

[Chosun Weekly] An exclusive interview with Professor Fishkin, an inventor of “deliberative polling”

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The heat of debates over suspending the construction of the Shin Kori nuclear power plant 5 and 6, a decision that would be a milestone in the Moon government’s anti-nuclear power policy, shows no sign of abating. The government has commissioned the Public Opinion Committee for the Shin Kori 5 and 6, which was set up in July, to come to a decision. The committee is scheduled to conduct a public opinion research on 20,000 citizens in August and select 500 out of them to form a group called the “Citizen Representatives.” The 500 representatives will answer a secondary public opinion research and stay together in a discussion camp for two consecutive nights. At the end, they are put to a third survey, and the resulting opinion will be delivered to the committee on around October 21, 2017. The committee will then convey the public opinion to the government. It takes a format of the government receiving opinions from the public to decide whether or not constructing the power plants shall be stopped, but in essence, it is most likely that the opinion collected from the representatives will determine the fate of the Shin Kori 5 and 6.

The methodology used - mainly by the committee - for this policy decision is called Deliberative Polling. This method combines a public opinion survey on scientifically-selected samples with educating the participants and holding discussions. It was first introduced by Professor James S. Fishkin of Stanford University in his book *Democracy and Deliberation* in 1991. The book was translated into Korean by Kim Won-yong, a former professor of Ewha Womans University. When asked in a phone-call interview as to why

he translated Deliberative Polling as *kongnon* (a synonym to public opinion) *chosa* (survey, research, or study) rather than more literal choices such as *sugui* (deliberation) *chosa* or *shimui* (deliberation) *chosa*, he said he had had to make the translation differentiate from *yeoron* (public opinion), and thought that *Shimui* and *sugui* sounded they were too focused on the deliberation process, so had chosen *kongnon chosa*.

A deliberative poll, a survey method that adds a deliberation process to a general public opinion survey, largely consists of four steps: step 1 is a first public opinion survey on the topic; step 2 is to select some people out of the survey participants who are representative of gender, age and regions to participate in a debate group; step 3 is to invite them under a single roof, brief them a set of balanced information, give professional lectures and have them debate over the issue. In this step, a camp for at least one night is recommended to ensure in-depth education and discussion; and in the final step, the citizen representatives are given a secondary survey, which will be the outcome of deliberation - learning and debating. The key to deliberative polling is to see how the secondary survey's results differ from the first ones.

The government explains that the reason for using the method of deliberative polling is because "under the current circumstances, this method effectively has the highest level of representation." If the government unilaterally decided whether to stop the Shin Kori 5 and 6, the opposite end of the decision would fiercely protest; if the issue was put up for a public vote, the entire public, not being experts, would be preoccupied with the nuclear issue and the resulting social cost would be colossal. A hearing with experts would only end up with bickering since it is hard to expect a change of stance from them. A typical public opinion survey conducted

on thousands of general citizens also has a weakness that the public can easily be swayed by external forces.



▲ 지난 8월 9일 오전 서울 여의도 국회 의원회관에서 더불어민주당 최인호 의원실과 사단법인 한국사회갈등해소센터가 주관한 '탈원전과 신고리 5·6호기 공론화 방향 모색' 토론회가 열렸다. photo 연합

Why Deliberative Polling?

In the meantime, some are raising concerns that it is not appropriate to employ deliberative polling to determine whether or not to suspend the power plant building. They argue that the matter has already been politicized and that it is hard to expect effectiveness out of deliberative polling. Emeritus professor Hong Du-seung of Seoul National University, who served a chairman of public opinion committee for spent nuclear fuel for 18 months from October 2013, said in an interview with Dong-A Ilbo on August 8 2017 that he could not understand why stopping the construction of the Shin Kori 5 and 6 should be subject to public discussion and that it is hard to see a change of opinion from participants over an already-politicized matter like this one.

From August 7 to August 8, 2017, Chosun Weekly sent Professor James S. Fishkin of the Department of Communication of Stanford University email questions that ask

his opinion over the methodology of deliberative polling that the South Korean government has adopted. Mr. Fishkin emailed back twice on August 8, 2017, saying that he has been involved either directly or indirectly in deliberative polling-related projects that were carried out in 27 countries over the last 30 years, and described a textbook deliberative polling method. Mr. Fishkin also heads the Center for Deliberative Democracy of Stanford University. It is the first time that he has a say, as a person who invented the concept and the methodology, over the deliberative polling being implemented in South Korea.

Mr. Fishkin said that no group from South Korea has approached him for help or advice, adding “This is the first time that a government has gone ahead without any effort to seeking our advice or help.” By “our,” he refers to the CDD of Stanford University. According to his statement, South Korea is the only government that has not gone through Mr. Fishkin among the governments that carried out deliberative polling over the past 30 years.

In response, the Public Opinion Committee argues that their current method has differences with Mr. Fishkin’s. According to the minutes from a third meeting held by the Public Opinion Committee for the Shin Kori 5 and 6, made public on August 10, 2017, one of the committee members said that “if we were to put the trademark, we would have to follow the procedures defined by Prof. Fishkin. However, our citizen-involved survey already has a few differences with his method.” “Mr. Fishkin’s method of deliberative polling is one example, and we are moving forward in light of our own circumstances,” says the member. “Putting the trademark” means that the committee would pay for the trademark and seek advice from Mr. Fishkin for the research. The statement implies the committee acknowledges that their current

deliberative polling is different from Mr. Fishkin's textbook method.

