2. Gorbachev’s political reforms

a) The problems of political reform

Lenin and Stalin had created:
- A centralised party with control over the Soviet Union
- Regional parties in the republics that obeyed the Party
- A party that obeyed the Politburo

Any policy which weakened the authority of the Party weakened the Union, as the Communist Party held the Soviet Union together. Reform was needed because the tension between the goals of the Soviet Communist Party and the reality of life increased – led to cynicism. The Soviet people became aware of the corruption within the Party.

Reform was dangerous – democracy could lead to the end of Communism. Khrushchev’s reforms threatened Soviet control of Hungary and Poland. Brezhnev made no attempt to reform. Andropov wanted greater freedom in the Party to discuss problems and promote radicals e.g. Gorbachev.

Gorbačev’s objectives:
- Revitalise the Soviet Union
- End stagnation
- End corruption in the Party
- Open up debate
- Allow freedom of expression for intellectuals
- Allow the public to have more access to information

b) Gorbachev’s early political reforms, 1985-86

Gorbačev’s appointment as General Secretary was the beginning of a shift of power from one generation to another → replacing the senior officials was his first priority. He appointed young Communists who supported the idea of reform and change.

In his first year, he focused on economic reforms but as those began to fail, he was convinced that political reform would revitalise the economy.

Democratisation – limit the power of traditionalists and speed up reform and end strict centralisation
- Openness – end the distortion of economic information

c) GLASNOST, 1986-88

“openness”
- First spoke about in December 1974
- From 1983 onwards it was used by Andropov supporters who wanted to expose corruption within the Party
- Opposed by hard-line Communists

The Twenty-Seventh Party Congress
- February and March 1986
- ‘Systematic and all-round improvement of socialism’
- ‘genuine democracy’ – power exercised for the people and by the people
- Little openness and Gorbachev failed to set out proposals for the Party

Liberalisation of the media, 1986
- Gorbachev hoped that intellectuals would criticise the Party and create new ideas
- Alexandr Yakovlev – responsibility for the media
- Yakovlev appointed radical editors for Moscow News and Ogonek (a Communist paper)
b) The impact of Gorbachev’s reforms

Cadre change and anti-corruption
- Gorbachev argued that effective government was more important than representative government—no longer committed to ensuring that republic governments were staffed by local people → local leaders were replaced by Russians
  - Linked to anti-corruption campaign as his purges were far-reaching e.g. Central Asia in 1986
- Gorbachev’s Politburo only had one non-Russian = resentment e.g. in Kazakhstan in 1986, there were riots when a Russian leader replaced the Kazak leader Dinmukhammed Kunaev

Acceleration
  - Gorbachev’s economic reforms = economic decline
    - Standards of living in the republics declined or stagnated
    - The inequalities between the new Russian leaders and the people they ruled became obvious → Gorbachev didn’t challenge the privileges of Communist Party officials
    - His reforms were associated with a new privileged leadership and economic decline.

Glasnost
- Demand for greater autonomy and independence
- Exposed the ways in which Stalin persecuted non-Russian people
- Allowed Soviets to see how much higher Western standards of living were compared to the Soviet Union → glasnost undermined the perception that the Soviet Union benefited the people in the republics
- Allowed nationalist groups to publish material containing their demands

The Sinatra Doctrine
- Soviet relationship with the Eastern European ‘satellite states’ was summarised in the Brezhnev Doctrine of 1968—Soviets had the right to intervene in the ‘satellite states’ and republics to protect socialism
- August 1989—Gorbachev announced the Sinatra Doctrine after Frank Sinatra’s ‘My Way’, allowing greater freedom in the Eastern European countries = NO MILITARY INTERVENTION
- In Poland and Hungary, new leaders won democratic elections, and in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, there were revolutions against communist rule e.g. Fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th of November 1989
- GORBACHEV ALLOWED IT TO HAPPEN.

Democratisation
- Allowed nationalists to fight and win elections → gained majorities in several of the republic’s parliaments in 1990 – first nationalist challenge since 1921
- March 1990 – Lithuania declared independence – Gorbachev claimed that the declaration was illegal and attempted to impose economic sanctions
- May 1990 – Yeltsin insisted that Russian laws were legally superior to Soviet law → use of banned Russian flag indicated that the nationalists in Russia wanted to break away