

(English translation)

What did the deliberative poll reveal on Energy and Environmental Options?

by Yasunori Sone

In early August, the unfamiliar term "deliberative poll" could be seen gracing the front pages of newspapers everywhere. It is only natural that one wonder, then, what it means to say that the results of this poll would be integral in determining Japan's dependency on nuclear-generated electricity in the year 2030.¹

It could simply be said that a deliberative poll is a poll to which an element of deliberation has been added. In order to better understand what a deliberative poll is, however, it is necessary to examine in what way those two components have been combined, and how this results in something more than just a common public opinion poll.

Affecting the policy-making process for the first time ever.

A unique characteristic of this *Deliberative Poll on Energy and Environmental Options* was the fact that it was decided that its results would officially be used by the Japanese government. Until now, deliberative polls have been held in 18 countries around the world some 70 times in total (including those dealing with the same topic held multiple times in different cities), but this marked the first time in history that a nation's central government would officially apply the results of a poll that it sponsored to its policy-making process.

In Japan, deliberative polls have been held five times in the past, making this the sixth. I was personally involved in each of those four previous polls and one was supported by my junior colleague of our center, with recent examples dealing with the designing of long-term planning for the city of Fujisawa in Kanagawa Prefecture (held in January and August of 2010 in collaboration with the Fujisawa City Planning and Policy Division), and another which addressed the pension system (held in May of 2011 in collaboration with the Asahi Shimbun Company). None of these five deliberative polls, however, drew the attention of the

¹ Details on the Deliberative Poll on Energy and Environmental Options, together with further information such as data and reports can be found at the web site below.

<http://www.kokumingiron.jp/dp> http://keiodp.sfc.keio.ac.jp/?page_id=243

media or the public to the extent that the sixth did.

As illustrated in Figure 1, a deliberative poll comprises two broad sections. The first of these is the poll itself, which differs in no way from common public opinion polls conducted by the mass media. The point of difference, then, is the subsequent inviting of those who responded to the poll to take part in a one-night two-day deliberative forum (though some follow one-day or two-night three-day formats). The amount of participation has been found to vary depending on factors such as the time of year, theme, and duration of the forum.

In our case, the first public poll (conducted via telephone) was completed by late July, and participants for the deliberative forum were then recruited. Those who agreed to attend were sent a 47-page briefing document prior to the forum and asked to familiarize themselves with the topics that would be discussed.

The two-day deliberative forum was held on August 4th and 5th. When participants arrived at the venue on the afternoon of the 4th, they were first asked to answer a questionnaire (referred to as T2). The same questionnaire was again administered at the end of the event on the afternoon of the 5th (referred to as T3). These two questionnaires, together with the initial telephone poll (referred to as T1), present three points in time at which data was recorded. This enabled us to observe any changes in the data that took place over the entire course of the deliberative poll.

As for deliberations, small group discussions and a plenary session (each 90 minutes in length) were scheduled for both days. The theme of the first day was *Criteria for Judging Energy and the Environment*, while the second day dealt with the topic of *Energy and Environmental Option Scenarios for 2030*.

Once the pre-forum questionnaires T2 were finished, the participants split up into groups of roughly 15 individuals and deliberation began immediately. This is a significant point of difference from explanatory briefings held by the government. Briefing documents prepared by the government often come to serve a "guiding" role. These small group discussions, however, were facilitated by moderators trained to intervene as little as possible. In the final 15 minutes of the discussion, each moderator summed up the questions that his or her group

would ask at that day's plenary session. Here, the uniqueness of the deliberative poll lies in the fact that there is no consensus making, voting, or collective summarizing of the group's discussion. Whatever consensus emerged would be expressed at the end through the final, confidential questionnaires.

At the plenary session, the questions of each group were posed to a panel of four specialists in each day. The panelists were given two minutes to respond, and were not permitted to debate answers amongst themselves. All of the panelists were leading individuals in their respective fields, selected only after careful consideration was given to their areas of expertise and their professional positions. To take an easy example, should there be a total of 20 small discussion groups, then a total of 20 questions would be asked at the plenary session.

