Analyzing Joko Widodo's Pandemic Rhetoric on Instagram: Insights into Political Communication, Populism, and Crisis Management

Firly Annisa[1], *Frizki* Yulianti[2], *Ayu* Amalia[3], *Muhammad Raqib Bin Mohd* Sofian[4] and *Safiyyah Ahmad* Sabri[5]

[1] Communication Department, Social and Politics Faculty, University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia, 55183

[2] Communication Department, Social and Politics Faculty, University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia, 55183

[3] Communication Department, Social and Politics Faculty, University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia, 55183

[4] Communication Program, Faculty Leadership and Management, University Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia, 71800

[5] Communication Program, Faculty Leadership and Management, University Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia, 71800

Abstract. This study examines Joko Widodo's rhetoric on Instagram during the pandemic. This study is significant for several reasons; social media has become an indispensable channel for political leaders to communicate with their constituents, particularly during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. By analyzing the language, tone, and themes of President Widodo's Instagram posts from January to December 2021, researchers can gain insight into his communication strategy and the extent to which it may have influenced public opinion and behavior. In addition, by analyzing President Widodo's Instagram posts, we can better understand populism's role in political communication during the pandemic. Populist rhetoric frequently makes emotional appeals and aims to create a sense of "us versus them," which can effectively mobilize support but can also lead to polarization and division. President Jokowi consciously refrained from portraying himself as a hero or savior, contrary to what is commonly observed in the communication patterns of some leaders during crises. Instead, Jokowi emphasized the importance of unity, community cohesion, and adherence to public health regulations. By doing so, President Jokowi intended to cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and encourage individuals to participate in the fight against the pandemic.

Keyword: populist communication, political communication, social media, covid-19, political discourse

1.   Introduction

Effective communication from political leaders is crucial for instilling confidence and disseminating vital information in times of crisis (McGuire et al., 2020). This political communication is significant during the crisis because it will instill confidence since the public looks to political leaders for guidance and reassurance in times of uncertainty and crisis (Coman et al., 2021). Effective political communication helps leaders instill confidence in the public by clearly articulating their plans, actions, and strategies. By demonstrating transparency, empathy, and competence, leaders can alleviate fears, address concerns, and foster trust among their constituents (Beilstein et al., 2021). This political communication helps create a sense of stability and confidence in the government's ability to navigate the crisis effectively. From another perspective, political leaders serve as conduits for vital information during a crisis. They have access to crucial data, expert advice, and policy updates that can significantly impact public well-being. Effective communication allows leaders to disseminate this information promptly and accurately to the public, ensuring that citizens are well-informed about the evolving situation, recommended precautions, and government measures. Timely and transparent communication helps combat misinformation, dispel rumors, and enable individuals to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their communities.

Political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic has witnessed a significant shift, with social media platforms, especially Instagram, playing a crucial role in disseminating information, engaging the public, and shaping public opinion (Metcalfe et al., 2020). With its visually-oriented and interactive features, Instagram has become a relevant medium for political leaders to communicate during this global crisis. The history of political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic on Instagram began with recognizing the platform's broad reach and engagement potential (Malik et al., 2021). As the pandemic unfolded, political leaders recognized the need to connect with the public on a personal level and provide timely updates and guidance. Instagram emerged as an effective tool because it conveys messages through compelling visuals, videos, and infographics, making complex information more accessible and engaging to a broad audience.

The relevance of Instagram in political communication during the COVID-19 crisis lies in its ability to reach diverse demographics, including younger generations who are avid users of the platform (Meraz, 2022). By leveraging Instagram, political leaders can tailor their communication strategies to resonate with these audiences, using relatable language, appealing visuals, and interactive features like polls and Q&A sessions to foster engagement and participation. Instagram's real-time updates and features like Instagram Live have allowed political leaders to respond immediately to emerging situations, address public concerns, and clarify misconceptions. This direct and interactive communication helps instill confidence and trust among the public, as leaders can address public anxieties, share accurate information, and exhibit transparency in decision-making processes.

