

Women show deep drop in church attendance, survey says

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) Women, long considered the dominant pew dwellers in the nation's churches, have shown a dramatic drop in attendance in the last two decades, a new survey shows.

Since 1991, the percentage of women attending church during a typical week has decreased by 11 percentage points to 44 percent, the Barna Group reported Monday (Aug. 1).

Sunday school and volunteering among women also has diminished. Two decades ago, half of all women read the Bible in a typical week -- other than at religious events. Now 40 percent do.

The survey also found a marked stepping away from congregations: a 17 percentage increase in the number of women who have become "unchurched."

"For years, many church leaders have understood that `as go women, so goes the American church,'`" wrote Barna Group founder George Barna, on his website. "Looking at the trends over the past 20 years, and especially those related to the beliefs and behavior of women, you might conclude that things are not going well for conventional Christian churches."

The Ventura, Calif.-based researchers compared surveys of more than 1,000 people in 1991 and 2011.

They found that the percentage of women who strongly believe the Bible is accurate in all it teaches declined by 7 percentage points to 42 percent. And those who view God as "the all-knowing, all-powerful and perfect Creator of the universe who still rules the world today" dropped

from 80 percent to 70 percent.

"Women used to put men to shame in terms of their orthodoxy of belief and the breadth and consistency of their religious behavior," wrote Barna. "No more; the religious gender gap has substantially closed."