For several years, the only major options in the smartphone market have been Android and iOS. Android is an open-source operating system, but virtually all Android devices come with significant amounts of proprietary code; iOS is almost completely proprietary. Many Android phones and all iPhones have locked bootloaders, preventing the user from replacing the operating system.

Many phones are also carrier-locked, preventing the user from switching cell carriers without the approval of the one through which they purchased the phone. Few devices give the user root access without making modifications to the software and possibly voiding the warranty in the process. Overall, while the purchaser may legally own the device, in many ways it remains in the control of the manufacturer and often the carrier. Previous attempts at developing open-source smartphones have either failed or produced expensive devices.

PINE64 has been making various FOSS-friendly electronic devices for several years. The company originally made single-board computers (SBCs), and later developed devices such as laptops and tablets. One of its most popular devices, however, is the PinePhone, which is designed to promote mobile Linux distributions as an alternative to
Android and iOS. The phone allows the user to install any compatible operating system, and it is not locked to a particular carrier. Instead, it is designed to give the user as much control as possible.

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