Hi. This is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project, recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

This week's guest, Heath Brown, is an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center, CUNY. He has worked at the US Congressional Budget Office as a research fellow, at the American Bus Association as a policy assistant, and at the Council of Graduate Schools as Research and Policy Director. He is author of several books, including Immigrants in the Electoral Politics and The Tea Party Divided: The Hidden Diversity of a Maturing Movement. He is also an expert contributor to The Hill, as well as to The Atlantic magazine and The American Prospect magazine.

Welcome back to The Thought Project, Professor Brown.

It's great to be back here. I think this is either three of four, which must put me in some sort of very special circumstance here. It's-

Absolutely.

It's great to be back.

You are an exceptional guest at an exceptional time. So, when this podcast is published, we have 25 days to go for the Iowa caucus, the first contest of the Democratic Party's presidential nominee contest, and we're now down to really five major candidates, Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar. And second tier, and not to be disregarded, either, is Mike Bloomberg, Cory Booker, another billionaire, Tom Steyer, and Andrew Yang, the lone minority left in this lineup of candidates. But the second tier's got some issues of qualifying for the next debate. They either don't have enough donors or their pulling is subpar, so they're not going to be on the stage.

Right now, Heath, I want to ask you. Do you have any predictions on Iowa?

Well, I'm so glad that you didn't ask me to name all the candidates, because you're better. Your mind works better than mine on this. You're just, you've got that information at your fingers.

We still do have so many candidates out there, but in the race, but it really does come down to these five or so. You know, I think on the one hand, it doesn't really matter right now who wins Iowa. I think maybe more than any other cycle that we've been in, who wins Iowa? It's hard to imagine any of these candidates winning and that directing them to the nomination in a way that it might have in the past, and so-
Tanya Domi: So you don't think it matters in terms of momentum?

Heath Brown: I don't think it matters. I don't think ...

Tanya Domi: Hmm. Interesting.

Heath Brown: ... momentum really matters. You know, obviously, the one that people care most about is Mayor Pete, and if he comes out on top and there's any kind of margin there, that's really, really interesting. And so maybe with the exception of him, if any of the others come out on top, it could be interesting, but I don't think that this is going to have the momentum that Iowa causes have in the past.

Heath Brown: To me, the two that I'm most interested in are South Carolina and Nevada. Those seem, to me, the most interesting early contests that are going to say so much about it, because the Democratic electorate in those two states is, I think, much more interesting. It will say much about who ultimately is able to persist in this race, and who really has the legs for this. I don't think Iowa does that, really.

Tanya Domi: I see. Interesting. Well, I think you're right. In South Carolina, we're talking about a major African-American vote, and when you get to Nevada, we're talking about labor and we're talking about Latino votes. And in 2016, we all thought it was going to be the year of the Latino voter. Is that really going to happen in 2020? What do you think?

Heath Brown: You know, I ... Is it going to be the year of Latino ... You know what? I don't know that. I mean, I think the recent decision by Secretary Castro to get out of the race, and his decision to endorse Elizabeth Warren, is really the most interesting piece of evidence right now that that dynamic is going to be in play.

Heath Brown: Nevada-

Tanya Domi: That was a big move. That's a big move by Castro, and he was in New York City last night with Warren. He was doing the stand. He was doing the selfies with her. It wasn't just her, it was her and Castro together. I know some people who were at the event in Brooklyn last night.

Heath Brown: Yeah. It's a big deal. It's a big deal, and it's a surprise, and I suspect that we're going to have maybe another surprise before South Carolina.

Heath Brown: I think that sometimes, these things have a little momentum unto themselves, and his decision, maybe, is one that others are going to take a little bit more seriously. Our mayor hasn't made an endorsement yet, from what I can tell, and I don't know if people are going to be looking for his endorsement in the way
that they are for some other people. But that's another example of somebody who has tried to sit at the sideline, take advantage of the opportunity to get people courting him. I'm sure there are people courting him, as there are lots of different major officials out there, and so that's another one to pay attention to as we move over the next couple of weeks.

