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Big Tech remains top priority for DOJ and FTC in US antitrust litigation

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Summary

[IN SUMMARY](#)[DISCUSSION POINTS](#)[REFERENCED IN THIS ARTICLE](#)[INTRODUCTION](#)[UNILATERAL CONDUCT LITIGATION](#)[LITIGATION REGARDING VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL AGREEMENTS](#)[MERGER ENFORCEMENT LITIGATION](#)[PRICE DISCRIMINATION LITIGATION](#)[ENDNOTES](#)

IN SUMMARY

This article summarises recent trends and developments in US antitrust litigation concerning vertical and horizontal agreements, unilateral conduct, merger control and other issues. This article also summarises notable court decisions and litigation shaping the current antitrust landscape and provides key takeaways for counsel to keep in mind when considering potential antitrust issues in the United States.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Government and private plaintiffs have continued to challenge alleged monopolisation by the nation's largest tech firms under section 2 of the Sherman Act.
- Government and private plaintiffs have been using section 1 of the Sherman Act to challenge various platforms that allegedly facilitate improper information sharing and coordination among competitors.
- Many of these recent monopolisation cases revolve around the size, structure and business models of these firms and are novel in terms of both the legal theories they present and the aggressive structural remedies they seek.
- US government antitrust enforcers have also continued to challenge proposed mergers aggressively in court under section 7 of the Clayton Act. The agencies have been successful in recent challenges to horizontal mergers but have seen less success in cases concerning proposed vertical mergers.

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INTRODUCTION

This article reviews key antitrust cases from the past year and offers takeaways for corporate counsel to keep in mind moving forward. Recent litigation trends include a continued focus on the tech industry, novel proposals for structural remedies and challenges to allegedly anticompetitive information-sharing practices. As usual, government investigations and enforcement have spawned follow-on civil class actions.

For example, in *US v Agri Stats, Inc*, the Department of Justice (DOJ) is alleging that the defendant, a data subscription and consulting service in the meat processing industry, is the hub in an industry-wide ‘information-exchange conspiracy’ that allows competitors to improperly coordinate pricing and output. Private plaintiffs have also pursued claims against algorithm-driven platforms that allegedly facilitate price-fixing. For instance, in *In re: Real Page Rental Software Antitrust Litigation*, renters assert class claims against landlords who allegedly conspired to coordinate rental pricing using RealPage’s pricing recommendation software.

The DOJ and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have had significant success challenging horizontal mergers among head-to-head competitors, often by defining and proving very narrow product markets. However, the agencies have had less success challenging vertical mergers. Also, while the agencies have pressed novel theories of competitive harm set forth in the 2023 revision of the agencies’ Merger Guidelines, their recent wins generally invoke traditional merger analyses focused on market structure and post-merger consolidation. With respect to price discrimination, the FTC has fulfilled its long-standing promise to enforce the Robinson Patman Act.

Noteworthy developments in cases challenging unilateral conduct, joint conduct, merger enforcement and price discrimination are discussed, in turn, below.

UNILATERAL CONDUCT LITIGATION

FTC V Meta

In early April 2024, Meta moved for summary judgment in the FTC’s case challenging the company’s alleged monopolisation in the market for ‘personal social networking services’.^[1] This case is notable because the FTC is primarily using section 2 of the Sherman Act (Section 2) to challenge prior acquisitions by Meta.^[2] The FTC claims that Meta engaged in a pattern of monopolisation by acquiring emerging or nascent competitors, including Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014.^[3] The FTC also claimed that Meta maintained its dominance by hindering the interoperability of potentially competitive third-party apps.^[4]

After a federal judge in the United States District Court for the District of Washington, DC dismissed the FTC’s initial complaint for its failure to adequately allege that Meta possessed monopoly power,^[5] the FTC amended its complaint, which survived a second motion to dismiss.^[6] The court, however, narrowed the FTC’s case against Meta to only those claims related to Meta’s previous acquisitions and prohibited the FTC from challenging Meta’s policies that allegedly deny competitors access to Facebook Platform tools.^[7] The court concluded that those policies constituted lawful refusals to deal, and, even if Meta’s decisions to revoke access to specific competitors were anticompetitive, claims related to those refusals would be barred by the applicable statute of limitations.^[8]

