“Anti-establishment Conservatism”

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Conservatism has been the most important political doctrine in the United States for almost four decades. It has dominated the intellectual debate and largely set the policy agenda, even during years of Democratic electoral control. But this is a particular kind of conservatism, focused not just on familiar topics of conservative concern as government spending and low taxes, but anxious about the hoax of climate change, rule by experts and elites, our secretly Muslim president. It practices a politics that is disciplined, uncompromising, and enraged, aiming to “take back our country.” This is “anti-establishment conservatism,” whose origin can be found in the faction of the right wing that battled both Democrats and moderate Republicans in the post-World War II period. I will examine the nature of anti-establishment conservatism, trace its development from the 1950s to the Tea Party, and analyze the institutional and communicative networks that underlie its political ascendance.