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## The Relationship between the State and the Citizens in Current Realities

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to evaluate the current situation in the field of eGovernment development in Slovakia and its role in ensuring the operation of the state in times of corona crisis.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The main method of data acquisition can be considered a questionnaire survey, the analysis and deduction of which identified positive and negative phenomena of behaviour of the examined system. Our research also combines qualitative (analysis of available documents) and quantitative methods (statistical data, their processing and analysis).

**Findings:** The current situation and events have shown the importance of the role of state authorities. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the system in which we live. The attitude and approach of state authorities and citizens, as well as the setting up of procedures and the system of public administration, can be described as key in this matter.

**Practical Implications:** The results of our activity provided answers to questions concerning the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of building a state-citizen bond.

**Originality/Value:** Nowadays, state and citizens have to deal with complexity of COVID-19 pandemic. The conclusions of this study will contribute to improve efficiency communication and relationship between the state and the citizen.

**Keywords:** Citizens, communication, relationship, state.

**JEL Codes:** H75, H83.

**Paper type:** Scientific article.

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## 1. Introduction

The high degree of global social development is changing the rules, conditions, and attitudes of all players in society. Sophisticated use of technical and information technologies, respect for state authorities and space for citizens are key factors. A modern State cannot exist without the reciprocity of these and other elements. If a citizen does not have secured and guaranteed benefits from the position of the State, the State loses its significance for him. Similarly, we can say, it is even worse in vice-versa. Then there is a situation where the citizen and his existence is not important for the State.

However, rationality and cognition lead society to the continuity of fulfilling obligations and building a state-citizen relationship. The State holds the position of a representative of social establishment, order, and public power. The citizen holds the position of the natural personnel substrate of the State. Both of these subsystems have law and capabilities, with the intersection of private and public frameworks being important. How the State behave, and citizen should behave? What do they demand from each other and what do they offer? Why is their correlation necessary and how far can it go? Who is the driving force and of this relationship and what does it entail? These are many questions that are difficult to answer and even more difficult to set strict boundaries. Therefore, in this article we will try to answer at least a few of them. At the same time, we will try to interpret the results of our findings, which have been and are largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 State and Citizens Relationship during the Crisis

The state is a sovereign independent political unit that is evolving historically and evolutionarily (Strebel *et al.*, 2018; Oquendo, 2017; Klíma, 2006; Krasner, 2001) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Definition of the term state.

Definition	
Geographical Aspect	State is an area or territory inhabited by a certain community of people.
Sociological Aspect	State is a territory to which a nation is culturally, historically and ethnically attached.
Political Aspect	State is a form of political regime that is defined by relations between state institutions.
Legally Aspect	The state is a form of legal order that determines and defines the patterns of behavior of citizens and the State.

*Source:* Own, based on “Kapitoly z porovnávej politológie”, UCM.

Through its institutionalized procedures for taking collective and generally binding decisions and standards (Chan *et al.*, 2017; Gilley, 2006; Heywood, 2004), it controls and shapes the society. This effect is most visible in times of crisis, such as economic and pandemic. The UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has outlined 11 principles of effective governance in this area (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Principles of effective governance.*

Governance category	Governance principles
Effectiveness	<p>Competence - Professional public sector workforce, strategic human resources management, leadership development and training of civil servants. Efficient and fair revenue administration, Investment in e-government, and others.</p> <p>Policy making - Strategic planning and foresight, promotion of coherent policymaking, monitoring and evaluation systems, risk management frameworks, data sharing and others.</p> <p>Collaboration - centre of government coordination under the Head of State or government, collaboration, coordination, integration and dialogue across levels of government and functional areas, raising awareness of the sustainable development goals, network-based governance, multi-stakeholder partnerships and others.</p>
Accountability	<p>Integrity - promotion of anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies, codes of conduct for public officials, competitive public procurement, whistle-blower protection, provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants, and others.</p> <p>Transparency - proactive disclosure of information, budget transparency, open government data, and others.</p> <p>Independent oversight - Promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies, independent audit, respect for legality and others.</p>
Inclusiveness	<p>Leaving no one behind - promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy, promotion of social equity, data disaggregation, systematic follow-up and review and others.</p> <p>Intergenerational equity - sustainable development, impact assessment, long-term public debt management, long-term territorial planning and spatial development and others.</p> <p>Non-discrimination - promotion of public sector workforce diversity, prohibition of discrimination in public service delivery, and others.</p> <p>Participation - free and fair elections, regulatory process of public consultation, participatory budgeting, community-driven development and others.</p> <p>Subsidiarity - fiscal federalism, strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems, enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks, multilevel governance and others.</p>