The case proceeded on the FTC’s claims that Meta’s past acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp enabled Meta to maintain its monopoly power in personal social networking services.^[9] Specifically, the FTC claims that by acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp, Meta neutralised the companies as independent competitive threats, which ‘enabled Facebook to sustain its dominance . . . not by competing on the merits, but by avoiding competition’.^[10]

In its motion for summary judgment, Meta argued that the FTC’s market definition is underinclusive because it improperly excludes companies like TikTok and Twitter.^[11] Emphasising the ‘extraordinary consumer benefits’ from Meta’s acquisitions of Instagram

and WhatsApp, Meta further argued that the FTC cannot demonstrate that consumers would have been better off in a but-for world in which the acquisitions did not occur.^[12] Last, Meta called for a 'presumption that the transactions were not anticompetitive' given that the FTC reviewed and declined to challenge the acquisitions.^[13]

The Court denied Meta's second motion for summary judgment and commenced a seven-week bench trial to determine Meta's liability for violating section 2 in April 2025.^[14] During the trial, the FTC presented evidence – including Mark Zuckerberg's communications – seeking to prove that Meta acquired Instagram and WhatsApp to eliminate potential competition.^[15] Meta presented evidence that it continues to face substantial competition from other social media platforms that are outside of the FTC's alleged market, including TikTok.^[16]

The trial concluded in late May 2025,^[17] and the court is expected to take at least several months to issue its decision.^[18] If the court rules that Meta violated section 2, the court will then conduct additional proceedings to determine the appropriate remedy. The FTC seeks to break up Meta by forcing divestitures of Instagram and WhatsApp. The agency is also seeking a ruling that would require Meta to give prior notice and obtain prior approval for future mergers and acquisitions.^[19]

United States V Google: Search Engine Litigation

The DOJ, joined by coalitions of state attorneys general, is also pressing two monopolisation actions challenging Google's online search and digital advertising businesses.

The DOJ's first action alleges that Google monopolised the market for online searches and was tried before a judge in the District Court for the District of Columbia in fall of 2023.^[20] At trial, the DOJ sought to prove that Google eliminated competition for online searches primarily through agreements with web browser providers, device manufacturers and cell service carriers to make Google the default search engine.^[21] Google's payments for its default status amounted to US\$26.3 billion across these various agreements in 2021.^[22] According to the DOJ, Google captured 50 per cent of general search queries through these default agreements, which suppressed competition by denying rivals the critical inputs needed to scale their own competing search engines.^[23]

In its defence, Google argued that its success in the online search market is attributable to its pursuit of innovation and quality.^[24] Consumers prefer its search engine, Google argued, because it is superior to competing products, not because it has suppressed competition.^[25] Google also offered evidence of pro-competitive benefits to justify its various agreements and argued that its exclusive arrangements did not foreclose competition from rival search engines.^[26] For example, Google argued that its agreements did not prevent browser providers from promoting rival search engines to users and allowing users to switch their defaults to a rival search engine.^[27]

In August 2024, the court issued a judgment holding Google liable for violating section 2.^[28] The court held Google possessed a monopoly in the online search and related advertising markets and acted to maintain that monopoly,^[29] and that Google's exclusive distribution agreements restrain competition without any valid procompetitive benefits.^[30]

The remedies phase of the trial started in September 2024 and culminated with a remedies-focused evidentiary hearing in the Spring of 2025.^[31] The DOJ and the plaintiff states attorneys general are seeking injunctive and structural relief,^[32] including bans on

bundling and exclusive contracts as well as the divestiture of Google's Chrome search engine, possible divestiture of its Android mobile operating system and implementation of choice screens on all Google's search engine access points.^[33] In contrast, Google's proposed remedies focused only on banning bundling and exclusive contracting.^[34]

Google has stated it will appeal the court's decision on liability when the remedies phase of the trial closes.^[35] The court is expected to rule on remedies by August 2025.^[36]

United States V Google: Adtech Litigation

In January 2023, the DOJ filed a second antitrust suit against Google in the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, claiming that Google monopolised the market for digital advertising services (ad tech), which connects website publishers seeking to sell ad space on their websites with advertisers seeking to place ads on websites.^[37] The DOJ alleges that Google engaged in numerous anticompetitive practices, including serial acquisitions of actual and potential competitors and other tactics 'to force more publishers and advertisers to use its products while disrupting their ability to use competing products effectively'.^[38]

