This week’s guest, Heath Brown is an associate professor of public policy at the Graduate Center and John Jay College of Criminal Justice at CUNY. He obtained his PhD in public administration and public policy at the George Washington University and a master's degree at the Elliott School of International Affairs also at GW. He is the author of four books, three of which apply to today's podcast conversation that includes Immigrants in Electoral Politics, Nonprofit Organizing in a Time of Demographic Change, Pay to Play Politics, How Money Defines American Democracy. And for today's purposes, The Tea Party Divided, the Hidden Diversity of a Maturing Movement. Welcome Heath to the program.

Heath Brown: Yeah. Thank you for having me. As a frequent podcaster, it’s nice to be sitting on the other side of the microphone today.

Tanya Domi: My questions today are pressing and they are about this week seems to be an avalanche of news about immigration policies and initiatives, and what's facing the congress. On Monday, the Trump administration announced it was going to terminate provisional residency permits have about 200,000 Salvadorans who've lived here more than 20 years and they would be facing deportation imminently. Isn't this a continuation of the Trump policy on immigration even if they are here legally?

Heath Brown: To describe ... I think anything is a continuation of Trump policy would be to extend that word beyond what its normal usage is. I think what we have come to expect from the Trump administration is a lot of chaos in the area of policy making. So I think you’re right, that in general terms this recent decision related to the Salvadoran refugees are going to be in essence deported shortly after having lived in the country for so long does fit with the general outlines of what the Trump administration and formulate the Trump campaign ran on and is now governing on. But there's all sorts of other mixed signals that come from the administration itself to the point where it's very hard to figure out exactly what the policy is outside of a series of often hem handed decisions. And the difference between a set of government decisions and a coherent policy I think is one of the very interesting parts of trying to make sense of the Trump administration.

Heath Brown: In this case, they're different in many previous administrations, they mean about the same thing. When a decision came from the Obama administration, it almost always reflected policy that is a stance from the White House on an issue. In this case, we see decisions made that don't seem to always align with what the broad policy outline is, in part because the policy itself seems to be a
moving target. And so that to me is a real important part of understanding how immigration policy has evolved over this first year of the Trump administration.

Tanya Domi: And that's exactly on point I think with respect to the policy on dreamers. Now, yesterday the administration had a meeting with congressional leaders about the dreamers and about what kind of package they could put together. The president sort of presided and said, "I'm open to all kinds of things. I'll take the heat on a path to citizenship." But in fact, this is really a challenging situation for the democrats because many of them want a clean bill without a wall, give the dreamers a path to citizenship and yet even ... democrats now or even threatening a shut down of the government as a possibility, as a tactic. There's all kinds of problems here for the democrats or the republicans and especially the White House. How do you think the politics play out here?

Heath Brown: Yeah. I think this is another example where if you're looking for coherence from a White House, what you need is continuity in staffing, and that is exactly what we haven't had in the White House. Perhaps more than any other recent White House, we've had incredible turnover at some of the highest levels of the White House, including a change of chief of staff midstream, halfway through the first year in office to have a new chief of staff, to have numerous senior advisors leave under often dubious conditions. When that happens, you don't have the continuation of staffing and personnel that's needed for a coherent policy on much of anything. And so I think what just happened earlier this week related to a somewhat vague but the statement for the president seemed to indicate that he would support what would be ... could ... considered a clean DACA bill. Is to address the deferred action program on its own and then to later deal with all of the other ... not exactly related immigration policy issues, related to border security, related to all sorts of other issues. He seemed to indicate that that was something that he'd be interested in.

Heath Brown: It's hard to imagine that that was a well thought out position on the part of the White House and you tend to get that when advisors are moving in and out, when their level of power is constantly changing, when the willingness of the chief executive to listen to people is strained by his own often conflicting interests. What you then get is these statements that are hard to make sense of, is do we listen to the statement yesterday or the tweets today? The best you could say is, "Well let's just wait for tomorrow and maybe we'll split the difference between the two." It's very unclear at this point I think whether the president is interested in addressing the DACA issue on its own or whether he's going to be pressured by the rest of his party to try to deal with this as a part of a much larger immigration reform plan. It seems quite obvious that the republicans would prefer the latter and democrats would prefer the former. What the president prefers at this point, I don't think anyone would really understand what that is.

Tanya Domi: And in an extension of this immigration mess that confronts the administration and the country, we now have in related news the pardoned Sheriff Joe Arpaio
who was found guilty of contempt for defying a court order for racially profiling Latinos in the state of Arizona. Now he's announced he's running for the U.S. Senate in Arizona. Can his candidacy flip Arizona blue?

