



## Feet in 2 Worlds

### Surveillance At Your Front Door

Government agencies, law enforcement, and retail businesses are increasingly making use of surveillance technologies like license plate readers to monitor and track members of the public. While privacy rights advocates critique the way these institutions can abuse the data they're collecting, some individuals opt to use these technologies in their own homes.

Producer Ahmed Ashour explores the relationship between immigrants and consumer home surveillance devices like Ring cameras. Do immigrants feel that these technologies keep them safe? And how have attitudes towards these devices changed in recent years?

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**Quincy Surasmith:** This is Feet in 2 Worlds, telling the stories of today's immigrants. I'm Quincy Surasmith, Managing Editor.

Today's story is part of our latest series, "Surveilled and Sold." That investigative series has been reporting on how surveillance technologies track immigrants in an era of mass deportation — and the ways corporations and the U.S. government buy, sell, and exchange our personal data.

But what about the immigrants who choose to use these technologies themselves? What's their relationship to devices like doorbell cameras? And have attitudes toward these devices changed in recent years?

Feet in 2 Worlds producer Ahmed Ashour has the story.

**Ahmed Ashour:** We begin in a living room in Irvine, California. It's February 8th, 2026.

**Sharareh Drury:** It's Sunday. I'm there with my husband, his parents. My father's in town.

**Ahmed:** That's Sharareh Drury. She's an Iranian American journalist and it's not just any Sunday.

**Sharareh:** Super Bowl Sunday. We're sitting down to watch the game.

**Ahmed:** And it's the big game. Now, I don't really get American football. But Sharareh and her family love the sport. Maybe because they actually understand the rules of the game.

One thing that Sharareh and I can agree on is just how excited we are for what happens after the second quarter. We're excited for the Bad Bunny conce— I mean, the Bad Bunny halftime show.

But the Super Bowl isn't just about the big game and the halftime show. No. Many people tune in to watch the commercials — these big, splashy ads with celebrities. This year has commercials for everything from Pringles to Dunkin. And Sharareh — she's not liking what she's seeing.

**Sharareh:** We had been complaining that all of the commercials had been bad. And I hate to say this, like it's — I don't enjoy watching commercials at all, but the Super Bowl. Usually there's, I don't know, something...

**Ring Super Bowl Commercial (Archival):** “This is Milo!” Pets are family...

**Sharareh:** And then this ad appears.

**Ring Super Bowl Commercial (Archival):** And every year, 10 million go missing...

**Ahmed:** A commercial comes on with a man and his young daughter welcoming a new pet to the family: Milo, a photogenic yellow labrador with a blue collar around his neck. Everyone, including Milo, looks so happy to be there. But a second later, Milo goes missing. And so do many dogs around the U.S.

**Ring Super Bowl Commercial (Archival):** ...and the way we look for them hasn't changed in years...until now.

**Ahmed:** This is a commercial for Ring, an Amazon-owned company. Ring makes small doorbell cameras with a signature LED ring in the center. And in this commercial, Ring is introducing a special AI feature called “Search Party.” Ring says “Search Party” helps families reunite with their lost dogs.

**Ring Super Bowl Commercial (Archival):** One post of a dog's photo in the Ring app starts outdoor cameras looking for a match.

**Ahmed:** In one shot, we look down on a suburban neighborhood. Suddenly, all the Ring cameras from multiple houses activate at the same time. The cameras all emit these haloes of blue light as they search for Milo the dog. And one of the cameras spots the labrador within seconds.

**Ring Super Bowl Commercial (Archival):** Be a hero in your neighborhood with “Search Party,” available to everyone for free right now.

**Sharareh:** And like, gosh darn it, Ring can come in and save the day.

**Ahmed:** As Sharareh watches the commercial, she — a Ring user herself — starts to suspect this technology isn't just about finding lost dogs.

**Sharareh:** I remember looking at my dad. I'm like, "This isn't about dogs, this is about catching people. This is about catching and snatching." I have Ring and in that moment I was like, I can't have a Ring camera anymore.

**Ahmed:** Sharareh's not alone. That Ring commercial rubbed others the wrong way too. After the Superbowl, some even went online to voice their concerns.