According to the agency, Google aimed to 'become the be-all, and end-all location for all ad serving' and control both the website publisher and advertiser sides of the digital advertising market.^[39] Google's acquisition of DoubleClick in 2008 brought DoubleClick's leading ad server in-house, a move that the DOJ alleged 'complement[ed] Google's existing tool for advertisers, Google Ads, and set the stage for Google's later exclusionary conduct across the ad tech industry'.^[40] That alleged exclusionary conduct took multiple forms, including:

- acquisitions of potential competitors like AdMeld, a company that allowed publishers to view offers available through different ad exchanges;^[41]
- conditioning access to Google's advertising demand on the use of Google's own publisher ad server and ad exchange,^[42] and
- '[m]anipulating auction mechanics across several of its products' to advantage Google's ad tech tools and stifle those offered by competitors.^[43]

The district court denied Google's motion to dismiss,^[44] in which Google argued that its acquisitions of DoubleClick and AdMeld (which the FTC and DOJ previously allowed) were not anticompetitive and that conditioning access to Google's advertising demand on the use of Google's publisher ad server and advertising exchange constituted lawful refusals to deal.^[45]

In its April 2024 motion for summary judgment, Google largely reasserted that the challenged conduct amounts to lawful refusals to deal and product improvements.^[46] Google also challenged the DOJ's market definition, arguing that it improperly limited the scope of competition to 'open web display advertising' and excluded display advertising on websites – like Amazon and Meta – and mobile apps.^[47] The Court denied Google's motion in June 2024, ruling that there were significant questions of disputed facts that precluded summary judgment.^[48]

Following a three-week bench trial, the district court issued a judgment in April 2025 that Google has monopoly power in both the open-web display publisher ad server and ad exchange markets.^[49] In doing so, the court rejected Google's argument that Plaintiffs had defined both the publisher ad servers and ad exchange markets too narrowly.^[50] With respect to Google's alleged conduct, the court found that Google's acquisitions of DoubleClick and

Admeld did not constitute actionable acts of monopolisation. Conversely, the Court found that Google improperly maintained its market power through tying its publisher ad server to its ad exchange, in violation of the Sherman Act.^[51]

The remedies phase of the trial is scheduled to begin in September 2025.^[52]

FTC V Amazon

In September 2023, the FTC sued Amazon in the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington alleging that the company monopolised two markets: the online superstore market (the market for shoppers seeking the unique experience of browsing and purchasing from an online store offering a breadth and depth of products) and the market for online marketplace services (the market for services that enable sellers to list their products in a marketplace used by a high volume shoppers).^[53]

The FTC claims that Amazon restrained competition from rivals in these markets by imposing anti-discounting measures and requiring sellers to use Amazon's fulfilment services as a condition of Prime eligibility.^[54] According to the FTC, Amazon punishes sellers that offer lower prices on non-Amazon websites by burying those sellers' products in Amazon search results and by removing the 'buy box' from their product pages, a feature that allows customers to easily add the product to their carts.^[55] Amazon's alleged anti-discounting tactics, the FTC claims, impede rivals from attracting shoppers and sellers to their own platforms because they are unable to offer lower prices to shoppers or lower fees to sellers that can be passed along to shoppers in the form of lower prices.^[56] The FTC further argues that requiring sellers to use Amazon's fulfilment service makes it substantially more expensive for sellers to list their products on other platforms. According to the FTC, Amazon's policies have the effect of hamstringing independent fulfilment providers, who cannot access sufficient order volume to achieve economies of scale and would otherwise facilitate multihoming.^[57]

Amazon moved to dismiss the FTC's case, arguing that its practices 'benefit consumers and are the essence of competition'.^[58] Amazon maintains that its discounting practices are lawful and 'encourage[d]' under the antitrust laws.^[59] Amazon also asserts that its practices have pro-competitive benefits: refusing to feature products sold at a lower price elsewhere establishes consumer trust, and conditioning Prime eligibility on Amazon's fulfilment services enables Amazon to satisfy customer demand and expectation for reliably fast delivery.^[60]

The court granted in part and denied in part Amazon's motion to dismiss. While the Court dismissed certain state-law consumer claims,^[61] it ultimately held that the FTC sufficiently pled its Sherman Act monopolisation claims. The Court further held that Amazon's proffered procompetitive justifications were fact questions that could not be resolved at the motion to dismiss stage.^[62]

The trial is set for February 2027.^[63]

Key Takeaways

- Government enforcers and private plaintiffs have continued to press aggressive antitrust claims challenging dominance in big tech industries and have secured several notable wins.
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The government has had success in proving narrow technology markets at trial, even where there is some competition or interaction with other forms of advertising or search functions.