Moreover, Instagram has been instrumental in disseminating vital information during the pandemic. Political leaders have utilized the platform to share updates on case numbers, public health guidelines, vaccination campaigns, and other preventive measures. By reaching a broad audience through Instagram, leaders can combat misinformation, promote awareness, and encourage responsible behavior, thus contributing to the overall management and control of the pandemic. Furthermore, Instagram has facilitated public engagement and participation during the COVID-19 crisis. Political leaders have utilized interactive features to gather public opinions, answer questions, and provide a platform for dialogue and discussion. This

engagement fosters a sense of collective responsibility, as the public feels included in decision-making processes and is encouraged to contribute to the pandemic response actively. Thus, Instagram has become a relevant and powerful tool for political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its visually driven nature, broad reach, interactive features, and real-time updates have allowed political leaders to instill confidence, disseminate vital information, and foster public engagement and responsibility. As the pandemic continues, Instagram will likely remain an essential platform for political leaders to effectively communicate and connect with the public in these challenging times.

With the rise of social media platforms, political leaders have recognized the immense potential of these channels to directly connect with their constituents, particularly during challenging times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Platforms like Instagram have become indispensable tools for leaders to convey their messages, share updates, and engage with the public on a more personal level.

President of Indonesia Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, has held the position since 2014. His political messaging during the pandemic era has concentrated on a number of issues, including social assistance, economic recovery, and public health initiatives. Jokowi has been actively educating the populace about the value of adhering to health precautions, such as donning masks, using social distance, and often washing hands. He has underlined the necessity of shared accountability and cooperation in the fight against the pandemic. Jokowi has frequently addressed the nation to inform the public on the government's pandemic management efforts. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to display the narrative construction of Covid-19 vaccine in Joko Widodo eras. Jokowi's as a politician have several unique characteristics such us; grassroots approach, infrastructure development, proactive reforms, and social welfare programs.

Jokowi's use of Instagram for political communication in the context of the vaccination campaign demonstrates his recognition of the platform's potential to reach a wide audience, counter misinformation, and encourage public participation. By utilizing Instagram as a medium to convey his messages, Jokowi aims to leverage his influence and position to encourage Indonesian citizens to take part in the vaccination program, ultimately contributing to the collective efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that the success of the vaccination campaign relies on various factors beyond Instagram communication alone, including accessibility, availability of vaccines, healthcare infrastructure, and public trust in the healthcare system. However, Jokowi's use of Instagram serves as a valuable tool to complement broader vaccination strategies and to engage citizens in the fight against COVID-19. This study aims to illustrate additional political communication that can be found on Joko Widodo's Instagram during his vaccination campaign against the Covid-19 pandemic.

2 Method

This study makes an effort to engage in a multimodal discourse on the various modes of analysis that were employed to understand how Joko Widodo attempted to use his Instagram account to promote vaccination initiatives. The research's corpus, which focuses on Instagram accounts, is analyzed using a variety of multimodal analysis techniques. By deciphering and analyzing social media images, words, and captions, this study intends to assist the audience who is paying attention to the strategies used. Additionally, the image's

intentionally chosen objects—such as phrases, gestures, symbols, and objects—as well as their relationships with one another will be focused on. Using a qualitative approach to analyze data gathering from the presidential team's Instagram account, which is obviously administered by President Jokowi, this method chooses to examine the pictures and captions in the account, therefore screenshots and thematic classifications are done. The fact that many academics focus on the examination of words, clauses, or sentences in multimodal conversation is taken into consideration. This study employs a visual analysis study, which is seen not only as a campaign media but as a multimodal argumentation, to better understand how President Jokowi uses Instagram visuals and narration on his official social media to persuade and drive a vaccine campaign in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis throughout 2021 (Kjeldsen, 2015).

3 Basic Theory

Social Media and Politics of Visibility

With an increasing interest in literature, visual communication studies have become more mainstream over the past 20 years (Barnhurst & Quinn, 2012). This is related with common knowledge that how people perceive politicians can be quite important (Brants & Voltmer, 2019). Voters are specifically looking for political leaders who are determined (Bailenson et al., 2008; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019). For a variety of reasons, images are crucial to how a message is interpreted. Images are thought to be the most efficient medium for conveying information that is pertinent to a political discussion (Birdsell & Groarke, 2007). Political communication has always placed a strong emphasis on visual communication. However, its significance has grown during the past 20 years. For a substantial portion of the population, audiovisual media like television—which is available on numerous screens and offers an endless number of topics, channels, and levels of interactivity—has replaced print media as the main source of information.

