

views separate and not allow them to influence their political decisions’.

In response, 65 per cent of respondents said political figures should keep their religious beliefs cordoned off from their decision making, with just 14 per cent saying the opposite. The remaining 21 per cent chose neither option or said they did not know.

These sentiments have been appreciated by a number of political figures in recent years.

Tony Blair delayed his decision to convert formally to Roman Catholicism until after leaving Downing Street amid fears he would be branded a “nutter” if he spoke openly about his faith while prime minister.

Mr Farron stepped down as Lib Dem leader in July, explaining: “To be a political leader and to live as a committed Christian, to hold faithfully to the Bible’s teaching, has felt impossible to me.”

Mrs May spoke out about the importance of Easter as a Christian festival this year when criticising Cadbury’s and the National Trust for dropping the word “Easter” from the title of their



Tim Farron felt he could not be both a political leader and committed Christian
CHRIS J RATCLIFFE/GETTY IMAGES

egg hunt, and in her Christmas message this year said: “Let us take pride in our Christian heritage and the confidence it gives us to ensure that in Britain you can practice your faith free from question or fear.”

A second question in the survey asked about the 26 seats in the House of Lords guaranteed to Church of England bishops, with 62 per cent of people saying that no religious clerics should have “an automatic right to seats”. Only 8 per cent of people said the bishops should retain their seats while 12 per cent said leaders from other faiths should be added to sit alongside bishops as Lords Spiritual. The remaining 18 per cent said they

did not know.

A number of proposals have been made to reform the Lords over the past 50 years and many have suggested tinkering with the make-up of the Lords Spiritual by either reducing their number or adding other faith leaders, though none have suggested scrapping them outright.

The Times’s survey last year found that the proportion of people citing no belief in any form of god or spiritual power had increased from 33 in 2015 to 38 per cent in 2016.

The proportion of non-believers has fallen back to 36 per cent over the past year, while the number of people who believe in God increased by one percentage point, from 28 to 29 per cent, and the number of people who do not believe in God but do believe in “some sort of spiritual greater power” increased from 20 to 23 per cent.

It also found that the number of people who were planning to attend a church service over Christmas had increased from 16 per cent to 20 per cent.

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