The deliberative forum was held at Keio University's Mita campus, but this information was not revealed until just prior to the event. The reason for this being that if even only a portion of the demonstrations held every weekend were to organize and intrude, the goal of conducting composed deliberation in a quiet atmosphere would be lost. As the person responsible for the event, I took the greatest care in ensuring that it did not become a shouting match or angry feud like so many government-held hearings.

Behind the scenes—fighting against budget and time constraints.

Though the above was our general outline, the real problem proved to lie in preparation. At the center of any deliberative poll lies a solid core of logistics and know-how. I had read books and articles, watched videos, and observed deliberative polls held overseas from behind the scenes. All of this made me think that I understood those central logistics and know-how. But actually holding a national deliberative poll in Japan on such a contentious topic, I found that watching and doing are two *very* different things.

The present deliberative poll traces its roots back to early June of this year when bureaucrats from the National Policy Unit (NPU) approached me expressing their desire to study such polls. Last year, too, I gave a deliberative poll presentation to the NPU regarding the pension system. Unfortunately, the bureaucrats I had dealt with previously had been replaced, and so I was left no recourse but to begin the education process anew. The near complete lack of budget provided by the Cabinet Office, however, caused me to doubt this approach would prove effective in fostering deliberation on a national scale.

In mid-June, just as I was about to depart for the annual World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) conference in Hong Kong, I was again contacted by the NPU inquiring as to the possibility of conducting a deliberative poll. Though the schedule was tight through early August, I told them that it could be done if a random digital dialing (RDD) method was used. This is the process by which a poll is carried out by a computer dialing numbers at random. Previous deliberative polls in Japan had been sent via post to 3,000 individuals, so there was no empirical data on collection or participation rates, and it would also be necessary to gather more detailed information on their results. But it was not an impossible endeavor.

Luckily, while at the WAPOR conference in Hong Kong, I had the good fortune to attend the meeting as a member of the Stanford University Deliberative Polling group's sessions. There I was able to consult with the very experienced Professor James Fishkin. After describing the situation I faced in back in Japan, he was both enthusiastic and encouraging. "A poll in Lazio, Italy was put together in four weeks. It can be done with RDD. I'll teach you everything you need to know. Do it, and spare no effort!"

I am sometimes asked why I took such a risk, or whether I encountered any resistance by conducting the poll with government funds rather than a research grant. Once we decided to undertake this endeavor, it was our policy to take full responsibility and see it through to the end. No matter where the money came from, what needed to be done was the same, and so the origin of our funding in no way affected the content of our poll. Even so, it is not possible for the government to simply designate the Center for Deliberative Poll at Keio University as the recipient of a no-bid contract. We formed a consortium with entities such as Hakuodo, Inc. and took part in general competitive bidding. The winning bidder was to be decided on July 3rd, from which point there would be only one month before the opening day of the deliberative forum. We resolved these scheduling woes by using RDD and leaving the practical affairs of the logistics to Hakuodo.

When organizing a deliberative poll, both the selection of panelists and the preparing of briefing document and questionnaires are extremely important. The largest problem, however, was securing participants for the one-night two-day deliberative forum.

From past experience, we had thought it possible to secure 200 of the 3,000 people who had

responded to past polls in Japan. However, we found ourselves faced with quite an imposing enemy in the form of summer vacation. We received many rejections citing reasons such as previously made plans, undecided plans, or simply being unable to leave the house unattended. The sensitive theme of the forum itself may also have played a role in driving some individuals away.

Another factor is that this was a government poll being conducted by Keio University. The RDD process requests information on family composition, which alone is enough to arouse suspicion in some individuals. Explaining that travel and lodging expenses would be covered and that additional honorarium would also be provided only caused some people to become even more suspicious and mistakenly assume the poll to be some sort of fraud aimed at taking their money. This resulted in us having to handle various complaints, as well.

In the end, just over 300 of the 6,849 people who responded to the poll planned to take part in the forum (the actual attendance ended up being 285). The reason we so strongly sought 300 participants (or at the very least, more than 200) is because statistical significance would vary with the sample size and we wanted to be highly confident of getting significant results.