- In several cases – including those involving Google – courts are faced with crafting remedies where the government is seeking forced divestitures.
- These cases are likely to generate new precedents to guide courts in crafting remedies for monopolisation claims in the future.

LITIGATION REGARDING VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL AGREEMENTS

United States V Agri Stats, Inc

In 2023, the DOJ and numerous state regulators filed a complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota against Agri Stats, Inc (Agri Stats), an Indiana-based subscription and consulting service in the meat processing industry. Specifically, plaintiffs challenged Agri Stats' market data aggregation service as an 'information-exchange conspiracy' in violation of section 1 of the Sherman Act.^[64] Agri Stats aggregates market information from its subscribers – meat and poultry processors – regarding inventories, prices, wage information, costs and other operational metrics. Agri Stats then compiles the information, anonymises it and circulates it to subscribers in regular, detailed reports, which the complaint characterises as a business model that involves establishing and operating information exchanges among competitors.^[65] The complaint specifically alleges that the information published in its reports enables anticompetitive conduct, noting the sensitivity of the information, its timeliness, its level of detail, its insufficient anonymisation and the asymmetry it creates with non-processors who cannot access the data.^[66] The government plaintiffs also challenged Agri Stats' 'give to get' policy, which allegedly requires subscribers to provide complete, up-to-date reports on their own performance metrics as a condition of accessing the aggregated data.^[67] In the DOJ's view, this data allowed subscribers to learn where their prices were lower and could be raised to meet competitor rates, where they could restrict output to stay in line with competitors' current or projected supply and where they could alter the employment conditions of their labourers.^[68]

The complaint survived Agri Stats' motion to dismiss, as the court found sufficient the DOJ's allegations of antitrust injury.^[69] The court also denied Agri Stats' motion to compel plaintiffs to identify the specific competitively sensitive information that plaintiffs contend will result in antitrust injury.^[70] The court sided with the plaintiffs' argument that 'under the right circumstances, any of the information provided in Agri Stats' report can have anti-competitive effects'.^[71] The case is still in its early stages.

Realpage Litigations

Litigation is ongoing in a section 1 class action by a group of rental tenants against RealPage, a data service whose algorithms recommend rental rates to landlords across approximately 4.5 million housing units nationwide, as well as defendant landlords who allegedly used the software to set prices and restrict the supply of available rental units.^[72] The case is progressing after numerous cases were consolidated in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee in April 2023. The plaintiffs alleged that the landlords conspired to avoid competing among themselves by accepting RealPage's rental rate recommendations, which are based on an algorithmic analysis of both public and proprietary data. The defendants allegedly policed the utilisation of those rates to ensure rate

prices stayed high.^[73] While some landlord defendants have settled, plaintiffs' claims largely survived dismissal and the litigation remains active.^[74]

In August of 2024, the DOJ and several states initiated a similar claim against RealPage in a federal court in North Carolina.^[75] The complaint originally named RealPage as the sole defendant in alleged violations of sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Act, stating that RealPage held itself out to landlords as a means of fixing rental prices at artificially inflated rates, it did so by using non-public, competitively sensitive data provided by landlords, and it leveraged that data to exclude competition in the commercial revenue management software market.^[76] In January of 2025, the DOJ amended its complaint to add several defendant landlords, shifting its focus to methods of communication between the landlords about pricing, both through and independent from RealPage.^[77]

Duffy V Yardi Sys., Inc

In 2023, a group of plaintiffs brought a class action suit against Yardi Systems, Inc, a property management software company, and a group of property managers.^[78] Plaintiffs allege that a group of property managers and owners used Yardi's software to collude and impose artificially inflated pricing for multifamily properties.^[79] Plaintiffs claim that Yardi's 'RENTmaximizer' software was publicly marketed to eliminate discounting that normally occurs in a competitive market.^[80]