Political leaders are conscious of the value of images and diligently research how to present themselves in the best possible light using audiovisual tools. Building political leadership involves a lot of visual imagery (Schill, 2012). With notable exceptions, despite the significance that images play in political communication, their worth has not yet received much attention (Filimonov et al., 2016). Political discourse now places more emphasis on images than narrative. Images have been a vital part of political communication since the invention of television, but in the last 20 years, their importance has increased due to the development of the Web and social media platforms (Cervi et al., 2021; Filimonov et al., 2016) Despite this, text has not been abandoned, and specific scientific studies have found that including words, titles, and other details with the photos can increase the publication's effect (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

Communication media have created a new type of visibility in which the field of vision is influenced by a variety of social and technical factors, including camera angles, editing techniques, and organizational interests and priorities, as well as by the novel forms of interaction that these media enable (Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Silverstone, 2005). As mentioned by (Dayan, 2013) even makes the case that a new paradigm of visibility has been facilitated by changes in the media environment. From the standpoint of public representatives, these new affordances, practices, and norms have undeniably altered the art of managing visibility (Thompson, 2005), offering opportunities for self-presentation while also making visibility uncontrollable and public images inherently fragile due to the pervasive and multi-directional nature of mediation.

Populism is a Political Communication Strategy

Populists may use the self-representational brittleness that new kinds of visibility bring forth as a weapon. In their attempts to discredit the public perceptions of elite representatives, populists exhibit the Manichaean aspect of their ideology, which pits the elite against the people. In response to the necessity for visible representation, politicians are well recognized for their persistent attempts at image management—sometimes better than for their involvement in policy making. This study is based on (Waisbord, 2013) assertion that populism is a political communication strategy that aims to influence people in particular ways. Some populists primarily use media politics, while others concentrate on direct political communication (such as grassroots activism and community involvement).

Populists use these methods to connect with, create, and reconstruct their publics. Feeding into growing public discontent with, and distrust of, practices of impression management (Inglehart & Norris, 2016), coupled with the assumption that disclosure of discrete activities serves a democratic purpose, visibility has the potential to become not only a "weapon of the witness" (Brants & Voltmer, 2019) as wielded by the media, but also a weapon of populists in their efforts to pitch the elite against the people. A populist political communication strategy positions them as the "true" voice of the people in opposition to a dishonest or elite establishment by appealing to their concerns and interests. The rhetoric used by populist leaders frequently highlights the contrast between the "common people" and the "corrupt elites" or "establishment," positioning them as the defenders of the former. As (Brants & Voltmer, 2019) pointed out, populism as a political communication approach is characterized by a number of fundamental traits and tactics. Simple, clear language is frequently used in populist messages to appeal to a broad audience. Avoiding intricate policy discussions, the goal is to communicate in a style that is relatable to and easily understood by average folks. In addition, populist politicians frequently make emotional appeals to their supporters.

A populist leader could appeal to societal discontent, rage, fear, or resentment in some areas by promising to address these issues and give the people's voice back. Thus, it is very typical for populist leaders to present themselves as outsiders challenging the current political system. They present themselves as "anti-establishment" personalities, highlighting the perceived gulf between the general public and the political establishment. Additionally, political leaders embraced identity politics and nationalism. Nationalism and identity politics are occasionally incorporated into populism, which emphasizes the goals and ideals of a particular country or social group. This may entail promoting ethnic or cultural identification and a sense of "us" versus "them." Social media gives political figures a platform to use "authenticity," or language and style that are distinctly non-political (Higgins, 2017).

It's crucial to remember that populism can manifest itself in a variety of ways and be linked to a variety of ideological viewpoints. Politicians from all political parties can use populist tactics by tailoring them to the particular situation and audience they are trying to reach. While populism can be successful at gaining support and responding to justifiable worries, it can also be polarizing, oversimplify difficult topics, and undermine democratic institutions and norms. Analysis and discussion of the effects of populist communication tactics on societies and political institutions are continuing.

