

# Opinion: GOP platform contains world's strictest abortion policy

By Joel Brinkley

Costa Rican women are appealing to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to overturn a national law banning in-vitro fertilization.

The state's national ombudsman, Ofelia Taitelbaum, started the process, saying "people will understand that this is about rights" that are appropriate for "our times."

In the worldwide debate over abortion and women's rights, this might seem like an unusual law. After all, in-vitro fertilization actually creates life. But Costa Rica is heavily Catholic; more than 76 percent of its people identify themselves as Roman Catholic, and the Vatican openly opposes in-vitro fertilization, widely known as IVF.

When British scientist Robert Edwards won the 2010 Nobel Prize for his development of in-vitro fertilization therapy, Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco, the Vatican's spokesman for bioethics, declared that because of IVF, "a large number of freezers" in the world are "filled with embryos. In the best of cases they are transferred into a uterus, but most probably will end up abandoned or dead."

The odd thing is that Costa Rica is one of Latin America's most progressive nations, a true, longtime democracy that has one of the region's more liberal abortion policies. The state allows abortion in cases that are important to the woman's physical or mental health.

Last year, the United Nations published a study of abortion

and related policies worldwide and found that the most restrictive laws are in Latin America. But in truth, the study's findings show that the United States would be home to the world's most restrictive abortion policy – if the Republican Party has its way.

The party's platform calls for a constitutional amendment that would forbid abortion under all circumstances. The U.N. study shows that only four of the world's 230 states have similarly restrictive policies – El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and the Dominican Republic. All of them are predominantly Roman Catholic.

The Vatican firmly opposes contraception and abortion. About 95 percent of Dominicans are Catholic, for example, while fewer than one-quarter of Americans identify themselves as members of that faith.

But the Republican position takes the prohibition even further. Mitt Romney and many other Republicans are promising to eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, the organization that provides health care services for poor women nationwide – including abortion referrals in most of its offices.

Well, even those four Latin American nations that forbid abortion under any circumstances all provide government-funded family-planning services, the United Nations reported. So do Iran, Bangladesh, North Korea and East Timor, the Southeast Asian country that is the world's most heavily Catholic state. Only 2 percent of Timorese identify with another faith.

In August, a federal appeals court ruled that Texas can end financing for Planned Parenthood clinics. The state's Republican-controlled Legislature had passed a law last year forbidding state funding for any organization affiliated with abortion providers.

All of this seems to be another big problem for Romney, who has been self-immolating over the last few weeks. A recent

Gallup poll showed a continuing gender gap in President Obama's favor. Female voters preferred Obama by eight percentage points, and the Democrats are seizing on that, running ads about the Republicans' "war on women."

The truth is that if the Republicans were to get their way, many American women wanting or needing an abortion would certainly turn to back-alley abortionists, which would be an extremely dangerous turn for American society.

"Unsafe abortions continue to be widespread, and nearly all are performed in developing countries" where abortion is restricted, the United Nations said. The World Health Organization reported that in 2003, back-alley practitioners performed 19.7 million abortions worldwide. That number rose to 21.6 million in 2008, the last year for which statistics are available.

The United Nations added, "globally, it's estimated that 47,000 women lose their lives each year from the complications from unsafe abortions, almost all of which could have been prevented through better access to sexuality education."

No other nation in the Western world restricts abortion as severely as the Republican Party platform advocates. In fact, the U.N. study shows that since 1996, far more nations have been liberalizing their abortion policies than restricting them – by a factor of more than 4 to 1.

However, it also adds that some states impose policy conditions that might not be reflected in actual law, among them a compulsory waiting period, parental or spousal consent or mandatory counseling. It did not report that any other countries order invasive ultrasound examinations before an abortion is permitted, another favored Republican proposal.

Will the Republicans get their way? Not likely. Most Americans, women particularly, adamantly oppose that.

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