Yardi filed a motion to dismiss, arguing that the property management companies' independent decisions to use Yardi's software do not equate to a price-fixing conspiracy.^[81] Yardi explained that the plaintiffs' claims misunderstand Yardi's software; rather than users being bound to the suggested rates, Yardi's software balances real-time inventory and market conditions, thus allowing users to see rates daily.^[82] The District Court denied the motion to dismiss, explaining that the plaintiffs alleged more than 'simply parallel conduct'.^[83] Important factors considered by the court that pushed the plaintiffs' claims towards plausibility included the detailed allegations of how Yardi's software was advertised to landlords, how the software works, the confidential nature of the information the defendants agreed to provide and the alleged perk of being able to raise rental rates, which the defendants 'understood' they would receive in exchange.^[84]

Litigation is ongoing, with trial currently scheduled for February 2026.^[85]

Epic V Google: Google App Store Litigation

In December 2023, a jury delivered a victory to Epic Games in its suit against Google, Inc for monopolising the markets for app distribution and in-app billing services on Android devices.^[86] Epic, which develops the game Fortnite, convinced the jury that Google adopted and enforced anticompetitive restrictions on Android platforms to unlawfully maintain its app store and in-app billing monopolies, enabling Google to claim substantial transaction fees from developers for in-app purchases.^[87]

Specifically, Epic argued that Google suppressed rival app stores and in-app billing services by:

- entering into licensing agreements with device manufacturers that required the manufacturers to pre-install and display Google's app store and Google Play on device home screens;
- paying certain device manufacturers to refrain from pre-installing other app stores;

- implementing a Premier Device Program, which offered special financial incentives to device manufacturers in exchange for Google Play exclusivity;
- prohibiting developers that distribute apps on Google Play from offering competing app stores or routing in-app payments through competing billing services;
- offering incentives to keep top developers from distributing apps through platforms other than Google Play; and
- creating a ‘technically complex, confusing and threatening’ process that inhibits users from ‘sideloading’ apps and app stores other than Google Play.^[88]

In its defence, Google argued that it had no affirmative duty to distribute rival app stores on Google Play.^[89] Google also argued that its agreements with developers were pro-competitive because they enabled Google to deliver a more attractive app store to consumers.^[90] Google attempted to persuade the jury that Google Play competed vigorously with Apple’s App Store,^[91] but the jury ultimately found that Google competed and possessed monopoly power in more narrowly defined markets for Android app distribution and Android in-app payment services, thus excluding Apple’s App Store from the relevant market.^[92]

In its request for a new trial, Google disputed Epic’s Android-only market, which, Google claimed, improperly ignored the competition Google faces from Apple in the app store market.^[93] The court ultimately rejected Google’s request for a new trial.^[94]

In October 2024, the court entered a permanent injunction against Google based on the Jury’s verdict. The order bars Google from sharing ‘revenue generated by the Google Play Store with any person or entity that distributes Android apps, or has stated that it will launch or is considering launching an Android app distribution platform or store’ for a period of three years.^[95] Google has appealed the permanent injunction order to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. The appellate court heard oral arguments in the appeal in February 2025, and the case is currently pending.^[96]

Key Takeaways

- Private plaintiffs and government enforcers are focused on identifying modern forms of anticompetitive collusion, especially to the extent it exists in modern technologies and platforms that facilitate the aggregation and exchange of information.
- Companies should be wary when participating in platforms that require users to contribute sales or business data to receive data in return.

MERGER ENFORCEMENT LITIGATION

FTC V Tapestry, Inc & Capri Holdings Ltd

In April 2024, the FTC filed a complaint in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York to block Tapestry, Inc’s (Tapestry) US\$8.5 billion bid to acquire Capri Holdings.^[97] In the agency’s view, the combination of Tapestry’s brands, including Coach and Kate Spade with Capri’s brands, including Michael Kors, would unreasonably restrain competition in the market for ‘accessible luxury’ handbags.^[98] The FTC’s complaint emphasised that the companies are fierce, head-to-head competitors not only with respect to product design but also pricing, promotions and discounts, among other things.^[99] The court conducted an evidentiary hearing to decide the FTC’s request for a preliminary injunction in September 2024.^[100]