Dispelling doubts of a staged performance by trained moderators.

Nevertheless, the degree of interest expressed by the mass media was astronomical. Though they of course covered other deliberative polls with some degree of interest, the present poll saw 84 reporters representing 29 companies on the first day, and 104 reporters from 26 companies on the second. One among them remarked that the media's interest with the poll was on a par with that of the national budget screening.

Even though the embargo on all information was lifted after completion of the deliberative forum (that is, after collection of the final T3 questionnaire), one agency placed ten reporters on site to intercept 80 forum participants as they left for the purposes of conducting their own "exit poll." Coverage released the following day was extremely in-depth—certainly more so than we had anticipated.

At first, some members of the media were skeptical, suggesting that the forum was somehow staged or guided, that the common ground that would inevitably be reached had been decided beforehand, or that the whole event was designed simply to relieve mounting pressure. They changed their opinions, however, when footage of the moderator (those

charged with moving the discussions along) training session held on August 3rd—the day before the deliberation forum—was made public. Professor James Fishkin and Alice Siu of Stanford University (Director and Associate Director of that school's Center for Deliberative Democracy, respectively as well as their collaborator Professor Robert Luskin of the University of Texas, Austin) traveled to Japan and with the help of interpreters held a daylong training session for all moderators. Based on their instruction in themed simulations such as "Don't Fear Silence" and "Intervene as Little as Possible," it was easy to see the impossibility of government intervention.

The briefing documents and panelists were also publicly revealed. If any imbalances were present, they would be abundantly obvious. Despite having been so demanding for the immediate reporting of poll results, upon examining the questionnaire the media became much more sympathetic to our cause, asking instead if the analysis of such data would require a considerable amount of time.

Citizen's preparedness apparent against backdrop of growing support for Zero Nuclear.

At the end of the day, however, after the briefing documents have been read, the small discussion groups have been held, and the questions have been posed to the plenary session panel of specialists, our primary concern remains if and how the opinions and attitudes of participants have changed. The mass media perhaps thought we sought only to discover if citizens desired the country's dependence on nuclear-generated electricity in 2030 to be 0%, 15%, or between 20–25%. Our poll, however, included no such multiple-choice questions where one of three scenarios was chosen at the exclusion of the others.

Rather, our poll asked individuals to evaluate all three scenarios by assigning each a value of 0 through 10 in accordance with the strength of their support of it. Poll takers select a single number for each scenario, with 0 signifying "strongly disagree," 10 signifying "strongly agree," and 5 signifying a "middle" position between the two. As illustrated in Figure 2, this data can be summarized as 0–4 representing disagree, 5 representing middle, and 6–10 representing agree.

Looking at the shifts in the data over the course of the three polls, we see that support for the 0% scenario grew from 60% to 60.4% to 67.4%. Support for the 15% scenario dropped from 47.7% to 41.4% to 40.4%. Similarly, support for the 20–25% scenario also fell from 29.8% to

24.2% to 23.9%. It is worth noting that this indicates an overall increase in disagree from 44.6% to 49.1% to 57.2%. The coverage of some media agencies went even further, focusing attention on how individual averages score changed, as well.

Such calculation and analysis would likely be sufficient for a typical deliberative poll, but this time there was great interest, especially among the media, in which of the 0%, 15%, and 20–25% scenarios was "chosen." We therefore delved further, counting support among options to which participants assigned their most preferred score 6 and 10. People who assigned their highest score to more than one option were labeled "multi-option supporters," and those who assigned no option a value higher than 5 were labeled "non-option." The results are illustrated in Figure 3, and I daresay it is this image which many people may have seen in the coverage of our poll by the mass media.

However, we must take special care when viewing this diagram. Just as with support for political parties, an individual's support for these options is prone to oscillate. When all factors are lumped together, things may appear to be stable, but on the level of the individual there is always new support coming in from other avenues, taking the place of old support that fades. This article presents only the general outline of the poll, but I urge those interested in further details to visit our web site (see URL at beginning of article).

Still, this analysis alone is not sufficient to reveal the big picture.