**Source:** Own, based on “Principles of Effective Governance” by CEPA.

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All these principles are needed for effective management. They are the basis of relationship that should exist between the State and citizens. However, the application of these principles and the action of the government is most visible in times of crisis, such as economic and pandemic. In this context, it is important to focus not only on the extent but also on the nature of the crisis (King and Le Gales, 2017; Kútik and Králik, 2015). These characteristics then inevitably lead to a reassessment of the roles, duties, and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Participants have the opportunity to respond and verify the correctness of the current policy system. If necessary, it is possible to make changes to the system policy so that they lead to a rapid recovery of the entire environment.

The whole world is facing a global Covid-19 pandemic. Globally on 13 September 2020, there have been 28 637 952 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 917 417 deaths, reported to WHO (covid19.who.int). It is the pandemic crisis that is currently arousing the greatest interest among the general lay and professional public. Keeping society running is directly proportional to rapid policy responses and unprecedented economic stimulus (Koirala *et al.*, 2020; Ritchie and Roser, 2020). These activities have proven to be one of the decisive factors in protecting the population and the economy. The relationship between the State and citizens has proven to be key factor in shaping and determining government strategies and approaches. As Kauzya (2020) states, "governments' efforts to control the spread of a pandemic would not be possible without respecting each other." Respecting government regulations and respecting the importance of protecting the citizens can be described as an essential element in building a safer society. The basis is a credible and legitimate state leadership in which its inhabitants rely heavily.

The efforts of state-government officials to combat the spread of the virus have shown a different approach to solving the problem. Some governments have decided to take a radical approach to the problem (as an example we mention the Slovak Republic), others have chosen a milder way of resolving the pandemic (as an example we mention the USA). However, all states and governments have pointed to the critical role of effective and inclusive governance. Many states have taken strong action. They decided to stop the spread of the pandemic by locking the State, i.e. social distancing (closing schools, public institutions, businesses and changing to a distance form of study or working from home; monitoring contacts and repatriation of state citizens, deploying security forces, volunteers and medical professionals, construction of new hospitals and support of scientific capacities and others). Despite this difference, however, the efforts of individual States were to maintain the unity of the country. The aim of this unity was to prevent social disintegration and discrimination.

It is important to avoid collapse. The e-Environment as a means of maintaining and ensuring the operation, functionality and contact with citizens is becoming essential. When personal interaction is not possible, eGovernment solutions become vital.

Thanks to e-ID and e-Signature, citizens can communicate with the public administration without any restrictions (European Commission, 2020; United Nations, 2020). “The pandemic has renewed and anchored the role of digital government – both in its conventional delivery of digital services as well as new innovative efforts in managing the crisis,” Mr. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said in the survey, adding: “Partnerships are more important than ever, between governments and the private sector and among countries in the same region or across national digital government teams.”