Tanya Domi: That's the current mayor, but a former mayor is now in the race, sitting out the first four contests, and Mike Bloomberg is spending money like we have never seen before in the history of American presidential elections. And I think he's ...

Tanya Domi: You've written a book about the role of money in politics, but Bloomberg's level of spending is really quite remarkable. I think one of the messages is, "We have to beat Trump. I'm going to do my part, whether he gets elected, whether he is competitive or not." I mean, his numbers have come up. I don't know what they are at the state level, but national level, we're looking like about 7% right now on various polls.

Tanya Domi: And we're looking at him dropping ... Both he and Trump are going to drop $10 million on Super Bowl ads, which most campaigns have never had that kind of money to spend. They just don't have that discretionary money to drop on Super Bowl Day.

Heath Brown: Right. Right. Absolutely, and it's ... What's really motivating all these candidates is always a little hard to tell. You'd say, "Well, on face value, they want to become President." But there's always these secondary, third level motivations that are very hard to understand.

Heath Brown: For the former mayor, it seems that he's interested in sitting in the background waiting for some of the other candidates to drop out, knowing that he has the money in hand to spend at any point and he doesn't have to worry too much about fundraising. It seems also that he's the candidate, maybe along with Joe Biden, that is positioning his campaign in the most direct way in opposition to the President.

Heath Brown: Now, all of the candidates are obviously vocal in their opposition to President Trump, but many of them are positioning their campaigns in a slightly different way on certain kinds of issues, on aspects of their personal identity in some ways, but it seems that the former Mayor Bloomberg is really taking on Trump as the main reason to back him, that he's the one who is able to take on Trump because somehow, he sits in this billionaire class, that he's able to challenge him in a way that these other candidates aren't able to challenge, and he's going to play this waiting game. I don't think it's going to work, but it does seem like his strategy is a novel one, the money on the one hand and sitting out these early races on the other.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. Very, very different. Very unique from anything we've ever seen.
Tanya Domi: Speaking of Trump, we are in the cycle. We're in the primaries. We're getting ready to have the first contest, and it looks like we may have a trial in the Senate, and I'd like to hear your thoughts about the effect of the impeachment process on the election of the President this year. I mean, this election is coming, and we're ... For the first time, we have somebody in the first term being impeached.

Heath Brown: Yeah, it's a big, big deal. It's a big deal historically, but the way in which things look like they are likely to play out ... Now, with this administration, you never know from day to day what's going to happen ...

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: ... so who knows, really, what's going to happen as soon as we're done with this recording? But if things stay along the current path, and senator McConnell is able to maintain the control that he has masterfully maintained in the Senate, it seems like this is going to be a process that's going to take place over a very short amount of time, is likely to have a vote that as close to exonerates the President as you can get.

Heath Brown: And I suspect by the time we get to the real, active campaign by this summer, impeachment's-

Tanya Domi: It's forgotten.

Heath Brown: It's just not going to be registering in the way that other things are, and what, I guess, leads me to that conclusion is there are things that happen with this presidency that just haven't happened in the past. And the assassination of the number two person, number two military official, or no, maybe number one military official, number two official ...

Tanya Domi: Two person ...

Heath Brown: ... in Iran ...

Tanya Domi: ... in the government. Or in, yes.

Heath Brown: ... is something that, three weeks ago, no one would have predicted, and if that happens, and there are so many other examples of things that we simply have never expected, who knows what's going to happen as this campaign really starts to heat up?

Heath Brown: And I suspect the things that we don't know right now are much more likely to drive this campaign than the things that we currently know about.
Tanya Domi: Well, I just want to go back, though, to the impeachment, because we've got about five or six Republican senators that are in purple states, or states that are going blue. They're going to have to vote. They're going to have to vote if there is, in fact, a trial, and I could foresee ads being cut on those votes, because Susan Collins is on the bubble in Maine. She's really in a blue state now, statewide, the governor. It's going blue. Cory Gardner in Colorado. It's a very purple state. It's a swing state.

Tanya Domi: You've got a situation where both seats are up in Arizona, and Arizona is definitely purple going blue, and if you're below Tuscon, it's blue. And you've got some really competitive races. Is it going to matter how they vote on the impeachment? It would be ...