Heath Brown: I think the first thing that I think would be something that to make very clear is, I think for anyone who has been pardoned to have something or who receives back their voting rights and all of the rights, they should have every, every right to run for office. And his right to run for office, I don't think it's diminished by what are a series of quite I think unfortunate decisions in his views on immigrants, his views on race and ethnicity, I think are quite problematic. But that I don't think it he means that he shouldn't be able to run for office. The politics of him running for office I think are a quite troublesome for the republican Party. I think that there are lots of reasons why they would prefer one of the other candidates who is also a strong conservative running for that seat in the Senate. I can't imagine that there is a republican activist, there is a republican party official who thinks that Joe Arpaio is the right candidate to win that election. And if he does win that election, he's the right person to hold that seat.

Heath Brown: I think a lot of what we saw in Alabama is going to be replayed in Arizona with the same kind of intra a party conflict that has so plagued the republican party over the last several years, mainly this year. We're going to see that replayed again in Arizona if he stays in the race and I suspect that we're going to see that in some other house races as we go, as other kinds of candidates whose motivation to run isn't simply to win the office, but it's also to cause a lot of havoc in doing so. And so I think we're going to see more of those kinds of races within the republican party happen again and again as we run up to the 2018 election.

Tanya Domi: It may not be exactly the Tea Party conflict that exists in the party. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that very quickly. But there is some tensions here and there is a civil war being engaged and I don't know if the Tea Party's been transcended by Trump himself, but it's certainly a really complicated situation. What are your thoughts on that?

Heath Brown: Yeah, I think you're right in a sense of the way in which factional divisions within a party can affect collective decisions about who's to run and what the policies are. Now in the Tea Party case, I think we had some sense over time at least of what the Tea Party faction was about, agree with it or disagree with it. It sort of fit into a couple of clear areas. It's not clear exactly what the factional divisions are right now outside of a close or a distant affiliation with the president. Outside of that, it's hard to know exactly what will connect the array of factions that are going to form, those aligned with the populist vision for the republican party affiliated with somebody like Steve Bannon. A vision for the party connected to somebody on the ... that has a quite hostile views towards immigrants and towards racial minorities and potentially even women.
Heath Brown: It's hard to see at this point how those views are coalescing into one, two, or even more than a two factions in the republican party. This hasn't been named yet and until it's named, it's hard to really get your head around it. But I suspect that one of the things we're going to see as we move towards into 2018 is those factional lines become clearer. They may not work themselves out, but they're going to pick them at least clear where people stand and they're going to have to because endorsements are gonna have to be made in primaries and it's going to be clear where people stand on the future of the republican party, which right now at the beginning of 2018 is very, very questionable.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, I think the primaries will begin to sort that out. We'll start to see some lines emerge, I think. The other issues ... I mean well immigration really defined Trump as a candidate and that's basically how he ran. The other issue that dominates discourse in Washington is the role of Russia in our ... in the election of 2016. And yesterday, an unprecedented action by ranking member of the judiciary committee, Senator Dianne Feinstein, unilaterally released a transcript of the interview of Glenn Simpson, a senior functionary at GPS Fusion, which is a company in DC that hired Christopher Steele to prepare a dossier. And Christopher Steele's a former MI6 British intelligence operative. This dossier has really dominated on one hand the electoral, election towards the end and now it's playing out in a contest between republicans who lead the hill and the democrats. This was highly unusual. Feinstein, an established figure, this is not somebody that just acts out in an arbitrary manner. Really an incredible moment yesterday. What are your thoughts about it?

Heath Brown: Yeah, I think that this is I think an illustration of what happens when you have unified government, when during periods of divided government, a bipartisan agreement on investigating cases of corruption has a certain kind of logic to it. And there's a way in which parties can come together to agree that the truth needs to be sought out. It's much less the case I think when the single party holds a control of the major parts of government as we have right now. And so I think those kinds of situations, what you get is the highly unusual steps that have been taken by a Senator Feinstein and others as well. I mean there have been other examples, perhaps less notable that happened more in the weeds of congressional procedures that suggests that republicans and democrats on these kinds of issues, which they would typically get along quite well on. Investigating international threats to an election, investigations of corruption would, would typically bring out the bipartisan spirit of even the most polarized members of Congress.

Heath Brown: Increasingly we see that is not the case here and I think that the move to release this ... the transcript from these privately held hearings is an indication that things are really breaking down. That's not a good sign, particularly when ... if you take seriously the thread and the allegations, there's every reason to think that there should be widespread government wide agreement that the truth needs to be sought out. When a member of the Senate is compelled to do what
she did, it suggests that that wide agreement is not there and that's a problem for democrats, republicans and every citizen of the country.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. I think this is going to continue to play out. We're gonna have to watch this. I just really want to thank you for being with us today. Thanks for tuning in to the Thought Project and thanks to today's guest, Professor Heath Brown.

Heath Brown: Thank you Tanya.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with CUNY TV located at the Graduate Center in the heart of New York City, with production engineering and technical assistance by Sara Fishman and Jack Horowitz. I'm Tanya Domi, tune in next week.