**Instagram User 1 (Archival):** I'm trying to understand why nobody is talking about this Ring camera ad...

**Instagram User 2 (Archival):** ...you can activate the whole neighborhood of cameras to help you find your dog. Replace dogs with anything...

**Instagram User 3 (Archival):** In case it wasn't clear, we're the dogs in that video, in that commercial.

**Ahmed:** People are worried. This includes people from immigrant backgrounds, like Sharareh. People who are worried about being watched, especially by the government.

President Donald Trump's second administration has carried out a ruthless agenda of mass deportation. And ICE — that's Immigration and Customs Enforcement — has executed that agenda by watching immigrants. Tracking their movements in real life and online. Now, ICE raids have become common sights in cities across the country from Los Angeles, to Minneapolis, to New York City, where I live.

**News Anchor (Archival):** ...24 hours after ICE swept in making arrests along Lower Manhattan's Canal Street...

**Protestors:** Fuck ICE! Fuck ICE!

**Protestors:** Chinga La Migra! Chinga La Migra

**Ahmed:** It's a scary time to be an immigrant. So, when Ring rolls out a feature that allows a camera to look for something based on its physical description, it's alarming. But if Ring cameras aren't for finding dogs, then what *are* they for? To answer that question, I needed to figure out why we buy these devices in the first place.

For many SWANA folks — that's folks of South West Asian and North African descent — the word "surveillance" is synonymous with living in the United States after 9/11. The U.S. government invested heavily in surveilling Muslim communities across the country, even passing legislation, like the PATRIOT Act, to make that surveillance legal, easy.

But for Sharareh, the word "surveillance" is attached to a traumatic experience she never thought she'd go through.

**Sharareh:** Fun fact — I say this with heavy sarcasm — is, when I was in my senior year of high school. I was kidnapped.

**Ahmed:** That's right, Sharareh was kidnapped.

It's 2006 and Teenage Sharareh's returning home late one night from school. As she's stepping out of her car, she feels something pressed against her head. A gun. Two men in masks demand that she take them inside her home and give them all the money she has. Sharareh remembers her biggest concern that night.

**Sharareh:** My very first thought, and I think if someone else is Iranian, they will get this. I was like, my Persian mother, if she wakes up to this, she will get us all killed. Like she will get a bat and she will start throwing dishes at these people. Like, she won't care that they have guns.

**Ahmed:** Fortunately for the men, Sharareh's mother does not get involved. Unfortunately for Sharareh, she still has a gun to her head. She lies to the two men and tells them that she has money in her bank account. The two men pick up on her lie and force her to call her dad. He comes to her rescue with some cash. And eventually, the men set them free.

After that incident, things change around the Drury household.

**Sharareh:** We had never had, in our own home — we had never had security. But obviously after that incident, we did. Within a week, we got a dog. We had never had a dog. We had to this day, like, this extensive, like, alarm system at my house where like cameras inside the house, outside the house, everywhere. That still remains at our house today. And that experience has always made me feel unsafe everywhere I've been ever since.

**Ahmed:** And ever since, Sharareh has always had some kind of security system installed. When she moved to Irvine, California, two years ago, she was looking to install a doorbell camera. She heard about a device that everyone seemed to be talking about. A device you've probably seen installed on other people's front doors — maybe even your front door. A device with a sound you might recognize.

[Ring notification sound]

**Ahmed:** Sharareh...

[Ring notification sound]

**Ahmed:** ...bought a Ring camera.

[Ring notification sound]

**Ahmed:** Ring’s story begins in 2013. It had a different name back then — DoorBot. It was a small startup founded by Jamie Siminoff — he’s the voice you heard in the Super Bowl commercial. Siminoff first pitches the idea of Doorbot on the show *Shark Tank*.

**Shark Tank (Archival):** Sharks, wouldn’t it be nice to know who’s behind the door before you let me in. With my product, you can.

**Ahmed:** None of the Sharks take the bait. And Siminoff leaves the tank without a single investor. But it does not matter — DoorBot’s appearance on the show boosts interest in the product, and we’re off to the races.

2014, Doorbot rebrands as Ring, to be more in line with this image as something you purchase for your home.

2015, basketball legend Shaquille O’Neill invests \$1 million in Ring.