Ultimately, the court granted the FTC's request for a preliminary injunction and barred the parties from completing their merger.^[101] The parties hotly contested the FTC's proposed 'accessible luxury' market definition during the hearing. Accessible luxury handbags, the FTC claimed, were distinct from both 'mass market' and higher end 'true luxury' products. The parties attempted to respond with evidence that consumers will look to products from across these three categories when selecting a bag, and that the FTC's market definition did not fit the industries' commercial realities.^[102] The court sided with the government by ruling that 'accessible luxury' constituted a cognisable antitrust market. Applying the factors set forth by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown Shoe v United States*, the court found that 'accessible luxury' bags constituted a relevant market because they are generally manufactured in the same factories in Asia with comparable craftsmanship and materials and are generally marketed in similar ways at affordable prices.^[103] The court also gave heavy weight to internal documents suggesting that the parties treated each other as key competitors and used terms like 'affordable luxury' to identify their own market segments.^[104] Using 'affordable luxury' as the operative market definition, the court considered the parties' respective evidence and expert testimony regarding market concentration and found that the merger was likely to substantially lessen competition.^[105]

Tapestry and Capri appealed the district court's decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in October 2024.^[106] In November 2024, while the appeal was still pending, Tapestry and Capri announced that they were abandoning the transaction.^[107]

FTC V Microsoft Corp & Activision Blizzard, Inc

In May 2025, the FTC abandoned its long running bid to block Microsoft's US\$68.7 billion acquisition of video game developer Activision Blizzard, Inc.^[108] The announcement followed a decision by a panel from the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirming the district court's denial of the FTC's request to enjoin the deal.^[109]

In its complaint filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, the FTC alleged that the deal would allow Microsoft – maker of the Xbox gaming console – to suppress competition from rival video game console makers and subscription cloud-gaming business, in violation of section 7 of the Clayton Act.^[110] The district court also rejected the FTC's contention that it could demonstrate the merger would substantially lessen competition either by demonstrating that Microsoft would have either the ability or the incentive to foreclose rivals – making clear that both the ability and incentive must be demonstrated. The court placed significant weight on Microsoft's commitment to make Call of Duty available on rival gaming consoles such as Sony's PlayStation and Nintendo's Switch and several cloud gaming services.^[111]

On appeal, the FTC repeated its arguments that the merger would empower Microsoft to foreclose competition from rivals.^[112] The Ninth Circuit rejected the FTC's arguments and affirmed that the district court applied the correct legal standards and did not abuse its discretion.^[113] The court confirmed that a preliminary injunction was unwarranted because the FTC was unlikely to prevail on the merits as the FTC's foreclosure theory was unrealistic, and the deal was unlikely to substantially lessen competition. Call of Duty's availability across gaming consoles and cross-console gameplay are central to the game's success, the court reasoned. Thus, Microsoft would have a substantial disincentive to foreclose competitors' access to Activision games.^[114] Similarly, the court ruled that the deal would not adversely affect competition in the market for video game 'library subscription' services. On this point,

the court held that the FTC demonstrated that, at most, the deal could potentially lead to some foreclosure of competition, and this would not amount to a substantial reduction in competition, as prohibited by the Clayton Act.^[115]

FTC V Tempur Sealy Int'l Inc And Mattress Firm Group Inc

The FTC lost its case in US District Court for the Southern District of Texas in which it sought to block Tempur Sealy International Inc's (Tempur Sealy) proposed acquisition of Mattress Firm Group Inc (Mattress Firm). The court denied the FTC's motion for preliminary injunction after finding that the vertical merger is likely procompetitive, and unlikely to substantially lessen competition.^[116] The court also rejected the FTC's theory of a narrow product market definition for 'premium' mattresses defined as mattresses priced at US\$2,000 or above, reasoning that '[t]he evidence on the whole doesn't support a bright-line distinction of that sort based so rigidly on price'.^[117]

Regarding competitive effects, the FTC advanced a theory that the proposed merger would harm Tempur Sealy's competitors – other mattress manufacturers – by foreclosing an essential channel where mattresses are sold, arguing that Mattress Firm is a uniquely situated multi-brand retailer with a national geographic footprint. The court did not find evidence of a risk of substantial foreclosure considering the multiplicity of suppliers and retailers in the mattress industry, and the small percentage of the of the market being foreclosed.^[118] The parties' remedial commitments to divest certain Tempur Sealy retail stores, commit slots at Mattress Firm for third-party mattresses and prevent the sharing of competitively sensitive information, relieved the court of any lingering concerns about the transaction.^[119] After the court denied the government's request for preliminary injunctive relief, the FTC dismissed its case against Tempur Sealy and Mattress Firm.^[120]

