

Support for nuke-free Japan rises to 47% after voter discussions

August 22, 2012

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Popular support for a nuclear-free Japan by 2030 has increased sharply to nearly 50 percent, according to a new polling method that gauges public opinion after selected voters have had a chance to discuss the issue among themselves.

The system, called deliberative polling, combines conventional public opinion polls with discussion meetings. It allows for people to change their opinions as they become more informed about a particular issue, and thus is thought to more accurately reflect public sentiment.

The polling method is being used by the government as a tool to help it draw up a future energy policy in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster last year.

The ratio of respondents who supported scrapping all nuclear power generation by 2030 increased, said the committee that conducted the survey. The results were released Aug. 22.

On each of the three options on the ratio of atomic energy to generate electricity in Japan in 2030, respondents had to choose their level of support.

The options are: "zero percent," "15 percent" and "20-25 percent."

Those who support the zero percent option increased from 32.6 percent to 46.7 percent as a result of discussion meetings and becoming better informed on the issue. The rise was apparently due to the number of people who put faith in assurances of a safer existence.

Those who supported the 15-percent ratio decreased from 16.8 percent to 15.4 percent. Those who backed the ratio of 20-25 percent were unchanged at 13 percent.

The sharp increase in the ratio of supporters for the zero percent option will likely exert considerable influence in the government's final decision.

Of the 50 nuclear reactors in Japan, only two are currently operating. The government's decision to reactivate the two reactors at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture has triggered massive demonstrations in Tokyo.

The committee that carried out the poll is headed by Yasunori Sone, a professor of political science at Keio University. In July, his team conducted a telephone survey of 6,849 eligible voters across the country. Of them, 285, who expressed interest in attending discussion meetings in Tokyo, were able to do so on Aug. 4 and 5.

In the survey, respondents were offered a maximum score of 10 in expressing their support for each of the three options. For example, strong opposition scored zero, while 10 denoted strong support.

It asked the question three times to gauge how people's awareness changed as a result of discussion meetings.

The second survey was carried out in the form of a questionnaire immediately before the respondents attended a discussion meeting on Aug. 4. The third survey was carried out Aug. 5 immediately after the respondents attended the discussion meeting, using the same questionnaire.

If a respondent chose 6 or a higher figure for one or more of the three options, the option that garnered the highest score was regarded as reflecting the individual's support.

Those who supported the zero percent option came to 32.6 percent in the first survey. However, the figure increased to 41.1 percent in the second survey, and then 46.7 percent in the third survey.

The zero percent option drew an average score of 6.92 from respondents in the first survey. The figure was almost unchanged at 6.9 in the second survey, but rose to 7.31 in the third survey.

Respondents were also asked about their priorities in selecting energy sources. Again, they were given a maximum score of 10.

Assurances of safety resulted in an average 8.88 score in the first survey. But it rose to 9.27 in the third survey, the highest among all the options.

Another option, "stable supply of energy," increased from 7.66 to 8.05 while "prevention of global warming" decreased from 7.10 to 6.80. When asked about "costs," the figure rose from 6.13 to 6.18.

Sone, reflecting on the strong support for the zero percent option, said, "I think that (even after discussion meetings,) many respondents were not thoroughly convinced about the safety of nuclear power plants."

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