

On The Front Lines of a Pandemic: The Maltese Response to Covid-19

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Abstract

Malta did exceptionally well when COVID-19 first hit the Maltese Islands. Health experts around the world took notice. However, health care in Malta is dominated by the Ministry of Health and updates about the COVID-19 pandemic are vetted by the Health authorities. After reading about the pandemic in Malta, we set up a visit to the islands to discover what was going on. While the government provides useful information to the public, it can also obfuscate what should be a transparent and scientific process. We paid particular attention to the island of Gozo where locals spend hours idling in the bars, sharing information with anyone who cares to listen. This provided us with fresh insights about how two parallel layers of information, one official, the other unofficial, portray different pictures during the pandemic and result in unexpected outcomes. While government officials seek to dominate the narrative, the pandemic ebbs and flows, making a mockery of predictions. Interposed between public policy and the pandemic is the public with a mind of its own. While official information may be more readily available, without a time-consuming examination of what the people are saying, the glass box will remain a black box.

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