Key Takeaways

- Recently, government enforcers have successfully blocked horizontal mergers between head-to-head competitors. In several such cases, the government has asserted the more novel theories put forth in the FTC and DOJ's 2023 Horizontal Merger Guidelines. Reviewing courts have, however, avoided ruling based on these theories and have instead granted preliminary injunctions based on more traditional analyses of market structure and post-merger concentration.
- Conversely, government enforcers have faced several defeats in cases challenging vertical mergers. Courts have expressed scepticism of government claims that deals will give parties both the ability and incentive to substantially foreclose competition from rivals.

PRICE DISCRIMINATION LITIGATION

FTC V Pepsi

In January 2025, two days prior to President Trump taking office, the FTC, in a 3:2 vote along political party lines, authorised a lawsuit against PepsiCo Inc.^[121] The suit was filed in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York.^[122] The FTC claimed Pepsi violated § 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act and §§ 2(d) and 2(e) of the Robinson-Patman Act, which prohibits sellers and buyers from, respectively, offering and accepting promotional advantages that are not available to all competitors.^[123] The suit alleged the soda company provided a large, big box retailer with price advantages, such as promotional payments,

allowances and services, which were not made available to competing customers.^[124] The FTC sought a permanent injunction.^[125]

The same day the suit was announced, the Commission's two Republican members dissented.^[126] Commissioner Holyoak argued that the complaint was insufficient to survive a motion to dismiss, as (1) it failed to allege PepsiCo paid the retailer for anything, (2) any perceived payment for the retailer's services was not in exchange for the sale of PepsiCo products, and (3) the complaint's allegations regarding promotions provided to competitors was conclusory.^[127]

In May 2025, the FTC voted, 3:0, to dismiss the suit without prejudice, citing weaknesses in the original complaint including a lack of evidence.^[128] In its statement regarding the dismissal, the Commission affirmed its willingness to enforce the Robinson-Patman Act in the future after 'thorough investigation'.^[129]

In The Matter Of Southern Glazer's Wine And Spirits

In April 2025, the Central District of California declined to dismiss the FTC's claims against Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits, LLC (Southern) under the Robinson-Patman Act.^[130] The Robinson-Patman Act prohibits certain forms of 'price discrimination'. In *Southern Glazer's*, the FTC alleges a 'secondary-line' theory of liability, in which the seller is allegedly discriminating among its customers.^[131] In other words, the FTC alleged that Southern had 'favoured' and 'disfavoured' customers, who were 'competing purchasers of commodities of like grade and quality'.^[132] The FTC further alleges that Southern 'violated the Robinson-Patman Act by selling wine and spirits to small, independent 'mom and pop' businesses at prices that are drastically higher than the prices Southern charges large national and regional chains'.^[133]

Southern moved to dismiss, arguing that the FTC's complaint failed to satisfy the Robinson-Patman Act's interstate commerce requirements and instead focuses on intrastate alcohol sales, pursuant to state laws regulating alcohol distribution. The court rejected this argument, holding that the FTC had sufficiently alleged interstate commerce by alleging that Southern purchased specific products across state lines to fulfil the anticipated demands of favoured purchasers in several states.^[134] The court likewise rejected Southern's remaining arguments and ruled that the FTC sufficiently alleged Southern discriminated among 'favoured and disfavoured buyers'; who purchased goods of 'like grade and quality'; and that such discrimination created 'harm to competition'.^[135]

Following the denial of its motion to dismiss, in May 2025, Southern filed its answer, which contains a narrative introduction describing widespread scepticism of the Robinson-Patman Act in the modern era.^[136] Southern's answer describes the Robinson-Patman Act as 'a little-known federal antitrust statute that has not been used by a government antitrust enforcer in almost a quarter century' and criticises the FTC for 'dusting off' the statute and using it to stifle discounting practices that make products more affordable for consumers.^[137]

Key Takeaways

- Although the Robinson-Patman Act has not been widely enforced over the past few decades, recent rulings confirm the ongoing Act's ongoing enforceability.
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The Robinson-Patman Act prohibits price discrimination under certain circumstances – such as where a seller has ‘favoured’ and ‘disfavoured’ customers who purchase goods of like grade and quality.

Endnotes

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