Policing welfare: Punitive adversarialism in public assistance. By Spencer Headworth. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. 272 pp. $32.50 paperback

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President Reagan notably fought to reform the welfare system and to curb the abuse of government programs. He "famously argued that he wanted his agents of oversight and investigation to be as relentless and unsparing as 'junkyard dogs' in the effort to identify and eradicate wasteful or ill-advised expenditures" (p. 27). While much is known about welfare reform in the late-20th century, until now, scholarship has not focused on how these "junkyard dogs," (i.e., fraud workers) investigate and adjudicate welfare fraud in the United States. Spencer Headworth's *Policing Welfare* offers the much-needed, first study of fraud enforcement.

Based on a case study of five state-level welfare fraud units, Headworth looks at how bureaucrats enforce the eligibility of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). More specifically, Headworth conducts 42 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fraud workers across five states—which he anonymizes as "Eastcoast," "Midatlantic," "Northeast," "Southeast," and "Southwest." His focus on fraud workers, while likely limited by some degree of social desirability bias, offers a unique purview into the various ways that these actors make sense of their occupations. Headworth leverages his rich data to make two central claims. First, he argues that fraud control units manage welfare legally and bureaucratically. In doing so, he shows how these units engage in punitive adversarialism—that is "the institutionalization of surveillance, investigation, formal charging processes, and punishments within bureaucratic structure" (p. 3). Second, he shows how welfare enforcement carries adverse consequences for the poor. While *Policing Welfare* delivers on both claims, the text's specific focus on the enforcement-side of welfare allows Headworth to more convincingly make his first claim.

Chapter 2, the first substantive chapter, begins with a brief overview of fraud control. Headworth shows how federal policies of the 1970s–1990s, like the Food Stamp Act of 1985 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act or 1996 (PRWORA), created state-level welfare fraud units and mandated protectionary standards against abuse. The federal government, while maintaining oversight, essentially tasked states with welfare enforcement. Despite federal mandates, Headworth uncovers a lack of uniformity across the states' fraud units. Factors like size, salience of welfare fraud, and political climate shape how different enforcement practices exist across the five states. Chapter 3, then, offers more insight into how workers and fraud control units enforce welfare eligibility. By revealing how fraud workers identify cases, determine charges, investigate facts, and even present evidence in hearings, Headworth establishes the different ways that fraud units surveil, police, and penalize welfare recipients. As such, it becomes clear that punitive adversarialism appears within the welfare system.

Chapter 4 reveals how fraud workers and police work together. For one, policies, like State Law Enforcement Bureau (SLEB) agreements, have formally cemented partnerships between welfare and law enforcement agencies. Headworth, also, finds that interpersonal ties also facilitate this type of collaboration. Nonetheless, he argues that interagency collaborations blur the line between social provision and social control. Consequentially, Headworth finds that interagency partnerships extend the reach of policing into new realms, and this "produces new and expanded legal risks and injurious legal outcomes for poor people" (p. 99).

Chapter 5 looks at how fraud investigators make sense of welfare enforcement and who they are as workers. Headworth reveals that fraud workers justify their work via three occupational frames—catching cheats, resource preservation, and disinterested enforcement. Interestingly, Headworth

suggests that these frames shape occupational identities. Headworth finds that fraud workers' occupational identities fall somewhere between social worker and police officer. However, most fraud workers classify themselves more closely to police officers, which speaks volumes to how workers place themselves and their work within the legal realm.

Chapters 4 and 5, ultimately, show that welfare fraud units should be understood as part of the larger apparatus of policing. Chapter 6, on the other hand, looks at how fraud workers demonstrate their effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy to get funding and resources.

Headworth, throughout the text, alludes to the consequences of welfare enforcement. In Chapters 7 and 8, he more explicitly identifies how and who punitive adversarialism punishes. Chapter 7 focuses on how fraud workers explain rule-breaking among their clients. Though they do not explicitly evoke race, many draw on stereotypical themes of (un)deservingness when discussing welfare frauds. Chapter 8 continues this thread by discussing how fraud workers view violators as greedy and opportunistic. This outlook, Headworth argues, informs how workers see punishment as the solution to fraud. Headworth considers how welfare sanctions perpetuate inequality through a disproportionate impact on the poor, mothers, and those living in economically disadvantaged communities. Finally, Headworth concludes with a brief discussion of policy changes that may reduce fraud and the consequences of punitive adversarialism.

Policing Welfare's richness comes, in large part, from Headworth's access to different fraud workers, but his case study methodology and analysis is not without a few gaps. First, without offering any justification, I found the anonymization of the states limiting. Often, I found myself wanting more context on the fraud unit—like racial diversity, geographic makeup, income—to consider how these factors may shape fraud control practices. Second, I was curious why no states were included from the Midwest or Pacific Northwest. Third, I found it difficult, at times, to make sense of interstate variation in welfare enforcement throughout the book. The chapters of *Policing Welfare* could greatly benefit from a more in-depth discussion of how practices and punitive attitudes vary across the case study states. In doing so, it would become clearer how structural, political, and cultural factors are associated with fraud control.

Nonetheless, Headworth brilliantly accomplishes the two goals he sets out at the outset. He offers a persuasive argument that will long shape how we think about the relationship between social services and social control. As such, *Policing Welfare* markedly contributes to the literatures in law and society and punishment and social control.