The March Revolution 1917
The First World War placed an unbearable strain on Russia's weak government and economy, resulting in mass shortages and hunger.

In the meantime, the mismanagement and failures of the war turned the people—and importantly the soldiers—against the Tsar, whose decision to take personal command of the army seemed to make him personally responsible for the defeats.
In March 1917, the Tsar lost control first of the streets, then of the soldiers, and finally of the Duma, resulting in his forced abdication on 15 March 1917.
1. Many Weaknesses

1. Russia had been humiliated in a war with Japan, 1904.

2. There were many nationalities, languages and religions (the only unity was the Romanov dynasty).

3. Russia was vast – 125 million people spread across Europe and Asia. This made government difficult, especially because of poor communications – bad roads and few railways.
4. An out-of-date farming economy. Most of the population were peasants who lived in the country and are under the control of the nobles.

5. Russia was beginning to industrialise (eg Trans-Siberian railway, 1904). Towns/factories were starting to grow up. But there was worker poverty and poor living conditions – which created a large workforce, disaffected and concentrated in Petrograd, the capital. Also a small wealthier middle class were beginning to want a say in the government.
6. Tsar Nicholas was an autocrat – Nicholas carried out all the business of government alone, without even a secretary.

He was a weak Tsar. At first he refused to compromise then, in the crisis of 1917, failed to act.

7. There was opposition to the government from:

The Kadets – middle classes and liberal landowners who wanted Russia to have a Parliament like England.
Social Revolutionaries (wanted a peasant revolution, and to take all the land from the nobles).

The Communists (followers of Karl Marx), who were divided into the moderate Mensheviks (wanted Communism without a revolution) and the extremist Bolsheviks (wanted a violent proletarian revolution).

After 1900, there were many assassinations and protests (eg Bloody Sunday, 1905 and the murder of Prime Minister Stolypin in 1911).
2. World War I

- The First World War was the key factor.
- The army was badly led and poorly equipped. Russian defeats at Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes – the Russians lost 200,000 men – lost the government the support of the army.
- The war took 15 million men from the farms and trains had to be used for the war (so they could not bring food to the cities) so there were food shortages and food prices rose, all of which created anger and unrest in Petrograd.
The winter of 1916–17 was severe. Food shortages got worse – there was a famine in the cities.
3. Tsar’s Mistakes

- The Tsar took personal command of the army – which did not help the war effort and meant he was blamed for the defeats.

- He left the Tsarina in charge. She was incompetent (she let Rasputin run the government), and (because she was a German) rumours circulated that she was trying to help Germany to win.

- By February 1917 the government was in chaos.

- Finally, in the crisis, Nicholas went to pieces
On 8 March 1917, there were riots in Petrograd about the food shortages and the war.

On 12 March the Army abandoned the Tsar – the soldiers mutinied and refused to put down the riots. The government lost control of the country.

When you lose the army’s support, you lose POWER.
5. Duma abandoned the Tsar

On 13 March members of the Duma went to Nicholas to tell him to abdicate.
On 12 March 1917 Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, telegraphed the Tsar:

The situation is getting worse. Something has to be done immediately. Tomorrow is too late. The last hour has struck. The future of the country and the royal family is being decided.

The Tsar read it and said: Again, that fat-bellied Rodzianko has written me a load of nonsense, which I won’t even bother to answer.
Events of the Revolution

- 7 March: Steelworkers go on strike.
- 11 March: Troops fire on crowds. The Duma urges action – Tsar dissolves the Duma.
12 March: Soldiers mutiny and join riots.

Soldiers and workers set up the ‘Petrograd Soviet’ of 2,500 elected deputies (i.e. the Tsar’s government had fallen. Russia had 2 governments)

13 March: Duma sets up a ‘Provisional Government’, led by Kerensky.

The Tsar gets on the train to Petrograd, but (on 14 March) is arrested on the way and (on 15 March) abdicates.