2015. Billionaire Richard Branson drops \$28 million on Ring after seeing his friend use one.

2018, Amazon acquires Ring for over \$1 billion

Lots of money is invested in this device. And boy, does the company grow. A 2023 report estimated 10 million Americans have Ring cameras installed in their homes. Americans like Sharareh.

**Sharareh:** We’re Amazon subscribers. I saw the Ring, you know, advertised. I feel like when anyone ever talks about having a doorbell camera, it’s Ring.

**Ahmed:** Ring’s website states its mission very clearly: “Make neighborhoods safer.” And Ring makes it easy for you to buy into that mission. You can get a camera for as little as 50 bucks — sometimes even less. It comes with a handy app and you can even join Neighbors, a free social app and feature that allows Ring users to get crime alerts, share camera footage, and connect with each other.

But, I still wondered: if these cameras are so ubiquitous, so everywhere, so easy to install, do they actually make our neighborhoods safer? Do I, a Muslim, Arab immigrant, feel safer knowing that I could put a Ring camera up? Do other immigrants feel safe? I visited one of New York City’s most vibrant immigrant neighborhoods, looking for answers.

**Ahmed:** Hello!

**Tazin Khan:** Good to see you.

**Ahmed:** Salam Alaykom! Hi! How are you?

**Tazin:** Good, how are you?

**Ahmed:** It's a cloudy Wednesday afternoon in March. I'm in Jackson Heights, in Queens, New York with Tazin Khan —

**Tazin:** — Tazin Khan and I am the founder of Cyber Collective, an organization that's dedicated to online harm prevention for marginalized communities.

**Ahmed:** Tazin has a very cool and, frankly, intimidating air to her. She's wearing a black leather jacket and looks very intense — in an almost no-nonsense kind of way. But as we talk, I pick up on a side of her that is curious and quite funny, actually.

I want to ask Tazin about her work consulting everyday people and non-profits on how to stay safe online. But, before that, she offers to take me around the neighborhood. Tazin is Bangladeshi-American. She grew up around here, and these city blocks are home to a large South Asian population. So we set off to ask people — immigrants — whether they feel safe. And so, we're walking —

**Tazin:** — we're walking toward Bangladesh Street and 73rd. Um, the Bangladesh community is really, really big here. There's also a ton of like Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese population, but the Bengalis definitely have taken over.

**Ahmed:** Jackson Heights is alive with people doing some last minute shopping before the end of Ramadan and the arrival of Eid, a major Muslim holiday. We notice two young Nepalese men — students — getting chai from a cart nearby. We chat for a bit before I ask them: do they feel safe? Are they worried about crime?

**Student 1:** I would say about a year ago, we came to New York and it was very crowded, especially Jackson Heights, I was kind of worried that there might be a little bit more crime here. But when I came here it was a lot safer compared to other places. So yeah, I was really happy here.

**Ahmed:** Alright, I appreciate it.

**Ahmed:** I almost cut the recording when Tazin asks a very direct follow-up.

**Tazin:** I think specifically like, as immigrants, right? Are you afraid of being deported right now?

**Student 1:** Yeah.

**Tazin:** You are?

**Student 1:** Yeah. Kind of.

**Tazin:** And how do you think that that would happen? Like if you were to get deported? Do you think it's because you're going to an airport? Do you think the ICE raids will come find you?

**Student 2:** We were concerned like a month ago because there was raid on the Woodside area and also on the Canal Street area, there were few ICE officers. But, at the end of the day, we're just students, right? So we don't think too much.

**Ahmed:** Tazin and I then walk a few blocks down. We notice a man, an uncle, staring at us from a shop window. We approach him and, this time, I let Tazin lead the conversation. She speaks with him in Bangla.

**Man:** যাদের পেপার্স আছে তাদের কোন ভয় নেই যেই তো তারা লিগাল...

**Tazin:** He said, of course, everybody here is in fear. A lot of people that have documentation, they're like not as fearful, but majority of the people here are undocumented.

**Ahmed:** As the uncle speaks, he pulls out his green card, which he keeps on him at all times in his wallet, tucked right behind his driver's license.

