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Georgian Voters Duped by Empty Promises

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Georgian Dream party candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili won the country's presidential election Sunday. That came as no surprise, considering that the "Dreamers" had already managed to jail every prominent opposition candidate such as Vano Merabishvili, the former interior and state security minister who turned Georgia's crime-ridden country into a sparkling new state ruled by law and order.

The results of Georgia's presidential election are a sad illustration of what democracy leads to in a poor country.

Following the "Rose Revolution," the administration of outgoing President Mikhail Saakashvili achieved remarkable results. Georgia was essentially a failed state in 2003. Electricity blackouts were common in Tbilisi, "crime boss" was considered the most honorable job title, and the Georgian siloviki were making fortunes stealing cars, selling drugs and ransoming hostages to Pankisi Gorge guerillas.

Yet in a remarkable short few years, Georgia was transformed into a user-friendly state. Extortionists, drug dealers and kidnappers were imprisoned, taxes were reduced, and tax revenues climbed. State property was sold off in fair auctions, and Georgia's business climate significantly improved.

But Georgia's voters had grown accustomed over the years of Soviet rule to a mindless existence. As a result, in the election for prime minister one year ago they voted for Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch who had made his billions in questionable deals that relied on his close ties to a Kremlin that hated Saakashvili.

Ivanishvili promised voters the moon, telling them he would quadruple pensions and lower gasoline prices and utilities fees. That was how his party won the parliamentary elections in October 2012.

On the eve of those elections, drivers in Tbilisi actually refused to fill their gas tanks, believing that Ivanishvili would win the next day and gasoline prices would immediately drop by 30 percent.

At a time when even ordinary police officers refused to take bribes, the opposition leveled absurd corruption charges against senior officials. Opposition activists blocked Saakashvili from entering a restaurant, obstructed his path to the airport and stormed a jail to free thugs arrested for beating journalists. When the police detained them, they screamed that the Saakashvili regime was beating peaceful demonstrators.

And now that the opposition has been in power in Georgia for one year, it has failed to prove a single one of its allegations and has committed all of the misdeeds of which it had accused its opponents.

Former Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili and other key ministers have been thrown in jail on trumped-up charges because it was impossible to convict a single member of the former ruling elite on corruption charges. For example, the former defense minister was jailed for insulting officers who had refused to engage in combat training.

After Ivanishvili came to power, members of the new regime rushed to tap into budgetary funds, award themselves pay bonuses, appoint their friends to government posts and, with great fanfare, release so-called political prisoners from jail who were really just various clowns who had conspired against their country or were ordinary criminals.

Instead of lower gas prices, investment dropped. Instead of higher pensions, crime increased. Over the past 12 months, the Georgian Dream failed to carry out its campaign promises and its

dreams. Despite that, Georgian voters once again put the party's candidate in power. It seems that even empty promises are enough to keep some people happy.

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