It is more than twenty years since the publication of Archie Brown and Jack Gray’s *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (Brown and Gray, 1977) and Archie Brown’s *Political Culture and Communist Studies* (Brown, 1984a). While Communist power has in the interim largely receded into history, the premise of this book is that the need to consider the value of the concept of political culture in the face of post-Communist realities has not.

The study of political culture, as this book itself amply demonstrates, has never been monolithic conceptually or methodologically. But a similar set of questions confronts all those who have utilised a ‘political culture’ approach in their various ways. Should the conditions of post-Communism have an impact on the value we learned to assign to political culture as a result of these two important edited volumes, and indeed from many other writings by Brown and others that followed from the initial opening? Has our understanding of the value of political culture been significantly altered by the availability of greater information and data, and more importantly by the removal of many of the obstacles to free expression of cultural commitments by citizens of post-Communist states? How much, finally, has our estimation of the explanatory value of political culture to post-Communist conditions been affected by other developments in social science in the past twenty years, including not only developments in political culture research itself but also some of its conceptual alternatives that place greater emphasis on rational agency and the strategic environments in which individuals make choices?

Each of the chapters in the current volume engages in its own way with whether and how the insights into political culture that emerged in Communist studies may be updated and applied to post-Communist
conditions. Contributors were not asked to agree to a single definition of ‘political culture’ and readers will note differences across chapters in how authors conceptualise and engage with political culture research. These differences reflect the diversity of opinion within social science generally and within the political culture and post-Communist studies sub-disciplines.

Two very broad political culture perspectives – and two sceptical commentaries on them by Alexander and Pavel Lukin and by Stephen Welch – may be discerned in the chapters here, though each contribution contains considerable nuance and breadth of argument that tend to cross narrow conceptual boundaries. First, there are those (Stephen Whitefield and Jeffrey Hahn) who approach political culture as a particular form of individual-level social psychological attribute that can, in principle at least, be measured and tested for its relationship both to other kinds of psychological attributes and to overt political behaviour. (The manner of valid measurement and testing, of course, varies considerably across scholars who adopt this approach.) Political culture, from this perspective, has characteristics at the psychological level that make it comparable across countries; the research questions to be addressed, therefore, concern (i) whether political culture in any given context or situation is of empirical weight and (ii) the particular content of any operative cultural commitment. In the context of this book, therefore, these are questions about whether political culture, so understood, ‘matters’ in post-Communist conditions and, if so, about the kinds of cultural commitment that matter most.

By contrast, the second approach, favoured in this volume by Richard Sakwa, Charles King and Mary McAuley, tends to see political culture as a property of social collectives and embedded in the historically conditioned social practices and resources that define social meanings and possibilities of action for institutions and individuals that operate within these collectives. Studying political culture, from this perspective, is precisely to investigate the ways in which historical inheritances, both material and mental, shape the possibilities for change and development in social and institutional practices.

As is often the case, differences between these two positions can be overdrawn. (It is even known in social science and Russian studies for scholars to quarrel over such issues.) As editor of this volume, of course, I have had of necessity to see the value in both perspectives, despite the clear line of reasoning and evidence I bring to bear on the subject of political culture in the rest of this introduction and in my substantive empirical chapter. The desire for peace aside, however, it is important