Heath Brown: You know, I-

Tanya Domi: ... interesting to hear your thoughts.

Heath Brown: Yeah. I think we live in such polarized times, that finding that voter that is undecided about President Trump right now is a hard search. Similarly, within each one of these states, each one of these candidates that you mentioned, Susan Collins, Cory Gardner ...

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Heath Brown: ... are going to be in very, very competitive elections. It's hard for me to imagine any sizeable group of the electorate that would be looking to a single vote, even a very, very significant single vote as the basis on which they're going to use to vote for or against these candidates.

Heath Brown: It seems to me that a lot of this is already baked into Susan Collins' campaign and Cory Gardner's campaign. Those open seats, I think, are much more interesting in how the impeachment proceedings are going to play out in those campaigns, but I think voters in Maine already know Susan Collins. I don't think a vote in this situation, especially the way it's ultimately going to be set up-

Tanya Domi: It's not going to be a discriminator, in your view?

Heath Brown: It's going to simply reinforce the beliefs that are so deeply held, and the partisan divisions that are deeper now than they have been in the last 50 years, and so, so much of that overwhelms all of these historically significant, but in our political moment, somewhat insignificant, events.

Tanya Domi: Okay. Speaking of McConnell, McConnell's home state of Kentucky just went blue in the governor's race. He's got a real race. He has got the lowest approval rating of any US senator in the country. Amy McGrath, a former Marine Corps
fighter pilot, is challenging him, and she has raised $17 million. He's never had an opponent raise $17 million. What do you think about this race ...

Heath Brown: You know what-

Tanya Domi: ... and this head-to-head?

Heath Brown: Yeah. Yeah, sure. You know, the state has had this, sort of at these elections where democrats have won sort of surprisingly at the gubernatorial level, and that's something that has happened, and because of the state level politics-

Tanya Domi: 2018, really big bank shift there.

Heath Brown: And we don't want to overestimate what the gubernatorial outcomes are, but if anyone is going to be sitting holding the bag for President Trump, it is Mitch McConnell, and he now faces an opponent in this race that is as formidable as you can imagine, somebody who brings so much to this election, and I think it's a really interesting one.

Heath Brown: I would never bet against Mitch McConnell.

Tanya Domi: Of course.

Heath Brown: This is one of the ...

Tanya Domi: Of course.

Heath Brown: ... most skilled tacticians that the Senate has ever had, but he's certainly not the most effective campaigner that the Senate has ever had, and so his liabilities have never been within the chamber. They've always been outside on the ...

Tanya Domi: Outside.

Heath Brown: ... campaign trail.

Tanya Domi: Sure.

Heath Brown: If he's ever vulnerable, it will be in this election, because what he does in the Senate is so effective and powerful that the credit he's going to take on the campaign trail, especially on the judicial nomination side, I think, is ultimately going to sway things in his favor. And it's not somebody I'd ever bet against.

Tanya Domi: Okay. We just mentioned the Trump strike on Iran, taking out the second, number two leader in the political chain over there, and then last night, the
retribution of about 15 ballistic missiles that really were to no effect, and fortunately, no one was killed.

Tanya Domi: Has Trump put foreign policy as an issue into this election cycle, given these most recent events?

Heath Brown: Yeah. I mean, this and a couple of others, recently, have-

Tanya Domi: Well, of course the Ukraine situation, which is very, I think, muddled ...

Heath Brown: Right.

Tanya Domi: ... in many ways for the impeachment, but now you've got Iran, now, as well.

Heath Brown: Right, but no ... And as you were saying, no issues is as important and significant, geopolitically, as the relationship between the US and Iran and Iraq and the very difficult long-term relationships between these three different countries.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: And in thinking about this today, I was trying to think about kind of how foreign policy ultimately plays out, and as ... For somebody who sort of studies government, it's very interesting and it's such an area, and there's a situation.

Heath Brown: You have as much firsthand experience as I do that the way in which diplomacy works is so much more personalized than other parts of government. We don't really talk about the individual personal relationships of Deputy Secretaries of Education ...