4. Findings and Discussion

From the overall data it can be seen the summary results demonstrate that a total of 98 content posts on IG @Jokowi (54%) have vaccine-or vaccination-themed content, including a range

of vaccines, safe and halal vaccinations vaccine socialization, procurement of vaccines, and mass vaccination programs that are typically accompanied by the President's official visits to vaccine sites. The next theme, "appeal," is in second place with a total of 56 articles (30.6%), including appeals to local governments to work in tandem with the federal government to manage COVID19 and to the general public to stay out and celebrate National Idul Fitri.

The audience is advised to constantly be disciplined when putting health measures into practice in this appeal-themed content. The content on the theme of "Encouragement" is also directed specifically at state-owned institutions or agencies, such as the BPPT (Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology), to be more creative and progressive in providing health support tools and a vital quality of life during the COVID19 pandemic. With a total of 31 pieces of content (16.9%), the 'visit' theme from IG @Jokowi came in third. The President's visits to the sites of mass vaccination implementation are included in the content-themed "Visit" as well as visits that are equally important, such as reviews of the infrastructure and facilities that are ready to be used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients as prepared in the Market Area Grass, Jakarta and a visit to the oxygen producer, PT. Samator. Papua's preparation for the XX PON's implementation or special government programs related to handling COVID19, such as the distribution of packages to those who are undergoing self-isolation due to COVID19, are examples of routine annual government programs that fall under the theme of "government program," which takes up the fourth spot with a total of 20 content (10.9%).

Table 4.1 keywords that appear frequently in
the posting timeframe January-December 2021

No.	Keyword	Total
1	Vaccination	98
2	International Collaboration	14
3	Encouragement	56
4	Site Visit	31
5	Statement	15
6	Celebration	14
7	International Activity	14
8	Government Programs	20

Table 4.2 number of posts per month

Month	Total
Jan	12
Feb	13
March	24
April	8
May	14
June	13
July	30
August	23
September	17
October	11
November	11
December	7

The data gathered in Joko Widodo Instagram account reveals some issues that focus on Joko Widodo implementing a narrative construction for the COVID-19 vaccine campaign that focused on several key elements including importance of vaccination. As seen in picture 4.1 Jokowi emphasized the importance of vaccination as a crucial step in controlling the spread of the virus and protecting public health. He highlighted that vaccination would play a critical role in saving lives, reducing hospitalizations, and ultimately enabling the country to overcome the pandemic.


Picture 1. Joko Widodo shown himself vaccinated by doctor
Post by 12 January 2021

The picture is accompanied with a caption that emphasizes a significant endeavor as an Indonesian citizen to be immune to this pandemic by taking vaccines as soon as possible. Jokowi put him as a role model who was willing to take vaccines and solved the problem. He also mentioned Covid-19 vaccination, which was only administered after the Indonesian Ulema Council granted a holy and halal use declaration and BPOM provided an emergency use license. The discourse of Halal is part of During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MUI's halal certification for vaccines became a significant part of the vaccine discourse in Indonesia. The government and health authorities worked closely with the MUI to obtain the halal certification for approved vaccines, ensuring that the vaccines would be accepted by the Muslim community.

The MUI's involvement added a religious dimension to the vaccine discourse, providing religious legitimacy and assuaging concerns among Muslim individuals and communities. It helped address potential vaccine hesitancy or skepticism within the Muslim population and encouraged widespread acceptance and uptake of the vaccines. By collaborating with the MUI and obtaining halal certification, the Indonesian government aimed to ensure that vaccination efforts were inclusive, taking into account religious considerations and catering to the needs and beliefs of the Muslim population. This approach helped foster confidence and trust in the vaccine rollout and contributed to the overall success of the vaccination campaign in Indonesia.

