

# Which countries have the smallest personal space?

By How Stuff Works on 07.20.18

Word Count **427**

Level **MAX**



Two young Israeli women looking at pictures on a mobile device. A study found different countries had different definitions of personal space. Photo by: Ran Zisovitch/Getty Images

If you like to stand close to folks when you talk to them, you'll love Argentina. The South American country is filled with "close-talkers" — people who stand 2.5 feet (0.76 meters) away from strangers when chatting. If you prefer more personal space, make your way to Romania instead. There, residents like to stand a spacious 4.5 feet (1.4 meters) away from strangers.

This info on personal "bubbles" comes from a study of preferred interpersonal distances recently published in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. While this issue of personal space in different countries has been examined before, the authors of this study used a much larger data set (nearly 9,000 people living in 42 countries) than was used in previous studies. Participants were shown a picture with two figures representing two people and a line with some distances marked off in between them. The subjects were asked how close should the two figures stand together if they are strangers versus close friends versus colleagues (acquaintances). The subjects were to assume that they were one of the two figures.

The scientists found that residents of Argentina, Peru and Bulgaria stand the closest to strangers, while those from Romania, Hungary and Saudi Arabia want the most space. Americans were somewhere in the middle.

The researchers also studied the personal bubbles we draw between ourselves and family and friends. We're all fine with our family and friends standing closer to us than strangers — no surprise there. And our general bubble size with our friends stays consistent. That is, if we like more personal space, we'll keep our friends farther away than those who are fine with less personal space.

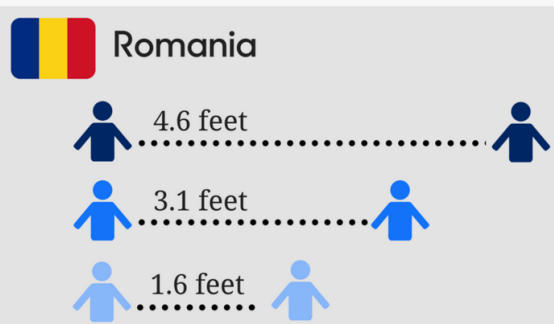
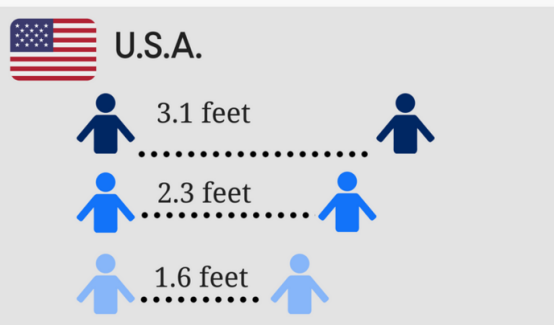
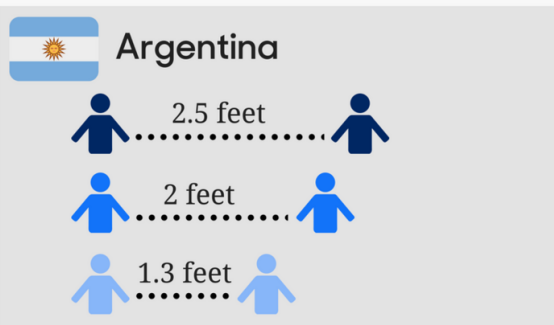
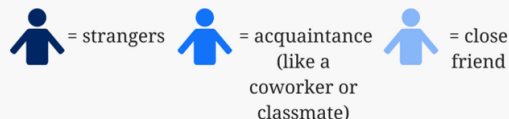
But intriguingly, things change when it comes to close friends or loved ones. The Romanians who like a lot of personal space between themselves and both strangers and colleagues like their intimate relations to be fairly close to them — about 1.5 feet (0.45 meters). That's closer than almost any other group studied. And the Norwegians, whose preference for stranger-distance is somewhere in the middle of the 42 countries studied, want their close friends to be closer to them than any other group (about 1.3 feet or 0.4 meters).

Scientists say it appears temperature has something to do with personal space. Those living in colder climates often prefer to be quite near to their friends, perhaps as a way to stay warm. And those residing in warm climates often stand closer to strangers; at least one past study showed when it's warm, people move in closer to one another.

## Personal Space

is how much space someone prefers to have between themselves and other people. Appropriate closeness differs between countries.

### Key:



Data: Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology

Graphic: Newsela Staff

## Quiz

1 According to the article, an individual's preferences for personal space remain fairly constant in different situations.

Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea outlined above?

- (A) This info on personal "bubbles" comes from a study of preferred interpersonal distances recently published in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology.
- (B) The subjects were asked how close should the two figures stand together if they are strangers versus close friends versus colleagues (acquaintances).
- (C) And our general bubble size with our friends stays consistent. That is, if we like more personal space, we'll keep our friends farther away than those who are fine with less personal space.
- (D) The Romanians who like a lot of personal space between themselves and both strangers and colleagues like their intimate relations to be fairly close to them — about 1.5 feet (0.45 meters).

2 Read the following sentence from the article.

*While this issue of personal space in different countries has been examined before, the authors of this study used a much larger data set (nearly 9,000 people living in 42 countries) than was used in previous studies.*

Which of the following conclusions can be drawn from this sentence?

- (A) There was no need for scientists to conduct a new study on personal space because it had been done before.
- (B) The recent personal space study is more authentic and accurate than previous studies because it included more people.
- (C) Scientists should have included people from every country in the world in their recent personal space study.
- (D) The authors of this personal space study used the information from previous studies as a starting point for their research.

3 Read the following paragraph from the article.

*The scientists found that residents of Argentina, Peru and Bulgaria stand the closest to strangers, while those from Romania, Hungary and Saudi Arabia want the most space. Americans were somewhere in the middle.*

Which CENTRAL idea of the article is MOST supported by the paragraph above?

- (A) Researchers were confused by cultural differences in personal space.
- (B) Scientists got information most easily in Argentina, Peru and Bulgaria.
- (C) Americans cannot agree on the perfect amount of personal space.
- (D) Opinions vary globally about how much personal space is necessary.

Which of the following details from the article is MOST important to the development of the CENTRAL idea?

- (A) Participants were shown a picture with two figures representing two people and a line with some distances marked off in between them.
- (B) The researchers also studied the personal bubbles we draw between ourselves and family and friends. We're all fine with our family and friends standing closer to us than strangers — no surprise there.
- (C) And the Norwegians, whose preference for stranger-distance is somewhere in the middle of the 42 countries studied, want their close friends to be closer to them than any other group (about 1.3 feet or 0.4 meters).
- (D) And those residing in warm climates often stand closer to strangers; at least one past study showed when it's warm, people move in closer to one another.