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## Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in American States

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**Abstract:** Growing rates of income inequality fuel concerns about our political system's ability to equally represent citizens who hold vastly different resources. Recent research at the federal level finds reason for concern: greater responsiveness to the preferences of the wealthy than the poor. But, these works do less to illuminate the process by which this differential responsiveness occurs. Here, we examine the role of political parties in this process—asking whether they serve their vital role as linkage institutions or serve to incubate political inequalities. Using the comparative leverage of the U.S. states, we test two party-specific pathways for representation of the poor. We find evidence to support the first, which expects socio-demographic characteristics and class-based political dynamics to affect the degree to which Democratic parties align their preferences with those of the rich versus poor. Yet, we find no evidence to support the second pathway in which the Republican parties would pursue an issue-based strategy of responsiveness by appealing to the poor on social issues and the rich on economic issues.

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