**Tazin:** The way that we say it in Bangla is like "kagoj," which means "papers." Like, "Do you have your papers?" And he's saying like the depth of that and the gravity of that. He's making a living legally and ethically, and he's doing right by, you know, what it means to be a good citizen, so he is not afraid.

**Ahmed:** I wish I felt that confidence myself. We've seen cases where green cards have not kept immigrants safe.

We then end up at a big supermarket carrying South Asian products and groceries. We speak with a woman. She's wearing a traditional Salwar Kameez and a hijab. She's a bit hesitant at first, but opens up when we tell her that she can speak anonymously.

**Woman:** আমি এখানে আজকে সাত বছর ধরে থেকে গেছে...

**Tazin:** She has been living here in the States for seven years, undocumented, and has been more afraid in the past two to three years about receiving her documentation. And she's a chef at a restaurant.

**Woman:** আজকে আমরা আতঙ্ক থাকি। যখন গাড়ি থাকে...

**Tazin:** She said that at the restaurant that she works at, they basically have like a network, like everybody in Jackson Heights is calling one another to let them know when they see ICE agents. She's like, we are living in a lot of fear right now because of this.

**Ahmed:** Tazin then does what she does at Cyber Collective. She reminds the woman that her phone records and chats are not necessarily private. They might pose a risk for her as an undocumented immigrant.

**Woman:** তাদের তো এমনিই সব থাকে যখন ইমিগ্রেশন করি আসে...

**Tazin:** She was like, yeah, of course I'm aware. Like, but even then we pray and we hope that they won't take us, that we're just people here trying to make a living and I brought my two sons here and I'm just trying to make them good men and provide back into this country. And she's like, we're just all praying.

[Sound of the Maghrib Athan/Call to Prayer]

**Ahmed:** Tazin and I are both Muslims. And we happen to be fasting for Ramadan. As Maghrib prayer time approaches - the time when we can break our fast — we sit down at Kabab King. It's a famous food spot that's a favorite of the city's Mayor, Zohran Mamdani.

**Tazin:** And we're sitting in the upstairs room where there are beautiful draperies and a bunch of people breaking fast, staring at us because you're using a gun-like device lookalike to record me right now.

**Ahmed:** She's referring to my microphone, which always draws attention everywhere I go. And seriously, people are *staring*.

**Tazin:** Everyone's in their *deen* and we are literally in our —

**Ahmed:** — And we're about to talk about surveillance of all things.

**Tazin:** Which is so iconic because like, Bangladeshi aunties and uncles are literally like analog surveillance from growing up. Do you know what I mean? Like they will tell on you, they will call somebody. They were the eyes and the ears before any cameras.

**Ahmed:** Tazin reminds me here that we have lived without home surveillance devices for decades. We finally break our fast over chole, chicken kebabs, and, of course, mango lassis.

**Tazin:** Wow, really sweet. But really good. You know what's crazy? They're all fasting making this food.

**Ahmed:** And I'm assuming they're open during the day, right?

**Tazin:** Correct.

**Ahmed:** Wow.

**Ahmed:** Tazin reminds me here that we have lived without home surveillance devices for decades. We finally break our fast over chole, chicken kebabs, and, of course, mango lassis.

We'll return to Tazin later, but I fixate on this idea that these devices sold us on “a safer neighborhood” or “finding lost dogs” when, right now, that's not even what we're really afraid of. In case you were wondering, no, they don't actually make our

neighborhoods safer. Reports show that these devices rarely prevent crime. They mostly just help us worry less about it.

And even then, those promises might be a distraction. In a surveillance state — one where the government constantly monitors and keeps tabs on its citizens, including immigrants - a company like Ring has a lot to gain from selling its services.

I spoke with Freddy Martinez, co-founder of the Lucy Parsons Labs, about this. The LPL focuses on raising awareness within marginalized communities about the surveillance state.

**Freddy Martinez:** I think Ring in particular — the reason I’ve kept an eye on them for so long, it’s a very ideologically, like, driven company. Like, the CEO goes on podcasts and he talks about like, zero crime.

**Jamie Siminoff on “The Vergecast” (Archival):** ...I think with our products, I do see a path to get crime in a neighborhood close to zero.

**Freddy:** Like that’s his vision of the world is like: we will solve all of society’s problems if we can collect the right amount of data and share it in the right ways and use the right technologies.

