

US lawmakers call for shake-up of Big Tech 'monopolies'

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A congressional report called for sweeping changes to antitrust laws and enforcement in response to the growing power of Big Tech firms, but Republican lawmakers declined to endorse the findings

A House of Representatives panel in a report Tuesday accused four Big Tech firms of acting as "monopolies," calling for sweeping changes to antitrust laws and enforcement that could potentially lead to breakups of the giant firms.

But the report by the House Judiciary Committee failed to win the endorsement of Republican members, highlighting a partisan divide despite widespread criticism of the tech giants.

The 449-page document concluded that Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google "engage in a form of their own private quasi regulation that is unaccountable to anyone but themselves."

"Companies that once were scrappy, underdog startups that challenged the status quo have become the kinds of monopolies we last saw in the era of oil barons and railroad tycoons," the report said.

The report follows an investigation of more than 15 months and hearings this year with the top executives of the four firms, in parallel to antitrust probes being led by federal and state enforcers.

Judiciary Committee chairman Jerrold Nadler and antitrust subcommittee chairman David Cicilline said in a joint statement that the tech firms "each possess significant market power over large swaths of our economy" and have "exploited their power of the marketplace in anticompetitive ways."

The report suggests moves which could lead to breakups of the big firms, calling for "structural separations" to prohibit companies from competing on platforms they operate.

Also recommended was a requirement that platforms allow "interoperability" with competitors and regulations aimed at preventing acquisitions that hurt competition.

Amazon pushed back in a blog post, arguing that "the presumption that success can only be the result of anti-competitive behavior is simply wrong."

"Amazon accounts for less than 1% of the \$25 trillion global retail market and less than 4% of retail in the US. Unlike industries that are winner-take-all, retail has ample space for many winners," the e-commerce giant said.

Big Tech backlash

The report's findings reflect a growing backlash against the firms, which have extended their market dominance even during the coronavirus pandemic.

But while Democrats have assailed the growing power of tech platforms, Republicans have decried what they consider bias by the Silicon Valley firms against conservatives.

Highlighting the partisan divide on tech regulation,

Republican panel members declined to endorse the committee's findings this week.

"Big Tech is out to get conservatives," Representative Jim Jordan said as the report was issued.

"Unfortunately the Democrats' partisan report ignores this [fundamental problem](#) and instead advances radical proposals that would refashion antitrust law in the vision of the far left."

Matt Schruers of the Computer & Communications Industry Association, a trade group which includes some of the large tech firms, said the lawmakers had failed to understand the digital economy.

"If the goal is simply to knock down successful US businesses, then perhaps this plan would score a hit," he said.

"But if the goal is to benefit consumers, which has until now been the standard for antitrust policy, it is hard to see how this would do anything but invite regulators to micromanage business models."

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