A Llano Del Rio Guide to Power in Los Angeles
by Rosten Woo
So, you want to see how Power works in Los Angeles?

Bad news first, you’re going to have to draw it yourself. The good news is that this guide provides a structure to help you do it.

But first, a little background. Twenty years ago, Los Angeles erupted into violence hours after police officers were acquitted of brutally beating Rodney King, an event that was captured on video and spread across media outlets worldwide. The image of the assault, as well as a city on fire, caught the world’s attention. But the tragic moment didn’t tell the world about the decades that preceded it—decades of disinvestment and neglect—which left South L.A.’s families powerless, without a voice in government or much hope for the future.

The group Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) emerged from this event with a long-term systemic analysis, applying it as a vehicle for rethinking community organizing. AGENDA later became Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE).

The *Power Analysis* tool was designed by SCOPE’s founder, Anthony Thigpenn, who got his start in organizing with the Black Panthers in Oakland. In the 1980s, he worked with Jobs With Peace, a crucible for much of Los Angeles’ progressive leadership from the nineties til today.

Thigpenn was interested in making community organizing more scientific, systematic, and structured. He wanted trackable results. The idea of mapping a constellation of power players was influenced by both the *Art of War*, and *Force Field Analysis*; a graphical tool developed by the social and organizational psychologist Kurt Lewin as a way to break down complex problems into their constituent parts. Lewin, a founder of modern social psychology, had fled to the U.S. from Nazi Germany, later becoming the director of MIT’s Center for Group Dynamics. He coined the terms “action research” and “group dynamics”.

In *Force Field Analysis*, the *status quo* is defined as the point in-between two opposing forces. The subject undergoing analysis then understands how to change the *status quo* by changing the forces, or relative weights of the forces, acting upon it. This tool, in turn, relied on the concept from gestalt psychology of “The Field”—a space where problems and relationships play out.

EXERCISE 1: FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

1. Write down a proposal for a change you’d like to make in the world. For example, you may write, “close the Chevron refinery in my neighborhood” or “world peace”.

2. Write out all of the forces working in favor of this change (Driving Force), and all forces that you feel restrain this change.

3. Give each force a rating between 1 and 10, basing the figure on the amount of power you imagine this force exerts on the current situation.

4. Add up the #’s in each column to compare how you weigh the driving and restraining forces.
The Power Analysis looks beyond the “Us vs. Them” mentality of Force Field Analysis. It encourages groups to ask who has a stake in a situation beyond the obvious opposition? Who can influence the decision-makers? Who has resources to bring about the necessary change? How invested are power players in addressing change?

Before continuing further, please spend ~5 minutes on Exercise 2, below.

A Network Diagram, like the one you just created, is frequently the kind of “picture of power” associated with television crime shows, conspiracy theorists, and political artworks like Mark Lombardi’s drawings, Josh On’s They Rule or the work of Bureau D’etudes. This kind of diagram emerges from the notion of “interlocking board directorates”—networks of powerful elites that rule society through overlapping appointments in public and private organizations.

The Power Analysis (on next page) is different, it’s not a distant view of “Them”—those who hold power. Instead it is a kind of expanded self-portrait. This form of representation forces the people who construct it to reckon themselves as agents—people who might have influence and an agenda. It does not assume the role of victim or subject.

Instead of creating a web of relationships (a practice that may work for charting organized crime, mapping real estate holdings, or identifying the chain of command in paramilitary organizations, but rarely clarifies power as practiced in the real world), the Power Analysis suggests relations by plotting actors on the same field. Proximity shows similarity in influence and position—not the nature of actors influence on one another.

One of the critical aspects of SCOPE’s approach to Power Analysis is that it is established by organizing a personal analysis around an agenda. You have to have a point of view in order to use the tool. Once this point of view is established, you place yourself and your allies within the same field of operations as your opponents. You cannot construct the Power Analysis without first forwarding your own idea of how the world should be.

The Power Analysis tool can be done alone, but is most often used in group settings with a facilitator. All you need is something to write on. The Power Analysis is meant to help a group hold a conversation. The conversation identifies problems and conditions, as well as community-led solutions. It facilitates the creation of a strategic campaign and organizing plan.

The Power Analysis is designed to be redrafted at many different points in an organizing campaign. It is a living, breathing tool that needs to be revisited to track the changes in the landscape.