Tanya Domi: Sure.

Heath Brown: ... the way we do in the State Department or in the national security apparatus, and what I'm most interested right now is the way in which this administration is going to be able to get its foreign policy team to actually function in a way that it's done everything to undermine.

Heath Brown: If this administration has done nothing else over its first three odd years, they have had rapid, rapid turnover at some of the highest levels. The White House is as different now as it was when it started as any White House that we've seen in the past, and their ability to actually deal with an international conflict is, in some ways, becomes a campaign issue because it really does get to this question of the sort of suitability and ability to govern.
Heath Brown: This plays most into Joe Biden's campaign, and I think it's the Biden campaign that most welcomes foreign policy as an issue on the sort of campaign agenda. I think Joe Biden has the strongest hand to play, and he would be the most interested in the debate with the other presidential candidates and also with Donald Trump being about foreign policy. I think he would be eager to take that on for the depth of his knowledge, the range of his experiences, especially in comparison to somebody like Mayor Pete who has, although he has military background, he has no foreign policy background to speak of. Joe Biden has the exact opposite of that.

Tanya Domi: So he does, and because he has that experience, he also has some baggage. The Iraq war is probably, I think, one of the most significant drawbacks to the Biden candidacy. When you talk about who's supporting Bernie, who's supporting Warren, and neither of those two candidates, though I've just mentioned, really have been that outspoken on foreign policy in general. I mean, Bernie came out and said, "This is wrong about Ukraine, and of course it's wrong that we launched a strike on the number two in Iran."

Tanya Domi: But all that being said, this has really been, I think, foreign policy hasn't really been discussed that extensively. If you're somebody like Buttigieg, or even Warren, and Klobuchar was on Morning Joe this morning discussing these issues, this gives you an opportunity to weigh in, in a way that you haven't yet, and it may be a missed opportunity as well not to say anything.

Heath Brown: Yeah. Some of this is really going to depend on how this plays out over the next two, three, four weeks. In 2007, if we go back in time, the importance of the antiwar protests to Barack Obama's ascendancy ...

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: ... is something we don't think about that much right now.

Tanya Domi: But it was significant.

Heath Brown: It was significant.

Tanya Domi: Very significant.

Heath Brown: Scholars have written about it.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: Now, it sort of moved away, and those protests and that movement didn't sustain past his election, even though many of those international conflicts, those wars, persisted.
Heath Brown: One of the questions is, how is this going to play out on the social movement protest side? That's a side that Joe Biden is unlikely to be very successful in. If this turns into a war and peace debate rather than the nuts and bolts of foreign policy, I think it favors some candidates over others. If, instead, the back and forth that we've seen over the last 48 hours or so is sort of all that we see, and then the subsequent months or so ends up being just a very, very hot negotiated peace, that sort of sets the stage in a slightly different way.

Heath Brown: But if this turns into a war, if this really turns into an active conflict, then we have to look to whether there is a antiwar, a peace movement that becomes significant for the Democratic Party and becomes a dividing line between those like Joe Biden who have been hawkish in the past, and other, like Bernie Sanders, in particular, who have been much more dovish. And then those track records, I think, pay off a lot.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. I agree with that. I would say it's interesting. Warren was on The View yesterday. Well, I saw it yesterday. I don't know if she was actually on it yesterday, and she had an interesting debate with Meghan McCain about the war, about what was happening. And one of the things that she does, which is so interesting, is that she always compliments her brothers, who all served in the military.

Tanya Domi: Now, she went onto the Senate Armed Services Committee by no mistake. I mean, it was planned, and she took a seat there to develop her national security credentials, but I don't think she's done much with it yet.

Heath Brown: I think you're right. This is not a prominent part. I mean, this is somebody with so many policy expertise.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: Have we had a candidate maybe short of Hillary Clinton that has had the breadth of policy areas that they can speak to, not just with a reasoned opinion, but actual hands-on, day-to-day experience? Hillary Clinton had that. Elizabeth Warren has that.

