

US Justice Dept probing telecom companies: WSJ

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The newspaper, citing "people familiar with the matter," said the review of potential anti-competitive practices by companies such as AT&T and Verizon is "in its very early stages."

It said there was no formal investigation at this point and it was not clear whether the agency intends to launch an official inquiry.

The Journal said the review could look into whether wireless carriers were hurting smaller competitors by locking up popular phones through exclusive agreements with handset makers.

It noted that lawmakers and regulators have raised questions recently about deals such as AT&T's exclusive service agreement with Apple, maker of the popular iPhone.

"The Justice Department may also review whether telecom carriers are unduly restricting the types of services other companies can offer on their networks," the newspaper said.

President Barack Obama's antitrust chief, Christine Varney, has pledged to be more aggressive than the previous administration in cracking down on practices seen as anti-competitive.

Combined, AT&T and Verizon control 90 million landline customers and 60 percent of the 270 million wireless subscribers in the United States, the Journal said.

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