EXERCISE 2: NETWORK DIAGRAM
In the circle at the center of this diagram write the name of a central actor or decision-maker in the situation you considered in Exercise 1.
Next elaborate a “network” by placing key allies and opponents in your situations into the diagram. Write their names and circle them. Finally, draw lines connecting any actors that you believe have significant interactions.
EXERCISE 3: POWER ANALYSIS

1. To focus your conversation, identify the problems and conditions you or your group wants to change. Place them in the center top of the grid on the right side of this page. Limit yourself to the top two or three that you would like to focus on at this time.

2. Next, place your own agenda on the top left corner. Your agenda should be your response to the current problems and conditions. (This should be the same agenda you formulated in Exercises 1 and 2.) Place the opposing agenda in the top right. The opposing agenda should include what you know about what motivates the opposition to keep things as they are.

3. Now define the axes. The left-right axis defines whether current or something else is in agreement or disagreement to your agenda. The y-axis is how much influence they have. You will use these axes to place the decision-makers, opposition, allies, and unorganized social groups onto the grid.

4. Next, identify key decision-makers in this particular struggle. Given what you know, where do you think they fall on the spectrum of the opposing agenda? These decision-makers are your ultimate targets—those with whom you want to influence and bring towards your agenda.

5. Figure out who the organizational allies are. These are not individuals or generalized groups of people but GROUPS OF PEOPLE that support your agenda or are important stakeholders that are important to your organization.

6. This next step is crucial. Place your group's allied organizations into the grid. How is this group relevant to you? Are you in the same field or different? This identifies how powerful your allies really are. It's easy to be overly optimistic—why not take time to grow!

7. Finally, you can add in “unorganized constituency ethics” or social groups. These are groups of people who are not yet organized but who have a stake in the issue—the people who will be impacted by the outcome of your work whether they know it or not.

8. Analyze! What are your arguments for or against the issues? Do you think that they are valid arguments? What are your arguments for or against the issues? Do you think that they are valid arguments?

9. You can use the Power Analysis to determine how much power different groups have in the decision-making process. This can help you understand which groups are more powerful and how they might influence the decision makers.

10. The Power Analysis can be used to identify potential allies and opponents. It can also help you to understand the power dynamics at play in any given situation.

SCOPE defines power as the ability to achieve a collectively agreed upon goal. This definition of power is useful for a community to come together and agree upon what is the best solution to the conditions that impact their daily lives. This is not the traditional definition of power that has been measured on the left-right axis or the traditional definition of power that speaks to the collective well-being of those most impacted by years of disenfranchisement.

The Power Analysis tool is based on the following basic assumptions:
1. Power relationships are unequal, and this is one of the primary reasons for the conditions and problems our communities face.
2. In order to permanently change the conditions in our community we must build collective power to create long-term systemic change.
3. We must build strong grassroots base of those most impacted by the problems and conditions and work to change the system.
4. A more systematic way of understanding power as essential in our efforts to win social change.

The Power Analysis tool is aligned with the following goals:
1. To learn more about the visual works can have a role beyond consulting or designing individual projects and programs. The value of the tool emerges for the participants in conversations and conversations.
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The Power Analysis tool is useful for all audiences. An analysis can be done at any scale. A "quick analysis" can be used to understand the broad political climate of the United States. A "deliberate" analysis may help to understand why people participate in their organizations.

This page offers an opportunity to have a conversation about power and how it is measured. The Power Analysis tool can be used to identify potential allies and opponents. It can also help you to understand the power dynamics at play in any given situation.
Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)
builds grassroots power to create social and economic justice for low-income, female, immigrant, black, and brown communities in Los Angeles. To do this, SCOPE organizes communities, develops leaders, collaborates through strategic alliances, builds capacity through training programs, and educates South L.A.’s residents to have an active role in shaping policies that affect the quality of life in our region. Justice, respect, responsibility, integrity, and voice: These are our core values.

The Llano Del Rio Collective
aims to expand cultural, social, and political imagination of Los Angeles through the production of thematic guides, related events and the hosting of a speakers bureau. We aim to frame practices, rather than be a practice. ldrg.wordpress.com
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LLANO DEL RIO GUIDES
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www.ldrg.wordpress.com

POWER POINTS
by Rosten Woo
An Introduction to SCOPE—L.A.’s Power Analysis Tool