Heath Brown: Elizabeth Warren doesn't have nearly the level of experience that Hillary Clinton had in the international realm. She has made overtures to it. Previous candidates have also been greatly lacking in this, and it has not necessarily held them back. Bill Clinton didn't have very much. Barack Obama also.

Heath Brown: And she's trying to sort of walk this tightrope and play to her strengths while recognizing that this is always going to be an area in a presidential campaign that comes up, and somebody who has the experiences is always going to be advantaged in that.
Tanya Domi: Yeah. And just like you mentioned, we don’t know what’s going to happen in the next five, six months. Anything could happen given what has been going on in this presidency.

Tanya Domi: And going back to your point about diplomacy, I just ... I’m going to weigh in here and say that I think one of the major, major indicators of Trump and his, I think, quite, his dislike of government has been the gutting of the State Department. On day one, they fired the entire seventh floor. We’re talking about 150 years of diplomatic experience. It’s not replicable. It can’t ... You can’t just bring in a junior Foreign Service Officer. So many people with so much experience are no longer there, and they’re leaving.

Tanya Domi: And there has also been a precipitous exit of people from the Pentagon, and we’ll note in the last 24, 48 hours, this letter somehow emerged from the Pentagon, was sent to the Iraqi government filled with grammatical errors, it was an incomplete letter, it wasn’t even signed, notifying them that they were going to withdraw 5,200 troops.

Tanya Domi: You’re talking about ... And also, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is brand new. He’s relatively new. Esper was a Boeing executive, did go to West Point. He and Pompeo were in the same class. Reporting indicates that Pompeo really wanted this strike since last summer, and had been working with Esper to get rid of some people so that they could actually make it happen.

Heath Brown: Yeah. The area in foreign policy, as I suggested earlier, has these personal dimensions. Where people went to college seems to matter, and the infighting. You know this infighting as well as anyone else with your experiences. Clinton administration was famous for the conflicts between Richard Holbrooke and some of the other foreign policy established, Warren Christopher and so forth.

Heath Brown: And how that plays out, it just makes it a very different area of government to consider. Now sometimes, that's oversold, and we personalize things that are ultimately much more bureaucratic than we would think, but I'm so curious, and ...  

Heath Brown: I came here today, and I was wanting to ask you a question.

Tanya Domi: Oh?

Heath Brown: And the question I wanted to ask you is, what's happening at these embassies right now? What goes on in an embassy after this kind of thing happens at the ... Maybe not at the highest level, but what's happening among the diplomatic core when the things that we've expected in the past, which is relatively clear signals about what US policy is, relatively clear doctrine on following international law. That has been the norm in embassies across the world. Right? They know what the score is.
Heath Brown: What do you expect is going on in the various embassies across the Middle East and elsewhere?

Tanya Domi: It's interesting that you ask. I mean, I am a member of the Women's Foreign Policy Network, and there's a number of people in that network that are active diplomats or they actively serve in the government. And of course, I have many colleagues and friends around the world. People are worried. They're very afraid, and there is this back channel within the state department where you can protest a decision. It's been long used. It's a tradition within the State Department. People are no longer using it.

Heath Brown: What does that ... How would that function?

Tanya Domi: Like, you would submit an anonymous ... Well, they're going to know who you are. A back channel where you protest a policy, and this ... I came to know about this during the Clinton administration, and the Bosnian war is an example because a number of diplomats resigned, because there was no movement forward to interdict and stop the war. I mean, Clinton did do that, but ultimately, it took a while.

Tanya Domi: And people ... It's done from a set of beliefs about having an avenue to air out issues that people talk about in their offices, or they talk about it within an embassy. Like, "Why aren't we doing X, and we're doing Y now and this is counterproductive because of whatever."

Tanya Domi: And we're talking about people leaving. I mean, they have lost more people in the State Department than in history, and you can't replace them. And some people are hoping and praying they can wait out Trump, and that there will be a change of power, change to administrations, in 2020. And people are hanging in.

Tanya Domi: When the attack happened on the Iranian official, many people were told they had to leave, and there has been this really disruptive, "You have to get out." For example, on the Ukraine situation, we know that the ambassador was called and said, "You have to pack your bags within 24 hours, and you're gone." People swear they take an oath to the Constitution of the United States. They dedicate their lives on behalf of the American people, and they're shocked by the shoddy treatment by this administration.

