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It's Putin's Crimea! Counter-Legality and Legitimacy in Russia

The article traces and analyses the mechanism of legitimating Crimean annexation that the Putin regime is trying to construct domestically in Russian society. In doing so it analyses not only narratives of such legitimation but also how legality is understood by people majority of whom support Crimean annexation despite it being branded as illegal by international law norms. I argue that Putin's regime in Russia employs strategies of constructing counter-legality – discourses that position both the annexation of Crimea and continuous rejections of international legal norms by Russia as the only legal and legitimate course of development. This strategy turns out to be successful for a variety of groups among the 80 % of those who support the annexation of Crimea in the Russian society. The counter-legality discourse brands Soviet law illegal, norms of international law applied to Crimean situation inappropriate and biased against Russia, and, finally, argues for the greater power of the 'ethnic' law where Russia has a right to intervene in any situation where the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minority are considered to be in danger. All of these strategies of counter-legality successfully legitimate Putin's decisions on Crimean annexation domestically but endanger widely accepted legal norms and democracy broadly.