Case for deliberative polls

It is now time to place informed public opinion at the forefront of our democratic culture. It is an open secret that much of the political dialogue in Nepal takes place behind closed doors. The people of this nation have the right to participate in the formulation of its policies. This is particularly critical in today’s federal nation where people that their voices matter in shaping reform. It is now time to let the informed public be heard.

The concept

Deliberative Polling is an innovative method that seeks to better inform and engage citizens to make educated choices. First, a baseline poll on pertinent issues is conducted with a larger representative sample group. Next, resource materials designed by Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University in 1988, Deliberative Polling is a public poll mechanism to establish a culture of open dialogue among diverse communities. Following this, a working group has been assigned to draft the constitutional amendment—reflecting the recommendations on constitutional amendments have been submitted via a deliberative council. Similarly, there was a 35 percent increase in public opinion about continuing humanitarian aid to North Korea; but following a deliberative poll, public opinion in favour of unification increased by 25 percent. Successfully conducted are two national polls on constitutional amendment in Mongolia.

Contentious issues

Even in extreme circumstances, while debating sensitive issues across deep cultural divides, people have suggested that only 43 percent of the population thought that unification would be beneficial for South Korea. These polls are an expeditious approach to fast track the constitutional transition. The end product was a difficult political compromise. Failure to resolve these issues will jeopardise Nepal’s aspirations to successfully transition from a post-conflict state to a prosperous federal nation.

The process

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