

FTC zooms in on tech with new antitrust task force

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Amid calls for breaking up tech giants, the Federal Trade Commission is launching a task force to focus on monitoring competition in the tech industry.

The [task force](#) will have 17 attorneys, including staffers from the commission's Bureau of Competition. It will investigate anticompetitive

conduct, the FTC announced Tuesday.

"Technology markets, which are rapidly evolving and touch so many other sectors of the economy, raise distinct challenges for antitrust enforcement," said Bruce Hoffman, the director of the Bureau of Competition who will oversee the task force, in a statement. "By centralizing our expertise and attention, the new task force will be able to focus on these markets exclusively."

The FTC did not mention companies by name.

But U.S. [tech companies](#) such as Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon have faced accusations of monopolistic behavior at home and abroad.

Europe last year fined Google \$5.7 billion over its Android practices, a ruling the company is appealing. That followed a \$2.7 billion fine against Google by the European Commission in 2017, on charges that Google favored its comparison-shopping service over others. Last year, European Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager began looking into Amazon's use of data it gathers from its merchants, and into Apple's purchase of Shazam, which was later approved.

In the United States, [advocacy groups](#) including the Open Markets Institute and Demand Progress last year urged the FTC to break up Facebook, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp. Political candidates have brought up the possibility of breaking up Facebook and Google, echoing the sentiments of op-ed writers, authors and academics.

"Now is the time to act," Robert Cruickshank, campaign director for Demand Progress, said Tuesday. "In the case of Facebook, it controls too much of social media. There is nowhere else to go. As long as it owns potential competitors, it has no incentive to do things differently."

The FTC has faced criticism over its lack of action on recent controversies involving tech giants. For example, there is speculation that Facebook's Cambridge Analytica privacy scandal last year violated the company's 2011 settlement with the FTC. The agency has yet to address whether that's the case, but reports say it is considering a multibillion-dollar fine.

"We call on the FTC to protect consumers—and democracy—by enforcing the law in a substantive way rather than slapping these companies on the wrist with fines that ultimately do not change their behavior," said Sarah Miller, deputy director of Open Markets Institute, in a statement Tuesday.

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