The provision of basic services must be the core factor of the relationship between government and all citizens. However, they need to be transformed into the e-Environment. This will ensure the smooth running of services and the social distance that is essential in these cases.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

Given the current situation in the world and homeland, we decided to approach the status and situation in the field of relations and ties between the State and its citizens. Interest, urgency, and efforts to minimize the unfavourable situation are essential in a democracy. For the purposes of this article, we have decided to map the situation within the Slovak Republic. Given the availability of information from the scientific and media environment, as well as the possibility of reaching out to citizens, we decided to examine the functioning of the public service system and point out the importance of progress in this area. The main method used to understand the preparedness and response of the State and citizens in this situation was to gather information through freely available data and experiences from citizens through the e-Questionnaire. The methods used in the work are therefore searching and analysis of available data, questionnaire survey, mathematical-statistical analysis, and deduction.

The main objective of this article is to examine and evaluate the relationship between the State and citizens in the situation after the outbreak of the Corona-19 pandemic. The aim of the study is to outline field experiences in order to identify needs and gaps and make recommendations for effective preparedness and response:

- a) examine and understand the overall management of the situation,
- b) evaluate the readiness and response of government activities,
- c) identify the main gaps and problems in the functioning of public services.

To meet the goal of the study, we conducted a survey (May 2020 - July 2020), which was attended by 605 respondents. Respondents were randomly contacted within citizens from online and offline environments. The respondents were Slovak citizens older than 18 years.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The main goal of our work was to point out the readiness and response of the government in connection with the pandemic crisis Covid-19 (Table 3). The Slovak Republic is the State that was the first to face the Corona-19 pandemic with very radical measures. In addition to these measures, the Government of the Slovak Republic declared a state of emergency from 15 March 2020 (Government Resolution of the Slovak Republic 45/2020 Coll., 49/2020 Coll., 64/2020 Coll. 72/2020 Coll., 84/2020 Z. z.). In doing so, it has set tough measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus (ban on retail and service sales; ban on public presence in catering and fast food stalls; mandatory isolation in facilities designated by the Ministry of the Interior; border controls and others), in other words lockdown.

These steps and decisions were perceived as crucial by wide professionals, despite the initial mistrust (Beblavý, 2020; European Commission, 2020). The fears and concerns that have emerged about the spread of the virus have made citizens' ties to the State and government more intense than ever before (ICAEW, 2020).

Most people felt that the government was acting in the interests of the public good, public health and the public interest, which most respondents agreed. They took for granted accurate information about what was happening and the development of the situation. Watching the TV entries of government officials was very intense on their part. The establishment of a portal with information on coronavirus and restrictions was also welcomed.

However, they assessed the material security (the availability of protective equipment) negatively. On the other hand, they pointed to the prompt action of the government or adherence to the rules of conduct towards the population, i.e. information, care for the most vulnerable groups and repatriation. They critically assessed readiness of schools, functionality of e-Services and private information's sharing ("infodemia").

Most respondents tried to postpone their agendas. The non-functional e-Environment of public administration also contributed to this (Table 4). This was not always active. In her speech (State of the Republic Report, 2020), the President of the Slovak Republic also mentioned: "The electronic infrastructure was not sufficiently prepared for a crisis situation, although hundreds of millions of euros were spent on its development.

The crisis has shown us that while the private sector has been able to do this quickly and without major problems, the public sector has run into serious difficulties." During the key week (Augustín and Sarvaš, 2020), the most of government.

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**Table 3. Relationship between State and citizens before (B) and after (A) Covid-19**