**Ahmed:**

Freddy is the son of Mexican immigrants. He grew up in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago — also known as the “Mexico of the Midwest.” He describes it as a “rough” environment. He would later combine his passion for tech with his experiences growing up in Little Village to launch the Lucy Parsons Labs.

Freddy starts telling me about some of Ring’s connections to the surveillance state he’s been observing for years.

Ring, from its early days, has always loved cops. Remember Shaquille O’Neal, the beloved basketball player who invested \$1 million in Ring early on?

**Freddy:** If you know anything about Shaq, he is also a deputized law enforcement officer.

**Shaquille O’Neal (Archival):** Hi, I am Detective Shaquille O’Neal. Doral Police Department. Why I wear the badge? Plain and simple, the badge made me who I am.

**Ahmed:**

Yup, Shaq was appointed as a reserve officer in different police departments across the country. Throughout his career in the NBA and even after he retired, Shaq maintained close relationships with police forces, occasionally helping solve crimes and even taking part in a raid. Safe to say, the Shaq Man loves the cops.

**Shaquille O’Neal for the Doral Police Department (Archival):** ...thank you badge and thank you fellow law enforcement officers. The Shaq man loves you.

**Ahmed:** After Shaq invested in Ring, the company would parade their star investor around these tech and law enforcement conferences. This includes the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference, which Ring would attend and, occasionally, they would throw a party for the cops there. So, they would invite Shaq to show up.

**Freddy:** And then Shaq would be like, “Yo, by the way, we have these Ring cameras. Do you wanna take them home with you for free?”

**Ahmed:** The deal was simple. Ring would turn celebrities, police officers, and celebrities moonlighting as police officers into brand ambassadors. That way, Ring could get more devices out while lending credibility to this idea that it was creating “safer neighborhoods.” We know this more commonly as “influencing,” and it goes against the code of ethics of most police departments. These kinds of offers continued for years.

**Freddy:** It’s almost like a comically corrupt way of selling products to people. But somehow you can do this with Shaq.

**Ahmed:** Ring doesn’t just do giveaways, it also helps the police, at the expense of user privacy. A 2019 investigation in VICE revealed that Ring made available to partner police departments maps showing homes with Ring cameras installed. Then, through a feature in the Neighbors app called Community Requests, the company allowed police to easily request camera footage from all users in the same area. And the police have made these requests a lot. In 2020, for example, police requested videos over 20,000 times. In case of emergency, police departments can even access footage without a user’s consent.

It’s worth noting that the company did reform many of its privacy policies and rolled back features that felt overreaching and creepy. This came after severe backlash and a 2023 Federal Trade Commission charge to the tune of \$5.6 million dollars. But, in 2025 and shortly after Donald Trump was reelected as President, many of these concerning practices started appearing again in features like “Search Party.”

Feet in 2 Worlds reached out to Ring about this criticism that’s been leveled at it over the years. In reply, Ring said, quote: “Ring does not provide law enforcement with direct access to user accounts or data and does not disclose customer information unless required to do so by law, or in rare emergency situations when there is an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury.”

So what does Ring have to gain from all of these deals?

**Freddy:** The value of the network...

**Ahmed:** That’s Freddy again.

**Freddy:** ...goes up as a number of people join the network. The data that they hold is the valuable bit.

Ahmed: And while Ring and its parent company Amazon profit from their relationships with police and their ubiquity in American homes, there's an increasing concern about their role in immigration enforcement.

As I dig deeper into Ring's history, I conclude that, no, there's no evidence that Ring cameras are being actively used by ICE to track, detain, and deport immigrants. And Ring has made an official statement saying as much. But what Ring does is it makes our data vulnerable, especially when that data can be accessed by local and federal law enforcement through various side- and back doors like emergency requests.

I shared with Sharareh, whom we heard from earlier, some of my findings. She was shocked.

Sharareh: I had zero clue. I had zero clue.

Ahmed: Sharareh is getting rid of her Ring camera. She doesn't want to be complicit in this mass surveillance network where people's data — the data of immigrants — is being collected and shared openly. Even if it means removing one of those layers of protection that she installed after she was kidnapped all those years ago. Part of this comes down to who Sharareh is. What her family looks like.