Another post Joko Widodo also exposes his concern to provide representation of expertise and scientific evidence to support the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines. Moreover, Jokowi and his government consistently referenced the findings of reputable health organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM), to assure the public about the reliability of the vaccines. As it can be seen on picture 2 and 3.
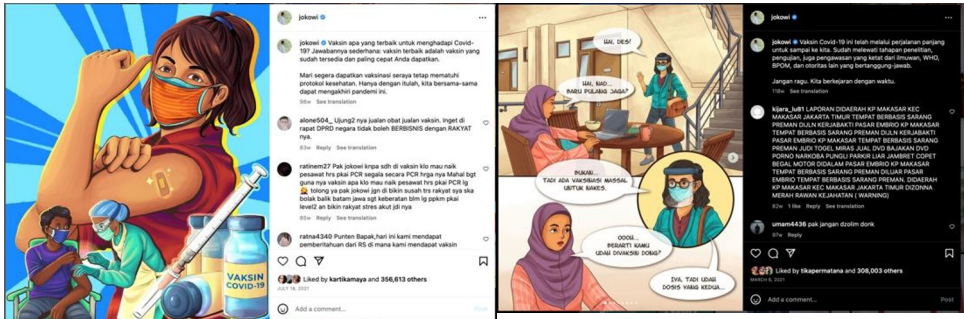
Picture 2 and 3 Vaccine campagne keep posted on Jokowi's Instagram
Post by 18 July and 6 March 2021

Not only that but the importance of taking part with vaccines is part of national unity and solidarity, as Jokowi emphasized the need for national unity and solidarity in the face of the pandemic. He encouraged all segments of society, regardless of political affiliations or backgrounds, to come together and prioritize the collective well-being by getting vaccinated. Therefore, Jokowi also emphasized the government's efforts to secure a sufficient supply of vaccines and ensure equitable distribution across the country. He highlighted the various vaccine procurement strategies and partnerships with international organizations to demonstrate the government's commitment to providing access to vaccines for all Indonesian citizens (see in picture 2). Including vaccine safety and monitoring, the narrative also emphasized the government's commitment to vaccine safety and monitoring. Jokowi assured the public that rigorous safety protocols and monitoring systems were in place to address any potential adverse effects and ensure public health (see picture 3), this all about gaining trust from people. He urged eligible individuals to register for vaccination and emphasized the importance of communities working together to achieve high vaccination rates.

Overall, Jokowi's narrative construction regarding COVID-19 vaccines centered around the importance of vaccination, scientific evidence, national unity, access to vaccines, safety monitoring, and public participation. These elements aimed to instill confidence and promote widespread acceptance of vaccines as a crucial tool in combating the pandemic and protecting public health. In conventional, offline advertising, visuals are more remembered, attract more attention, and elicit stronger emotional reactions than words (Childers & Houston, 1984; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Pieters & Wedel, 2004). This phenomenon is known as "The Picture Superiority Effect" in psychological studies, which, when applied to political campaigning, claims that a voter's perceptions of a candidate's character attributes can be influenced by just one image (Paivio et al., 1968; Stenberg, 2006)

During Joko Widodo's presidency (known as Jokowi), populism was observed as a political communication strategy. He applied populism as a political communication strategy through appeal to the masses-populism often involves appealing to the concerns and aspirations of the general public. Jokowi's political communication strategy aimed at connecting with the masses, particularly the lower-income groups and those in rural areas. He presented himself as a man of the people and focused on addressing their everyday issues and needs. Furthermore, Jokowi's also pertained to simple and direct messaging, as seen as well in picture 4 and 5.
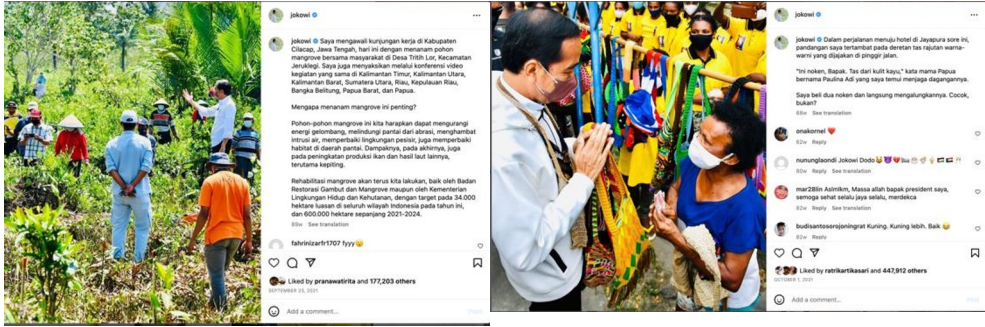
Picture 4 and 5 Jokowi's personal connection as part of his communication strategy
Post by 23 September 2021 and 21 October 2023