Generation*	high				medium				low				
	Man		Woman		Man		Woman		Man		Woman		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
<b>Binding to the State</b>													
Baby boomers	B	9	39,131	14	36,842	9	12,329	12	9,231	5	2,747	3	1,887
	A	16	14,953	19	28,358	6	5	7	4,698	1	1,961	3	2,703
X	B	3	13,043	7	18,421	19	26,028	32	24,615	51	28,022	42	26,415
	A	32	29,907	14	20,895	34	28,333	46	30,872	7	13,725	21	18,919
Y	B	9	39,131	15	39,474	32	43,835	69	53,077	105	57,693	82	51,572
	A	53	49,533	27	40,299	65	54,167	78	52,349	28	54,902	61	54,955
Z	B	2	8,695	2	5,263	13	17,808	17	13,077	21	11,538	32	20,126
	A	6	5,607	7	10,448	15	12,5	18	12,081	15	29,412	26	23,423
<b>Confidence in the State and its representatives</b>													
Baby boomers	B	5	5,747	7	7,527	12	8,696	14	7,143	6	11,321	8	21,053
	A	9	8,333	13	10,569	14	9,333	14	7,651	0	0	2	9,524
X	B	12	13,793	14	15,054	52	37,681	63	32,143	9	16,981	4	10,526
	A	16	14,815	26	21,138	55	36,667	53	28,962	2	10	2	9,524
Y	B	54	62,069	51	54,839	60	43,478	96	48,979	32	60,377	19	50
	A	61	56,482	57	46,341	67	44,667	93	50,819	18	90	16	76,19
Z	B	16	18,391	21	22,58	14	10,145	23	11,735	6	11,321	7	18,421
	A	22	20,37	27	21,952	14	9,333	23	12,568	0	0	1	4,762
<b>Watching what's happening in the State</b>													
Baby boomers	B	12	13,187	10	11,628	8	6,957	12	6,857	3	4,167	7	10,606
	A	19	9,694	27	10,227	4	5,263	2	3,448	0	0	0	0
X	B	23	25,275	26	30,232	31	26,957	42	24	19	26,389	13	19,697
	A	62	31,633	74	28,03	10	13,158	7	12,069	1	16,667	0	0
Y	B	52	57,143	43	50	64	55,651	97	55,429	30	41,667	26	39,394
	A	98	50	138	52,273	45	59,211	27	46,551	3	50	1	20
Z	B	4	4,395	7	8,14	12	10,435	24	13,714	20	27,777	20	30,303
	A	17	8,673	25	9,47	17	22,368	22	37,932	2	33,334	4	80
<b>Perception of the situation in the State</b>													
Baby boomers	B	11	19,298	15	17,857	12	9,023	12	7,895	2	2,222	2	2,817
	A	18	10,588	26	15,116	3	3,704	3	2,206	2	7,407	0	0
X	B	17	29,825	17	20,238	27	20,301	53	34,869	29	32,222	11	15,493
	A	32	18,824	46	26,744	31	38,271	31	22,794	10	37,037	4	21,053
Y	B	21	36,842	36	42,857	75	56,391	63	41,447	50	55,556	47	66,197
	A	94	55,294	82	47,675	38	46,914	77	56,618	14	51,852	7	36,842
Z	B	8	14,035	16	19,048	19	14,285	24	15,789	9	10	11	15,493
	A	26	15,294	18	10,465	9	11,111	25	18,382	1	3,704	8	42,105
<b>State interest in the citizen</b>													
Baby boomers	B	9	18	9	16,981	7	7,609	9	4,865	7	5,147	11	12,36
	A	15	13,514	18	15	6	6,316	10	7,195	2	3,226	1	1,471
X	B	12	24	17	32,074	35	38,043	37	20	26	19,118	27	30,337
	A	26	23,423	36	30	31	32,632	29	20,863	16	25,806	16	23,529
Y	B	24	48	21	39,625	31	33,696	103	55,676	91	66,912	42	47,191
	A	58	52,252	57	47,5	45	47,368	62	44,604	43	69,355	47	69,118
Z	B	5	10	6	11,32	19	20,652	36	19,459	12	8,823	9	10,112
	A	12	10,811	9	7,5	13	13,684	38	27,338	1	1,613	4	5,882

**Note:** \* Generation Baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1976), Generation Y (1977-1994), Generation Z (1995-2002). **Source:** Own study.

After this criticism, the government and ministries were able to mobilize. Together with the professional public, they were advised to find operational and effective solutions. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic set up a portal to help teachers and schools, the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic organized webinars and provided online support to companies and self-employed persons, the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic updated current applications. Many municipalities communicated with their citizens through the web, social networks, SMS domains and radio.