What is it that we use as a criterion for judgment when selecting a type of energy in the first place? This question was put to participants, and "safety," "stable supply," "prevention of global warming," and "cost" offered as four possible suggestions. It was "safety" that proved to be overwhelmingly of the greatest concern. Over the course of the deliberative poll, support for safety grew from 89.0% to 91.6% to 92.3%. This should be interpreted to mean that after comparing several factors, participants were placing the most emphasis on safety before any of the three options was even selected.

In the past, specialists in the fields of energy and nuclear power have stressed the importance of the "best mix." Yet according to one form of portfolio theory, no matter how ideal a balance is achieved, if one of the selected options becomes contaminated, in very much the same way as was recently observed with subprime loans, should it not be done

away with and the model reconsidered? It is my belief that, at present, nuclear power has come to be seen in this light.

The question then becomes with what do we fill the gap left by nuclear power? If the answer is to be renewable energies, then we must ask if the increase in expenses associated with those energies will be accepted, as well. Many people shared a common opinion, stating that "we should shift to a lifestyle that sees the amount of energy and electricity we consume significantly reduced, even if it means things will become more inconvenient." Furthermore, the number of individuals espousing the need for a change in perception among the people was greater than the number of those laying responsibility at the door of the government.

If one statement were to be chosen to summarize the effect of this deliberative poll, it would be the following: "There is an immense gravity to the growing support for the Zero Nuclear option fostered through discussion." (Gōshi Hosono, Minister of the Environment, speaking at the 3rd Inspection Meeting)

Holding another deliberative poll with the same briefing documents, panelists, and questions would likely yield the same results, even with a different body of participants. A group dissatisfied with the conclusions reached could attempt to influence the next outcome by, say, casting doubts on validity of the poll, citing, for example, a deficiency in the statistical representation of women. But even assuming that the numbers of females were increased to account for half of the participants, we could expect that the 0% scenario would then receive even more favor, and therefore the outcome would ultimately not be affected.

Listening to other opinions and doing away with dichotomy. A new path to dialogue.

On the afternoon of August 22nd—the same day that our poll report was released to the press—the Inspection Meeting of NPU Minister Motohisa Furukawa began, hosting eight specialists on public polling. Based on the differing opinions offered at this meeting, energy and environmental councils will be held and the government will then make its policy decisions. The point to be made here is that all forms of national opinion gathering, including deliberative poll, can be used as references in the policy-making process, but they do not ultimately decide which policies are adopted.

Each form of opinion consultation has its own characteristics, as well, and the manner in which they are used is determined by the purpose for using them. From this perspective, deliberative polling resembles other typical public opinion polls, but the wealth of information and the guarantee of discussion suggests instead that it is more akin to a parliamentary body. The most significant difference between these two, however, is that members of a parliamentary body are elected, which is the very basis of their legitimacy, but deliberative polling is the embodiment of statistical representativeness itself.

When speaking of so-called citizen participation, there is both the type in which people come forth via self-selection for participation, and the type which we employed random sampling, consisting of computerized random selection. To put it briefly, inasmuch as the former opens the way for ordinary and average citizens to participate, at the same time it necessarily opens the way for those with vested interests, as well. Past conferences on the topic of nuclear energy often devolved into verbal wars waged between these "mobilized" participants. Whether such instances are perceived as staged or a healthy representation of the citizenry depends entirely upon one's perspective. The random selection method we employed, however, adopts the method of assembling ordinary and average citizens. Deliberative polls, in particular, exhibit the trend of having individuals more inclined to listen to the opinions of others. Participants answering that "Even if our opinions differ, I respect their point of view" grew in number from 67.4% to 76.8% over the course of the poll. It can certainly be said that this approach avoided the heated confrontations and shouting matches that have been known to characterize the pro- and anti- sides of the nuclear energy debate.

Through this poll, we were also able to map out various opinion gathering techniques. Our topic this time centered on the energy problems associated with nuclear dependency, but deliberative polling can also be employed in the context of a variety of policy issues. It is my honest opinion that deliberative polling should absolutely be used for any and all key policy issues worth the investment of so much time and so many resources, and on which public opinion should be heard.