Populist leaders usually communicate with their followers in plain terms. Jokowi opted for a clear communication strategy, outlining his policies and beliefs in simple words while referencing pertinent experiences. Since Jokowi was able to relate to and connect with a large audience and their common problems, he embraced this type of strategy to engage in more direct connection and approach to people. Authenticity and a sense of intimacy were important components of Jokowi's communication strategy. The deliberate creation and application of "symbolic devices, which can be constructed with both visual and verbal messages, that provide a shorthand cue to audiences for the identification and enhancement of specific" characteristics of a person, an organization, a phenomenon, or a cause are what is referred to as political image-making (Bennett, 2016; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019).

Populist leaders frequently try to build a relationship of trust and honesty with their followers (Cervi et al., 2021). Jokowi used a variety of communication tools, including social media, to interact with the public directly and project an approachable image. As a result, research by Instagram's Joko Widodo demonstrates how visual-focused platforms are increasingly providing attention to their visual content. According to studies in the field of visual communication, images are more effective than text at drawing in and holding viewers' attention (Filimonov et al., 2016; Russmann & Svensson, 2017). On his Instagram, Joko Widodo frequently went out into the community, talked to people, and gave the impression that he was a leader who cared about the welfare of the people and understood their problems.

Jokowi frequently sends nationalistic messages that integrate nationalist vocabulary and symbols as part of his posture, which always conveys that he is from the grassroots. During his administration, Jokowi's political communication strategy focused on nationalistic themes, highlighting Indonesia's sovereignty, economic independence, and national growth. The message was intended to promote a sense of pride and community among the people. He consistently emphasized the importance of measures like social assistance programs, infrastructure improvement plans, and programs to reduce poverty. Jokowi presented himself as an advocate for economic development and pledged to meet the concerns of the underprivileged and working class. Additionally, many of his populist movements capitalize on anti-establishment emotions and present themselves as outsiders opposing the ruling political class. In order to capitalize on this emotion, Jokowi, who was a relative political outsider before being elected president, painted himself as a new face in Indonesian politics who would bring about change and address corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Overall, it's important to note that populism can be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and its interpretation may vary depending on different perspectives. The explanations

provided above highlight some common features observed in Jokowi's political communication strategy during Covid-19 crisis during his presidency, reflecting elements of populism as a communication approach.

5 Conclusion

Jokowi's political communication through Instagram during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 was characterized by his portrayal as a man of the people, focusing on addressing their everyday issues and needs. By adopting a straightforward communication approach, Jokowi effectively presented his policies and beliefs in plain terms, drawing upon relevant experiences that resonated with a broad audience. This strategy allowed him to establish a strong connection with the people and relate to their everyday situations, enhancing his popularity and credibility as a leader.

Furthermore, Jokowi recognized the importance of addressing the Covid-19 pandemic and emphasized the significance of vaccination. It is worth noting that the Covid-19 vaccines administered in Indonesia went through a rigorous approval process, ensuring their safety and compliance with religious guidelines. Jokowi highlighted that the vaccination program only commenced after the Indonesian Ulema Council granted a holy and halal use declaration, signifying the religious acceptability of the vaccines, and the National Agency of Drug and Food Control (BPOM) provided an emergency use license, verifying their efficacy and safety. Through his Instagram feeds, Jokowi effectively utilized the platform to engage with the public, providing timely updates and disseminating crucial information about the pandemic and vaccination efforts. By combining a direct communication style with an emphasis on addressing the people's concerns and prioritizing their everyday needs, Jokowi fostered a sense of connection, trust, and unity during a challenging time. His political communication through Instagram during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 demonstrated his ability to effectively engage with the public and mobilize support for his policies and initiatives.

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