Heath Brown: Yeah. My ... I don't have the firsthand experiences in this, but I bet many students go into the Foreign Service, and what we know is that the conflict is persistent and historical. Right? We're talking about some of the most intractable problems that ...
Heath Brown: ... the world has ever ...

Tanya Domi: For sure.

Heath Brown: ... everything from nuclear relations to the conflicts, the ethnic conflicts that run throughout the world.

Heath Brown: Every one of these people enters into this because of the inherent conflict, not trying to avoid conflict.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Heath Brown: Not one of the people that you've alluded to is opposed to conflict. What seems like matters so much, and is one of these threads, is, that runs throughout many, many of the questions about the Trump administration is the question of trust.

Heath Brown: And that's really, I think, what most people are so worried about right now, which is when one of the strategies of the Trump administration has been to undermine trust, trust in the civil servants that are employed across government-

Tanya Domi: Yeah, the deep state. He refers to them as the deep state.

Heath Brown: It's been one of the three hallmarks of the Trump administration, has been this undermining of the trust in the institutions that have existed for generations. When you do that, it makes it very, very difficult during an international conflict for the citizenry to even understand what's going on.

Heath Brown: It's also difficult for those in government to use the mechanisms like the ones that you're describing, which is a way to express the rational disagreement that is a part of making complex decisions. But the way in which the President has taken on whistle blowers, the way in which the President has addressed dissent, really, in any form, undermines the trust that civil servants have that their opinions are going to be taken seriously and not treated as treasonous.

Heath Brown: And this runs across so many things, and I think this most recent violent, violent conflict that we're seeing right now in the news just only illustrates that to a much, much greater extent.

Tanya Domi: And mistakes are really high. But what I would also say, another aspect that characterizes this administration, that differs from all previous administrations, is the dismissal of expertise, and education, and experience. And these people are not only sidelined, but they're pushed out.
Tanya Domi: It's ... I would then stretch and go the next step and say, "I don't believe he's going to be able to effectively govern, given what we know up to this point." That was a fear that all of us have had, that, oh my God, launching an attack on Iran, one of our longest term adversaries, was just really fraught with all kinds of danger. We ... it seems like it may, they have backed off. It seems like both parties have backed off, fortunately, and we'll see.

Tanya Domi: But I do think that because of all the reasons we've just discussed, I do think that the democrats have an obligation to address these issues, somehow, effectively in the campaign.

Tanya Domi: And I want to go back to the Democrats one more time. Let's make a swing back. It was that, as you know, the Democratic Party has touted itself as a party of big tent, and AOC just recently questioned that big tent and said, "In a different government", like in a different parliamentary system, specifically. She didn't say, "Parliamentary", but that's what she intended, I believe, that she and Joe Biden wouldn't be in the same party.

Tanya Domi: And also, with the top five that we now see, previously, everyone was bragging, "It's the most diverse, gender diverse, racially diverse, crop of candidates." What do you think now about this situation where now all the candidates are white? And do you think that, given what's happened within the party ... And Doug Jones' election in Alabama is an example where black women really came forward, African-American woman really drove that race, and many people in the party say they are the backbone of the party. Do you think there will be a candidate of color maybe in the second slot?

Heath Brown: Do you mean the vice presidential slot?

Tanya Domi: Yes. Yes. In this election.

Heath Brown: Yeah. Who gets to the top ... And the changes that have recently been made in the nominating process of the Democratic Party were promised to democratize small, democratize the way in which the primaries worked. And there were all sorts of decisions made that were efforts to equalize the process.

Heath Brown: Right. Diminish the super delegates. Right.

Heath Brown: Make this not the smoke filled room that we imagine from the past.

Heath Brown: And many of those changes were made. Maybe not all the ones that everyone wanted, but a good portion of them were made. But I think the fact that those changes have been made, and the current crop reflects the same demographics of the presidential options of the past, just reinforces how difficult it actually is to run. Tom Steyer-
Tanya Domi: I agree. I really agree with that point.

