

**Vincent Dubois**  
***Surveillance and Sanctions over Recipients***  
***A Coercive Turn in Social Welfare***  
[*Contrôler les assistés. Genèses et usages d'un mot d'ordre*  
Paris, éditions Raisons d'agir, 2021, 448 p.]

**Outline**

Among numerous innovations and changes, welfare reform in western countries has recently revitalized welfare surveillance, defined here as the institutional arrangements and practices aimed at checking that recipients comply with the rules of welfare benefits. Why did this revival of control occur? How has welfare fraud been constructed and promoted as a public problem? How has a bureaucratic routine been raised to the status of a political and policy issue? How is control organized and implemented? What are its impacts on the lives of the recipients? By addressing these questions, this book provides an original contribution to the analysis of the new balance between politics, economics and morals that define the contemporary social state. It shows how legal regulation, financial constraints, surveillance technologies and direct interactions between bureaucrats and clients intertwine in the new government of the underprivileged.

This book is based on more than 20 years of empirical research on the French case, set in an international perspective. Several excellent books address the question of welfare surveillance and punishment in the US case. But they either do not focus on this issue and address it only as a subtopic (Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, 2009; Soss, Fording & Schram, *Disciplining the Poor*, 2011), or they focus more on the experience of recipients than on policies (Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor*, 2001; Gustafson, *Cheating welfare*, 2011). This book is therefore the only one to analyze in depth the forces behind this coercive turn, from the highest levels of government to the daily practices of inspectors, the only other work going in this direction being Headworth's *Policing welfare* (2021), again on the US case.

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