**Table 4.** e-Services of the Slovakia before (B) and after (A) Covid19.

Generation*	high				medium				low				
	Man		Woman		Man		Woman		Man		Woman		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
<b>Use of eServices of the State</b>													
Baby boomers	B	0	0	1	2,439	4	3,333	6	4,027	19	14,961	22	16,059
	A	3	4,412	7	17,949	6	7,692	5	3,704	14	10,606	17	11,111
X	B	6	19,355	8	19,512	21	17,5	29	19,463	46	36,22	44	32,117
	A	8	11,764	6	15,385	14	17,949	29	21,482	51	38,636	46	30,066
Y	B	12	38,71	20	48,781	86	71,667	98	65,772	48	37,795	48	35,036
	A	47	69,118	18	46,154	48	61,539	80	59,259	51	38,636	68	44,444
Z	B	13	41,935	12	29,268	9	7,5	16	10,738	14	11,024	23	16,788
	A	10	14,706	8	20,512	10	12,82	21	15,555	16	12,122	22	14,379
<b>Interest in using eServices of the State</b>													
Baby boomers	B	3	2,113	2	1,333	12	15	10	7,353	7	12,727	18	42,857
	A	5	3,086	4	2,353	11	14,474	13	10,745	7	17,5	12	33,333
X	B	34	23,943	42	28	25	31,25	31	22,794	14	25,455	8	19,048
	A	51	31,482	49	28,824	16	21,053	21	17,355	6	15	11	30,556
Y	B	84	59,155	72	48	34	42,5	79	58,088	28	50,909	15	35,714
	A	89	54,938	81	47,647	35	46,052	75	61,983	22	55	10	27,778
Z	B	21	14,789	34	22,667	9	11,25	16	11,765	6	10,909	1	2,381
	A	17	10,494	36	21,176	14	18,421	12	9,917	5	12,5	3	8,333
<b>Evaluation of the quality of State eServices</b>													
Baby boomers	B	0	0	1	2,381	6	5,263	11	8,397	17	12,878	17	11,039
	A	4	8,163	3	4,478	5	5	15	9,615	14	10,853	11	9,565
X	B	7	21,875	11	26,19	34	29,825	29	22,137	32	24,242	41	26,623
	A	9	18,367	14	20,895	21	21	31	19,872	43	33,333	36	31,304
Y	B	19	59,375	25	59,524	59	51,754	71	54,198	68	51,515	70	45,455
	A	23	46,939	31	46,269	62	62	91	58,333	61	47,287	44	38,261
Z	B	6	18,75	5	11,905	15	13,158	20	15,268	15	11,365	26	16,883
	A	13	26,531	19	28,358	12	12	19	12,18	11	8,527	24	20,87

**Note:** \* Generation Baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1976), Generation Y (1977-1994), Generation Z (1995-2002).

**Source:** Own study.



If we look at the issue of sophistication of e-Services of the state, it is not possible to evaluate them positively. The State has limited the opening hours of client centers and other offices. As an alternative, it offered the possibility of using e-Services. However, the user must have an e-ID with a chip. However, according to available information from the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic (MV SR, 2020), only about 9% of owners (112,000 holders) use it. In addition, many services are not available or are of complicated design for the user. The overall satisfaction of citizens is therefore low. As many as 80% of people said when completing the questionnaire that many things should change in this area.

The curiosity is that despite its presentation of progress in the field of e-Government and e-Services, the State recommended that people use special telephone lines and e-mails as their primary source of contact and information gathering. However, I highlight the functionality of e-Health, which was also positively perceived by our respondents. Thanks to e-Health, citizens had the opportunity to obtain the necessary medicines without visiting their doctor.

Based on the results and findings obtained directly and indirectly, we can deduce the following. Through its quick action, the state was able to flexibly reflect on the current need to protect the health of citizens and the State. It has gained recognition at home and abroad for his strong decisions at lockdown. The company demonstrated its trust in the government with a responsible approach and actions. On the other hand, there were several major or minor shortcomings, which we have dared to point out a long time ago. The real dysfunction of the e-Environment of the State, i.e. e-Services and e-Government, became fully apparent during the pandemic.

