

Popular Muslim prayer app ends relationship with firm selling data to US military

by [Aysha Khan](#) in the [December 16, 2020](#) issue



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The popular Islamic lifestyle app Muslim Pro, which has nearly 150 million downloads around the world, says it will stop selling its users' location data to a tech firm that resells that information to the US military.

An investigation published by Vice News on November 16 found that Muslim Pro and the dating app Muslim Mingle were among hundreds of seemingly benign smartphone apps that have been providing their users' location data to private companies.

These third-party data brokers—in the case of Muslim Pro and Muslim Mingle, a company called X-Mode—sold that anonymized location data to various contractors, who then provided it to the US military. Vice's investigation found that the US Special Operations Command, a branch of the military responsible for counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and special reconnaissance, purchased location data mined from the apps in order to support overseas missions.

Muslim Pro denied that it has sold personal user data to the US military but confirmed that the app shared anonymized data with X-Mode.

The company said it is investigating its data governance practices to ensure user data has been managed in line with global laws and regulations around data privacy protection. The company also said it is immediately ending its relationships with X-Mode and all other data partners.

"The trust of millions of brothers and sisters of the Ummah put in Muslim Pro every day means everything to us," Muslim Pro wrote in a statement, after thousands of social media comments from Muslims worldwide decried the app's sale of its user data as "betraying" Muslims and allowing the military to "target" Muslims for surveillance.

The Islamic Leadership Council of New York has urged members of its 90 organizations to delete the Muslim Pro and Muslim Mingle apps, and several prominent Muslim figures have announced they are switching to other prayer time apps.

Muslim Pro is primarily used to help track daily prayer times and to point to Mecca. The app also offers a Qur'an text with translations and audio recitations, as well as a map of halal restaurants and mosques.

“These reports should serve as a reminder for American Muslims,” the Muslim Public Affairs Council said in a statement. “We must increase our data privacy literacy and collectively work to ensure transparency and equity in our data collection practices. Trust is built, but sketchy public-private partnerships erode its foundations.”

The Council on American-Islamic Relations has called for a congressional hearing “to explore one of the first documented cases of the U.S. military purchasing the movement and location data of Muslim app users—including American Muslims—for possible military strikes overseas.” CAIR questioned the legality of these purchases, since ordinarily obtaining location data would require a warrant.

In 2018, a security company found that Muslim Pro was among dozens of Android apps, including Tinder, Bible+, and OkCupid, that were transmitting sensitive, non-anonymous user data to Facebook. —Religion News Service