Quotes

'People do not influence events. God directs everything and the Tsar, as God’s anointed, should not take advice from anyone...' Nicholas II

'Russia is the last hope of the despots' Karl Marx

'To the emperor of all Russia belongs the Supreme and unlimited power' Fundamental Law

'The Tsarist system could not cope with the challenges of urbanisation and the development of a modern economy' Orlando Figes
Church

Dominated life in rural Russia. Controlled education and taught people to show loyalty and obedience to the Tsar and his officials. Helped to promote the Fundamental law.

 Had significant influence over God-fearing and illiterate peasantry. Because the Tsar appointed senior church officials, he controlled this powerful body.

 However, there was a wide range of different religions in the Russian Empire e.g. Catholic Poles, Jews. The Orthodox Church had limited influence in these areas. Church had limited influence in growing cities. e.g. 1900 - One Moscow suburb of 40,000 people had 1 church and 1 priest.
Okhrana

Spied on opponents of the regime. Infiltrated opposition groups with agent provocateurs. Stood outside the law and answerable only to the Tsar. Had unlimited power; could flog, fine, imprison, exile or execute opponents.

Hugely feared. Played a key role in enforcing Tsar’s will, and stopping political opposition. Fear of arrest dissuaded others from joining opposition groups. Informants made sure authorities were aware of potential threats.

However, only 10,000 regular police in rural Russia in 1900. Okhrana could not prevent strikes. 1905 75% of Russian workers went on strike. Had limited control over opponents in exile e.g. Lenin. Drove opposition underground - harder to monitor and control.
The Army

Huge (1.5 million men) and heavily armed. Controlled by upper class officers. Used to crush opposition. Cossacks particularly feared. Cossack regiments sent to potential trouble spots. Mere presence enough to restore order.

Army loyal to Tsar because officers were mainly upper-class and relied on the Tsar for their commissions.

'the visible broadsword, complementing the hidden dagger of the Okhrana'

However, the army had to be used 1500 times to suppress disorder between 1893 and 1903. This shows that there was significant opposition to the regime.
Nobility

Russian nobility relied on military and civil service to the state for its wealth and position in society.

The Tsar had enormous power over this group. They prospered in Tsarist Russia and were therefore loyal to the Tsar.

However, because promotion in the army and government was restricted to upper classes, this undermined the efficiency of the Tsarist 'Pillars of Autocracy', and also alienated the middle-classes.
Civil Service

Mainly middle-class. Ran the legal system, local government and the police. Enforced laws of censorship and association (who could hold meetings). Because civil servants relied on the government for their jobs, this ensured their loyalty to the Tsarist state.

However, for every 1000 people in Russian Empire, only 4 state officials in 1900. 'The under-government of the localities was the system's main weakness' Figes.

Censorship controlled what people were able to read. Also restricted what university lecturers could say, controlled access to schools and limited books available in libraries. Made it difficult for opponents to communicate, and restricted the spread of liberal or revolutionary ideas.

Russia becoming more literate and politically aware society. University students up 10x, daily newspapers up from 13 to 856. Impossible to censor them all.

Censorship did not prevent underground pamphlets from being distributed, or universities becoming centres of radical thought.
Russification

Emphasised the superiority of all things Russian (language, religion, culture). Russian was the only official language in education, courts and government. Russian officials put in charge of non-Russian provinces. Non-Russians had to pay heavy taxes to Russian government.

Showed power of Tsar to dictate policy across the whole Empire.

However, policy alienated non-Russians. Many recruits to opposition parties were Jewish or from national minorities. Growth in railways and rural schools helped to spread nationalist ideas and demand for native rights. Significant opposition e.g. uprising in Ukraine, and refusal to use schools and churches in Armenia and Georgia.
Opposition Groups

Social revolutionaries - supported by peasants seeking land reform.

Social Democrats - Marxist party which was supported by industrial workers.

Liberals - wanted a British style parliament.

None of these groups was powerful or popular enough to threaten the Tsar.

The opposition groups did not work together, and there were even splits within each group e.g. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Social Democrats.

Prevented effective opposition.

‘Pillars of Autocracy’ made it hard for opposition groups to challenge Tsarist state e.g. leaders often exiled (Lenin)

Size of Russia and levels of illiteracy made spreading political ideas difficult.