• Difficult to govern — vast country with a population of 130 million from over 20 ethnic groups
• Power of the Tsar — it was an autocracy (ruled by one person) and the Tsar’s secret police suppressed all opposition
• Emerging economy — there were low crop yields due to backward farming methods and Russia was undergoing industrialisation but it was underdeveloped
• Power of the Orthodox Church — wealthy and exercised a powerful influence in Russian society and supported the Tsar
• Divided society — it was divided into rigid class systems:
  • Aristocracy (rich land owners) — 1% of the population but owned 25% of the land and were very rich
  • Middle class (bankers, merchants, factory owners) — beginning to emerge helped by developments in industry
  • Working class — peasants accounted for 80% of the population, living in poor conditions with a low life expectancy; industrial workers were peasants who had moved to work in the factories and lived in over-crowded slums, working long hours with little pay
• Russia’s entry into the First World War made these political, economic and social problems worse

Growing opposition to the Tsar
Criticism of the leadership
• The character of Tsar Nicholas — he was not a strong ruler and refused to share power, believing that he had been chosen by God to rule and failed to realise the extent of the opposition
• The influence of Rasputin — after 1907 the Tsar and Tsarina came to rely on Gregory Rasputin to help control the blood disorder of their son Alexis suffered from. The aristocracy disliked the influence Rasputin exercised over the royal family
• The impact of the 1905 revolution — the events of Bloody Sunday (January 1905) demonstrators were fired upon by the Tsar’s soldiers; forced the Tsar to issue the October Manifesto (issued in 1905 by Tsar Nicolas promising constitutional reform) which promised freedom of speech, end to censorship and calling of the Duma (Assembly that the Tsar consulted but which had little power). Nicholas failed to take notice of the warnings of discontent and introduced a harsh policy of repression
• The failure of the Dumas — Nicholas quickly took action to reduce the power of the Duma and the four Dumas elected between 1906 and 1914 had little influence which fuelled opposition
• Industrial unrest — rapid industrialisation had created poor living and working conditions and resulted in many strikes, one of the largest being the Lena goldfields in 1912 and they became more common before 1914

Political opposition
• Growth of political opposition — after the 1905 revolution political parties became legal and they increasingly demanded change in the way Russia was governed. The main parties were:
  • Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) — Formed in 1901 they aimed to seize power by revolution and take the land from the wealthy to give to the poor, eventually led by Alexander Kerensky
  • Social Democratic Party — Formed in 1898 and followed the teaching of Karl Marx aiming to use revolution to bring about a communist system of government and in 1903 the party split into two: the Mensheviks led by Julius Martov and Leon Trotsky; and the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin
  • The Liberals — Mostly the middle class who wanted to bring about peaceful political change; they wanted a democratic system in which the Tsar shared power with the elected Duma. After 1905 they split into two: the Octoberists led by Alexander Guchkov who were satisfied with the promises made by the Tsar in the October Manifesto; and the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) led by Paul Milyukov who wanted to push for further constitutional change
The role of the Red Army

- In contrast to the Whites, the Reds had one commander — Trotsky, and one army — the Red Army
- In 1919 it numbered 3 million men and by 1920 this had grown to 5 million
- Many of the peasants were reluctant conscripts and desertions were common
- In the later stages of the war the army was poorly equipped in terms of ammunition and uniforms, but generally well supplied with food sue to War Communism (state control of industry and agriculture)
- The Reds had the advantage of controlling central Russia and had command of the railways to enable it to move troops quickly
- The backbone of the Red Army was the leadership of Trotsky who travelled to the front lines giving morale-boosting speeches
- Trotsky brought back conscription, used former tsarist officers, promotes talent and introduced a harsh code of discipline

The murder of the Tsar and his family

- After the February Revolution the royal family were held under house-arrest at the palace of Tsarskoye Selo outside Petrograd and then moved to Tobolsk in Siberia
- In April 1918 the Bolsheviks moved them to Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains
- By early July 1918 the Czech Legion was approaching Ekaterinburg and, fearing the royal family would be rescued and handed over to the Whites, Lenin ordered their execution
- At 2am on 17 July the Tsar and his family were shot and killed in the basement of Ipatiev House and the bodies were buried in the forest on the outskirts of the town and remained undiscovered until 1991