In a phone interview on August 17, 2017, Professor Lee Jun-ung of the Department of Communication of Seoul National University, a deliberative polling expert who gave a lecture to the committee members immediately before a second meeting held in late July, recommended following Mr. Fishkin's method. "(If we used his trademark) Mr. Fishkin would directly attend important meeting of the committee and we could ask him when coming across a problem. I requested the committee for the trademark when I presented at a previous meeting, but the committee chose another option citing lack of time and other factors," said Mr. Lee.

He added, "Now we are put in a situation where we need to design the research ourselves. They said they would seek advice from me in the design process, but no contact from them so far."

Earlier on August 8, 2017, the Public Opinion Committee had a notice published by the Office for Government Policy Coordination on the website of Public Procurement Service for a bid worth up to 2.5 billion KRW to select a service provider for a "citizen-engaged survey to discuss the Shin Kori 5 and 6." The committee will receive application until August 22, 2017, and choose one based on a review of 80% on expertise and 20% on price. If this project goes by this plan, the Public Opinion Committee and a research company will design a deliberative poll, without engaging Mr. Fishkin.

In explaining the methodology of deliberative polling, Mr. Fishkin pointed out three key factors: 1. Are the citizen representatives truly representative? 2. Do opinions change in a second survey as compared to the first one? And 3. Is the reasons for choosing the final opinion obvious? The current

deliberative polling project has yet to run a first survey before forming a group of citizens, so it is early to answer the three questions above. However, questions are being raised whether commissioning a survey company to design deliberative polling without any advice from an authoritative expert can really bring good results.



Dear Max:

First let me say that I have not been asked by the team in Korea to help or advise in a we advise to guarantee the quality of Deliberative Polls—working in concert with loc any effort to seek our advice or help. We have recently helped conduct a national Del helped conduct (with Japanese collaborators) two national Deliberative Polls and ma Korea

As for whether or not it is appropriate, everything depends on the quality of the effort

- a) Are the briefing materials balanced and accessible to ordinary citizens?
- b) Are the questions in the questionnaire to be asked before and after properly c
- c) Are the moderators of the small group sessions trained to facilitate an equal d
- d) Are the expert panels who respond to questions from the small groups balanc
- e) Is data collected to show whether or not the sample is representative in attitud

▲ 지난 8월 8일 피시킨 교수가 기자에게 보내온 메일 일부분.

Local experts say “Follow the Fishkin way”

In South Korea, there are neither cases nor experts of deliberative polling. Professor Fishkin has written four books since 1991 to introduce and build up ideas and methods on the subject. And yet, the only book that has been translated in Korean is *Democracy and Deliberation*. In his introduction to a revised edition of the book, he writes, “Deliberative polling was a mere idea when I wrote this book.” He describes the implementation methods for deliberative polling in a systematic manner in his 2009 *When the people speak*, but this book has not been translated in Korean. Also, few studies on the subject can be found in South Korea. There is no single academic thesis paper that addresses deliberative polling and the number of articles that examined the subject in major academic journals such as ones published by the Korean Association for Survey Research or the Korean Political Science Association stands at 3. It is only natural that experts advise the committee to “do it the right way.”

It seems fair to say that the government has chosen the method of deliberative polling as a makeshift measure in the wake of heated debates over the Shin Kori 5 and 6. Some experts say that it is problematic that the government depends on deliberative polling to decide whether to stop the construction of the power plants when the President has already made it clear that his anti-nuclear power policy, one of his campaign pledges, will be kept. Professor Park Jin of KDI School of Public Policy and Management wrote in a column for *Hankook Ilbo* on August 15, 2017, “Putting the single issue of whether to suspend power plant construction on the agenda may fuel controversy even more over the general idea of going nuclear-free. If things go awry, we might have to set up a committee all over again to discuss about anti-nuclear power policy itself.”

Legal grounds are also weak. According to Mr. Fishkin, when he advised for the Mongolian government, the Mongolian

Parliament first passed a common law that specified the necessity for and procedures of constitutional reform and deliberative polling was then carried out. On the other hand, South Korea does not have a law that specifies the procedures or formats of deliberative polling since there was little time left to introduce and deliberate such a bill. The only legal grounds that can support the deliberative polling decision for the Shin Kori 5 and 6 is a directive of the Prime Minister issued on July 17, 2017 to specify the setting up and operating of the Public Opinion Committee. The directive is binding inside the administration, but has no binding power externally.

A commonly-raised question over deliberative polling is whether it is appropriate to let ordinary citizens make a highly-sophisticated policy decision. Mr. Fishkin answers to this question:

“I have learned that the public is capable of handling a complicated and technical issue should the required processes be correctly designed, and above all, should it be made clear to them that there are options to choose from. People just don’t get to choose on pure technical terms, but they are able to contemplate many conflicting values, choose which value matters more and set the basic directions for a policy.”

When asked to give a comment on the method of deliberative polling that the Korean government is using, Mr. Fishkin said he only owned the trademark for the term “deliberative polling” and had no information on the Korean project, so he could not make a judgement or evaluation on that matter. He adds, “I made and published in a book a criteria to evaluate the efforts made to carry out a deliberative poll. I would like to make it clear that if the project is correctly designed, their efforts will meet all of this criteria. Probably, the Korean government developed its own

method, and that method could be highly successful.” He said that everything depends on the “quality of the effort” for Korea’s deliberative polling to be done appropriately, and proposed 10 questions to be asked for a successful deliberative poll (page 15).