



October 9, 2017

Dear Chief Justice John Roberts:

I write today on behalf of the American Sociological Association, the nation's largest scholarly professional association of sociologists, to respond to a comment you made during oral arguments on Tuesday, October 3rd in the case of Gill v. Whitford. You said: "It may be simply my educational background, but I can only describe it [social science data] as sociological gobbledygook."

We were pleased to learn that Justices Kagan and Sotomayor subsequently expressed concern about your statement and spoke to the value of social science measures. In this letter, we provide additional context for understanding the empirical nature of social scientific data and the ways it has served the national interests.

In an era when facts are often dismissed as "fake news," we are particularly concerned about a person of your stature suggesting to the public that scientific measurement is not valid or reliable and that expertise should not be trusted. What you call "gobbledygook" is rigorous and empirical. The following are just a few examples of the contributions of sociological research to American society that our members offered in response to your comment:

- Clear evidence that separate is not equal
- Early algorithms for detecting credit card fraud
- Mapped connections between racism and physiologic stress response
- Network analysis to identify and thwart terror structures and capture terrorists
- Pay grades and reward systems that improve retention among enlisted soldiers
- Modern public opinion polling
- Evidence of gender discrimination in the workplace
- Understanding of the family factors that impact outcomes for children
- Guidance for police in defusing high-risk encounters
- Strategies for combatting the public health challenge of drug abuse

We are certain that the social scientists and legal scholars at your alma mater would be disappointed to learn that you attributed your lack of understanding of social science to your Harvard education. Should you be interested in enhancing your education in this area, we would be glad to put together a group of nationally and internationally renowned sociologists to meet with you and your staff. Given the important ways in which sociological data can and have informed thoughtful decision-making from the bench, such time would be well spent. Please contact our Executive Director, Nancy Kidd, at [nkidd@asanet.org](mailto:nkidd@asanet.org) if you would like us to arrange such a meeting. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Ph.D.  
President, American Sociological Association