The claims of past governments can therefore be described as misleading. Quality, quantity, availability, or user friendliness are at a low to zero level. Unlike countries such as Estonia, Finland, and Luxembourg, we can only provide our citizens with a fraction of e-Services through the e-Environment. E-Government is not addressed for the benefit of the citizen. In several cases, it is a one-way flow of information, which does not meet the characteristics of e-Services (articles we have already published). As follows from the opinion of the European Union (2020b) Slovakia is characterized by a moderately low level of digitalization. The results of DESI 2020 show that only 52% of Slovak internet users send forms to public institutions online.

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, we can state that citizens trust the State and its representatives. They are convinced that the State is the guarantor of the protection of the health of citizens and should therefore address this issue in their favour. Respondents of the state apparatus respect and fully trust them. They appreciate the procedures, negotiations, and presentation of the state's priorities. This has proved crucial in the eyes of the general public. Regular information on the situation led to the respondents to realize the real interest of the State in the safety of the citizens health and to deepen the ties to it.

From this reason it is gratifying to note that the setting of rules, regulations and recommendations are not seen as a restriction on freedom or the rules of modern democracy. By respecting the above, citizens strive to achieve a societal goal, namely the health of society. They are therefore willing to give up well-being and adjust their social needs, but only for the necessary time.

Our findings also revealed another shortcoming, which is insufficiently functional e-Environment of the State. Respondents point out the shortcomings of the e-Environment of the State (quantitative and qualitative) and the urgent need to solve this problem. It is not acceptable that in today's era of electronization, it is not possible from the comfort of the house to equip common and less common agendas. With functional and sophisticated e-Services, we still guarantee functionality of the State, the protection of the health of clients and employees, and last but not least, a picture of the state's relationship and attitude towards its citizens.

Therefore, it is sad that the boom of modernization of the e-Environment and the presentation of results, which has been implemented by the Slovak Republic since 2012, has fully shown how this environment works or does not work. For this reason, we would appeal for the completion of eGovernment in terms of quality and quantity. Building a friendly e-Environment and protecting its operation should be key goal. By sophisticating services, set up a system of administration and the state's relationship with citizens and vice versa so that it really works (during and outside crisis situations). We call on the State to build an online sophisticated application for the two-way dissemination of information about measures, events, and the situation in the State. Extend this application with administration agendas for citizens, entrepreneurs, self-government, and the State. At the same time, set it friendly for all users, including seniors and people with disabilities. It can also be set in a simplified form for persons under 18 years of age, or for users of the environment outside the territory of the Slovak Republic.

## **5. Conclusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown and continues to show the degree of maturity of the society, the readiness of its players and the efficiency of the set infrastructure systems. It pointed out what a serious negative impact this type of crisis has on the economy, social interaction, or the running of society. It provided an opportunity to realize the inequalities, systemic failures and various other shortcomings that existed in the current system. It revealed strong points that prevented people from feeling and experiencing chaos. With its approach, the State has helped to minimize suffering or loss. The policies, guidelines, strategies, or services that the State and the government had to adopt were intended to strengthen equality and solidarity in the State. It has also been confirmed that preparation is important for an effective response to the spread of a pandemic or crisis. It was able to minimize damage and

loss. At the same time, however, by revealing weaknesses, it created space for the completion of the public administration system.

However, private sector involvement cannot be resilient and inclusive. The State and citizens should therefore continue to show respect and support for each other, or to re-establish mutual ties so that the society is more resilient to any kind and nature of crisis. Experts on digital transformation call for the State to make life easier for citizens by applying electronic administration of public affairs and public electronic services (for more than 17 years). Learning from failure, improving from one's own and other people's mistakes, responsible and open approach to citizens is the cornerstone of consolidating and building a new era and dimension of the State-citizen relationship.

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