

# [History](https://assignbuster.com/history-3/)

[](https://assignbuster.com/)[History](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/history/)

How accurate is it to describe the constitutional reforms of the years 1906-1914 as significant? The October Manifesto in 1905 offered many Russians the hope that constitutional reform would be significant. In particular, it would bring about a constitution whereby an elected Duma would actually have authority; for example, laws issued by the Tsar would actually need their approval. However, by April, 1906, the Fundamental Law would dampen these hopes and ensure reforms were anything but significant. However, what cannot be debated is that reforms did take place and this essay will aim to identify the successes and come to a conclusion in regards to how significant a change took place. As mentioned in introduction, many reforms took place during 1906-1914. It was the first time in Russian history that the elected assembly introduced. The four Dumas that took place within this period allowed the elected deputies to voice criticism of the Tsar criticism of the Tsar and his government. In mid-1907, Stolypin abruptly changed the way in which the Duma was elected, making controversial and improper use of Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws. The Tsar made no attempt to dispense with the duma altogether even though the opposition shown by the first two Dumas. He was advised by his foreign ministers, who at this time were in trade talks with France and Britain, that Russia’s new commercial allies were greatly impressed by his creation of a representative national parliament. Stolypin introduced new laws that restricted the vote to the propertied classes. The peasants and industrial workers lost the franchise. The consequence was that the third and fourth Dumas were heavily dominated by the right-wing parties, a reversal of the position in the first two Dumas in which the radical parties had held a large majority. Any criticisms of tsardom were now much more muted. Stolypin found the third duma more co-operative, which enabled him to pursue his land reforms without opposition from the deputies. It exercised its right to question ministers and to discuss state finances. It also used its committee system to make important proposals for modernising the armed services. These constitutional reforms set up schools for the children of poor and national insurance for industrial workers. Not only these events occurred but also there were a number of other factors which can state the successes of Dumas. First and foremost, the establishment and continued existence of the Dumas moved Russia closer towards becoming a full democracy even through the Tsar still dominated this period. In addition, the forth duma worked effectively with government until it was interrupted by war in August, 1914. In 4th duma, social reform work continued, but prepared to criticize government. It was the beginning of stepping into a more democratic nation as a country that seriously lacked freedom. Surprisingly, by 1912, Nicholas begun to ‘ like’ and accept the idea of a constitution despite the 3th and 4th dumas were more right wing. Historians also emphasise the progressive work of the duma in providing state welfare and suggest that it was only the blindness of the tsarist government that prevented the duma from making a greater contribution to the development of Russia. Moreover, the debates that were took place were widely reported and discussed within the media. However, there are also many reasons to believe that the constitutional reforms during 1906-1914 were not significant in challenging or changing the power of Tsarist Russia. In particular, the Fundamental Laws ensured the Dumas had very limited powers. The October Manifesto had promised so much but in reality there was very little progress. The Fundamental Laws made it clear that the powers of the Duma were to be severely restricted. The provisions of the Fundamental Laws fell a long way short of what liberals and others had expected and left them feeling cheated and betrayed. The citizens had expected much more from the revolution of 10905. In particular, article 4 of the new constitution suggests that the Tsar’s power remains unchanged and unchallenged. Also, important areas of government policy, such as defence and foreign affairs, were declared to be the preserve of the Tsar alone. What made it worse was that the Tsar was given the power to dissolve the Duma at any time of his choosing. In this case, the Tsar would have a lot of opposition within the Russian parliament, all he has to do was dissolve the Dumas and citizens have gained nothing. Also, under the Fundamental Law the Tsar appointed his own ministers and advisers without any need for Duma approval. It was not shown to citizen as a democracy. Furthermore, Article 87 of the Fundamental Law gave the Tsar the right to proclaim new laws without reference to the Duma at times when it was not in session. Laws made in this fashion had to be subsequently ratified by the Duma- but ratification could be delayed until years later. In addition, there was no mention of a two-house or bicameral arrangement in the October Manifesto. The Fundamental Law, however, established a counterweight to the Duma in the shape of the Imperial State Council. Its law-making powers were equal to those of the Duma-meaning that it could block anything the Duma did. Moreover, there was a lack of success in the outcomes of the Dumas thus highlighting the limitations of constitutional reform. First two Dumas can be exemplified because they were abruptly dismissed and later Dumas were elected on a restricted franchise and the last two Dumas on the other side were selected by the tsar and the high class citizens in order to decrease the number of opposition. The lower class citizens got disproportionate number of votes to those of the middle and high class citizens. It meant that there were also voting system problems. . This shows that the duma itself was for the tsar, not an example of freedom of speech. In the third duma, in addition, Stolypin introduced several changes to the Fundamental Laws that restricted many people from voting to get more pro-tsarist votes. Also, on the fourth duma, although the fourth duma was less openly obstructive than the earlier ones had been, it still voiced criticism of the tsar’s government. All things considered, there was also a lack of success in the outcomes of the Dumas. In addition, there were government actions that limited freedom of actions during the period. For example, a event which called The Vyborg appeal occurred for the result of that the duma met in a mood of bitterness. The elections had returned an assembly that was dominated by the reformist parties. They immediately voiced their anger at what they regarded as the government going back on its promises. Ivan Goremykin, the chief minister, told them that their demands were ‘ inadmissible’ and Nicholas II was reported as saying ‘ After two months of bitter wrangling, the tsar ordered the duma to be dissolved. This incidents caused the strikes. The Lena Goldfield incident happened as well as Vyborg appeal occurred was one of the example of failure of constitutional reforms. The mention of the Lena workers was a reference to the notorious incident that occurred in 1912 in the Lena Goldfields in Siberia. Demands fro m the miners there for better pay and conditions were resisted by the employers, who appealed to the police to arrest the strike leaders as criminals. When the police moved into Lena, the strikers closed ranks and the situation rapidly worsened, resulting in troops firing on and killing or injuring a large number of miners. Moreover, there were a huge amount of repressive policies. Firstly, ‘ De-revolutionising’ can be exemplified. The high price of land, which led to heavy mortgage payments, had impoverished the peasants. It was one of the reasons why the peasants involved in revolution. Second, there was the ‘ martial law’ which was proclaimed and a network of military courts, with sweeping powers, was used to quell disturbances wherever they occurred. Between 1906 and 1911 there were over 2500 executions in Russia. In conclusion, although there was constitutional reform within Russia during 1906 — 1914, it was not really significant. The Four Dumas that took place were relatively unsuccessful in that they either fizzled out rapidly or the Tsarist government implemented changes in the Fundamental Law thus ensuring opposition in the Duma was conservative. Overall, I feel that reform did take place mainly due to their being no political freedom prior to the Fundamental Laws and therefore any relaxation in the autocratic polices of the Tsar would be significant. However, the reforms that took place were not significant due to the fact they often promised more than they delivered. This is especially true in regards to what people expected and the fact that the initial Fundamental Laws were changed in order to get a more ‘ conservative’ Duma would be evidence of this.