecting the three levels of the system (political, social, economic) can break this equilibrium and unleash entrepreneurial potential. Partial reforms, however necessary, risk being absorbed and neutralized by the resilience of the system as a whole.

4.3.2. Policy Recommendations for Gabon

Empirical results demonstrate that entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon stems from a triply locked system – historical, social, and economic – whose components are self-reinforcing. Therefore, any credible reform must act in an integrated manner on these three levels. The following recommendations are designed to be concrete, progressive, and adapted to the realities of Gabon's political economy, identifying realistic levers for action to transform systemic constraints into opportunities.

To Dismantle the Rentier Mentality and Reform the Civil Service, a pragmatic and incentive-based approach is necessary. We recommend the creation of an Entrepreneurial Conversion

Program (ECP), offering voluntary civil servants a departure package (bonus, training, support) to start a business, coupled with a freeze on non-essential public hiring. This measure, presented as professional mobility, circumvents union resistance while reducing pressure on the state budget. Simultaneously, a reform of the education system aimed at integrating entrepreneurial culture from secondary school and publicly valorizing entrepreneurial career paths is crucial to reshaping the aspirations of younger generations.

To Transform Constraining Solidarities into Development Levers, it is necessary to institutionalize these obligations rather than ignore them. The creation of regional Entrepreneurial Solidarity Funds (ESF) would allow entrepreneurs to channel a portion of their income towards structuring community investments (schools, health centers), in exchange for tax advantages and priority access to local markets. This redirects redistributive pressure towards productive collective projects. Similarly, developing hybrid "family-business" financial products (project savings accounts, simplified shares) and instituting Entrepreneurial Reflection Circles facilitated by mediators, allows for formalizing and easing tensions between family obligations and business imperatives.

Opening Strategic Sectors and Breaking Up Oligopolies requires mechanisms of transparency and binding quotas. The establishment of Economic Diversity Quotas (EDQ), reserving 30% of the annual value of public contracts for SMEs independent of dominant political networks, must be coupled with a Digital Public Procurement Platform (DPPP) ensuring full traceability. To experiment with new governance models, the creation of sector-specific Special Economic Zones (SEZ) (agro-industry, innovative construction) endowed with independent regulatory authorities would allow for circumventing systemic blockages in confined spaces before potential scaling-up.

The role of international actors (IMF, World Bank, CEMAC) must be fundamentally reoriented from macroeconomic conditionality towards targeted institutional support. We propose negotiating "Institutional Contracts" linking fund disbursements to specific reforms (such as the effective implementation of the DPPP), measured by outcome indicators and independent evaluators. The creation of a Trust Fund for Entrepreneurial Diversification, managed by a mixed board (government, private sector, civil society), and an International Observatory of Economic Governance in partnership with CEMAC, would allow for credibly financing and monitoring structural reforms, using financial dependency as a lever to anchor lasting change. The implementation of this roadmap must be sequential and subject to strict accountability. An initial phase (2 years) of preparation and experimentation (ECP pilot, 2 SEZs, DPPP deployment) must precede a consolidation phase (2 years) and then an institutionalization phase. Monitoring must rely on a public dashboard of key indicators, participatory citizen audits conducted by trained "entrepreneur-auditors," and randomized impact evaluations to continuously adjust policies. The ultimate goal is to progressively transform the inhibitory institutional equilibrium into a virtuous cycle where economic success is measured by innovation and the creation of shared value, paving the way for a post-rentier, diversified, and inclusive Gabonese economy.

5. Conclusion

The fundamental objective of this research was to decipher the deep-rooted drivers of entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon, a striking paradox for a resource-endowed country characterized by weak endogenous economic vitality. By transcending compartmentalized approaches and reductive explanations, the study aimed to understand how Gabon's unique socio-historical trajectories have structured an institutional environment and a collective habitus that durably hinder the emergence of a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit. To achieve this objective, we mobilized an innovative systemic and idiosyncratic methodology, articulating long-term historical analysis, in-depth ethnographic fieldwork (85 interviews, 150 hours of observation), and rigorous quantitative validation (statistical analyses, correlations, reliability tests). This integrated approach, based on systematic methodological triangulation, allowed us to build a fine-grained and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, considering Gabon as a singular system whose internal logic needed to be elucidated in its entirety.

The empirical results fully validate the central hypothesis of an inhibition produced by a triple historical and institutional configuration. Firstly, the legacy of "pipeline politics" institutionalized a clientelistic relationship with a rent-distributing state, making civil service the privileged path for social advancement (63% of graduates). Secondly, the persistence of constraining informal institutions, notably obligations of extended family solidarity, operates as a material and symbolic brake on capital accumulation, affecting 72% of entrepreneurs. Thirdly, a locked, oligopolistic economic structure reserves access to strategic sectors for a connected elite, confining the majority of entrepreneurs to overcrowded "refuge sectors." Causal analysis revealed how these three levels interact in positive feedback loops that maintain the system in a stable but inhibitory equilibrium. The quasi-experimental evidence provided by the controlled comparison with the Gabonese diaspora definitively invalidated culturalist explanations. Gabonese entrepreneurs in France show significantly superior performance (a 5-year survival rate of 68% compared to 22% locally), demonstrating that entrepreneurial potential exists but is stifled in situ by the specific characteristics of the national institutional environment.

In light of these findings, the policy implications are clear and imperative. Only a systemic and coordinated reform, acting simultaneously on the historical, social, and economic lock-ins, can break the inhibitory equilibrium. We recommend a set of concrete and sequenced measures: an Entrepreneurial Conversion Program to defuse the rentier mentality, the creation of Entrepreneurial Solidarity Funds to transform family obligations into development levers, and the establishment of Economic Diversity Quotas coupled with a transparent public procurement platform to open strategic sectors. The role of international actors must be reoriented towards targeted institutional support, via "Institutional Contracts" and an International Observatory of Economic Governance. Nevertheless, this research presents several limitations that open avenues for future studies. The difficulty in accessing certain sensitive archives and data on the most opaque politico-economic networks may have limited the complete mapping of lock-in mechanisms. Although the sample was geographically diversified, a larger quantitative survey of rural entrepreneurs would allow for a better grasp of regional specificities. Finally, a systematic comparative analysis with other rentier economies in CEMAC (Congo, Equatorial Guinea)

would be valuable to distinguish what pertains to Gabonese singularity from what characterizes regional oil economies.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the development literature by proposing and empirically validating the concept of "entrepreneurship control" as an integrative framework for analyzing how specific historical, social, and economic configurations interact to regulate private initiative. It demonstrates that entrepreneurial inhibition in Gabon is neither an accident nor a cultural trait, but the coherent product of a historically constituted and self-reproducing socio-economic system. Transforming this institutional equilibrium, while complex, is not only necessary for economic diversification but also possible through courageous, intelligently sequenced reforms firmly anchored in transparent and accountable governance.

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