

Abstract

This thesis analyses the perception of equality in the United States in the context of today's high economic inequality. The main characteristic feature of this perception is the emphasis on the equality of opportunity. According to this ideal, America is the land of equal opportunity to achieve success, which depends on hard work and talent, not on family wealth. This concept is often considered as the opposite of the so-called equality of outcomes, which demands more even distribution of wealth, and which is usually perceived as foreign to American values. However, the large economic inequality, which is even much higher in America than in other advanced countries, has provably negative impacts on the general possibility of fair equal opportunity. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to verify the assumption that in the context of today's high and rising economic inequality, these negative impacts on the real state of equal opportunity must also find expression in the actual American perception of equality. Based on the analysis of an extensive set of public opinion surveys, it concludes that a certain change in the perception takes place. The emphasis on the equality of opportunity is still crucial, but the findings of the thesis do not support the notion that larger equality of outcomes is absolutely foreign and unwanted in America. It argues that the current economic inequality in the United States, where even large income disparities are perceived as fair, is in the eyes of a majority of Americans beyond this level of legitimacy. It is now becoming more evident that equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes are not in opposition to each other, but are interconnected.