Sharareh: My husband's Mexican. I am Iranian. Both of our communities have been dealing with so much lately with what's going on with Iran overseas, what's happening to the Latino community here? And very specifically, like I, I'm so scared all the time.

So when I'm seeing an ad about, gosh darn it, let's find these dogs. I'm just thinking, "This is gonna turn into where is this dirty brown person and how can I use my Ring camera to find them faster and then alert on the neighborhood app." Like, that is exactly what I felt that where that ad was going. In that moment I was like, I can't have a Ring camera. And I think for a lot of us, it's like, we need to step out of like what's comfortable and like go towards what's right. And that's what I feel like I'm trying to do.

Ahmed: Still, how far can one person go? How far should they go? Freddy and Tazin — people who study surveillance and its impact on immigrant communities — aren't sure whether taking down your Ring camera is sufficient. Tazin thinks it's difficult to fully outrun the surveillance state because it goes way beyond the Ring camera.

Tazin: Even if I decided today I am getting rid of every interconnected technology in my home. Even if I go to park somewhere, there are places where I cannot park without using a fucking QR code, right? Like — we do not have the opportunity to not be so hyper connected.

Ahmed: This perspective ties directly to her work at Cyber Collective, where she encourages risk assessment over moral ultimatums. I ask Tazin to explain how she thinks about

this in practice. She mentions one organization she works with that leads social justice efforts for women of color in Detroit, Michigan.

**Tazin:** Through the risk assessment process, we're like, okay, their number one priority is the safety of the women that they serve. We need a camera.

**Ahmed:** The organization was interested in purchasing a Ring camera, but Tazin warned them of the potential access that law enforcement might have to the footage.

**Tazin:** And that's where we talk about the trade offs, right? Like, the priority and the risk of police and law enforcement using the Ring camera to surveil their people was lower than the priority of using the Ring camera to protect the women that were inside. And that is the nuance that I think is so important.

**Ahmed:** And people in immigrant communities can go through that same risk assessment process, both for themselves and for other immigrants.

**Tazin:** Are you an immigrant? Are you undocumented? Do you fear that law enforcement or the government will find you? Or they're looking for you? Now let's reconsider Ring.

**Ahmed:** Freddy, meanwhile, wants us to take a step back and think about who should be held accountable.

**Freddy:** On a personal level, it does bring me huge satisfaction to see people, like, getting rid of them. But then on top of it, I also think we do ourselves a big disservice when we talk about consumer choices as well, don't just put one up. Just opt out of these features. When in reality it's like, well, hold on a second. There's a bigger issue here, which is: I think what these companies are engaging in are, like, largely undemocratic practices that we should question writ large.

**Ahmed:** I began reporting this piece based on a set of pretty open-ended questions. How do immigrants understand "safety"? Where does safety come from? What does it mean when there is no government to protect us, no police to fully trust, no home surveillance equipment to rely on? I keep going back to something Tazin said as we sat down for iftar at Kabab King:

**Tazin:** Bangladeshi aunts and uncles are literally like analog surveillance from growing up, do you know what I mean? Like they will tell on you, they will call somebody. They were the eyes and the ears before any cameras.

**Ahmed:** Maybe it was a throwaway funny comment, but I believe there's some truth to it. Truth to the fact that, across generations, we have always kept our own safe.

**Freddy:** The disappearance of people in Latin America has happened for generations and so it's like — it reminds me that I'm part of a lineage of people who are resisting this kind of stuff. What people need is a community.

**Ahmed:** Will community be enough in the face of this ever expanding web of surveillance? Will it be enough in the face of ICE raids, detentions, deportations? Civil rights violations? Will it be enough if doorbell cameras stop searching for dogs and start searching for people? I'm not sure, but community gives me hope and a reason to keep watching out for both myself and others.

**Quincy:** This story was produced for Feet in 2 Worlds by Ahmed Ashour. This episode is part of Surveilled and Sold, our investigative series about surveillance technologies and the way our personal data is being exchanged. You can read more about Surveilled and Sold on our website at Fi2W.org. That's F I the number 2, W, dot org.

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Visit our website at Fi2W.org to listen to more stories of today's immigrants. I'm Quincy Surasmith. Thank you for listening.

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