Heath Brown: Mike Bloomberg, I think, reinforced that only more. It is relatively easy to enter the race, and the diversity of the original pool of 21 or 22 or 23 candidates is evidence of that.

Heath Brown: But to sustain, to stay in the race, to grow the organization necessary to remain at the top in a system that tends to, advantages the things that candidates who have had to come up in different ways are going to struggle most with is part of why we end up, I think, with the array that we have, currently, that are running.

Heath Brown: Cory Booker's inability to gain traction, given all of his qualifications, given that his qualifications sound almost identical to Mayor Pete's, except for the fact that he has been in the Senate for now a number of years, an additional ... 

Tanya Domi: And-

Heath Brown: ... qualification.

Tanya Domi: And was a mayor of a much bigger city, with, probably, bigger problems.

Heath Brown: His inability to gain the traction with pretty significant name recognition, the same thing could be said for Kamala Harris, is, I think, evidence that the structural barriers to political inequality are much deeper than we often like to admit. And while the backbone of the Democratic Party, the electorate, as people might describe, may be much more diverse than it ever has been in the past, and could be credited with all sorts of victories including the one in Alabama, but also the 2018 ...

Tanya Domi: Oh, significant.

Heath Brown: ... Congressional election ...

Tanya Domi: Significant. Yeah.

Heath Brown: ... is in some ways the most pleasant surprise of recent politics. It's the persistence of the structural barriers that prevent candidates from gaining the traction that their resumes would suggest is what is just simply evidence that that change takes place very, very slowly.

Heath Brown: Money still matters a lot. Race still matters a lot to a lot of voters, and you end up-

Tanya Domi: I would say gender does, too.
Heath Brown: Gender does, too. Absolutely.

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Heath Brown: And those are, I think, things that we sometimes underestimate, and when you have a candidate like Kamala Harris, and you say, "That's somebody who looks like she has all of the qualifications to be the nomination, and she is unable to even get into the first contest", is evidence that a lot more needs to change in the country.

Tanya Domi: I do agree with that. I will say, though, I think the Democrats are very energized. A lot of people are worried about money, and Trump raised $46 million in the last quarter. The Democrats raised more than Trump, together, as a group. That indicates, I think, that the basic Party people and the people who are supporting, and who are out in the primaries, and that are on the campaign staffs, it's very clear Democrats are energized.

Heath Brown: Yeah, and these things have happened in the past. It happened in 2008. Were the Obama supporters and the Clinton supporters going to ultimately get along and mobilize and energize the Party together? It happened in 2016. Were the Bernie supporters and Clinton supporters going to be able to work together in some way?

Heath Brown: And despite the fact that Barack Obama won in 2008 and Hillary Clinton lost in 2016, that isn't the most obvious reason why those outcomes happened. And I suspect, when it all comes down, there will be a sufficient level of party unity to take them through the election, and some of these other unpredictable things, like the unpredictable things that happened in 2016 seem likely to happen again. We're in a highly polarized country where we kind of, we know pretty well who the vast majority of people are going to be voting for.

Heath Brown: It's these other things that, in 2020, everyone, I think, is most worried about, is the things that we don't know about. The disinformation campaigns, the voter-

Tanya Domi: Voter suppression.

Heath Brown: The voter suppression, which sometimes happens at times when you don't even expect it, purging voter roles at times that are legal.

Tanya Domi: Most recently, in Wisconsin. The most recently was ... Yeah, legally purged in Wisconsin.

Heath Brown: Right. And it seems like this ... We're setting up for a similar kind of incredibly chaotic, unpredictable campaign that is likely to have a good deal of party unity, but a highly polarized election as we move ahead.
Tanya Domi: Well, we will have you back. We'll have you back after maybe Super Tuesday. We can look at this situation. Who's going to have enough money to get through Super Tuesday? I think that's a question that's hanging out there. But we will have you back, Heath Brown.

Heath Brown: I'd love to come back.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project, and thanks to today's guest, Professor Heath Brown of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistance by Kevin Wolfe of CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.