

POLITICS & ANALYSIS

From Wave to Euphoria: A Rhetorical Analysis of Rabi Lamichhane's Orientation Speech

Political speeches are designed to make you feel something—hope, fear, pride, urgency. Lamichhane's orientation address to his MPs is no exception. It is polished, deliberate, and in many ways, rhetorically brilliant. But brilliance is not the same as truth. Before anyone celebrates this as evidence of genuine transformation, it is worth asking: what happens when the cameras turn off?

In the days after the March 5 election, many Nepalis frustrated with the old parties and their "wasted 35–36 years" felt swept up in the Rastriya Swatantra Party's landslide victory (The CSR Journal, 2026; NDTV, 2026). The political mood had already shifted dramatically in RSP's favor when Kathmandu Mayor Balendra "Balen" Shah formally joined the party and was put forward as its prime ministerial candidate. This created a powerful momentum and a renewed hope that "this time" would be different (Onlinekhabar, 2025; Ratopati, 2026). Rabi Lamichhane's subsequent orientation speech then served as emotional confirmation. It validated the decision of RSP voters and, for many, pushed expectations to an unrealistically optimistic level, as if a rapid national transformation were imminent (Khabarhub, 2026; The Rising Nepal, 2026).

From TV Populist to Governing Ethos

The first striking element is Lamichhane's deliberate reconstruction of ethos, the character he presents to his audience. Until now, he has been known for "aggressive, provocative, and confrontational" speaking, both on television and on the political stage (Khabarhub, 2026). At the Royal Tulip orientation, however, he appeared "composed, responsible, and mature,"

delivering a restrained address and avoiding his usual open attacks on rival parties (Khabarhub, 2026). This contrast functions rhetorically. Audiences are habituated to his sharp, combative persona, so even a modest shift toward restraint reads as profound maturity. The speech invites listeners to believe not only that RSP has secured a historic mandate, but that its leader has undergone a moral transformation from oppositional crusader to responsible head of government (Khabarhub, 2026).

This new ethos is set against the party's still-developing ideological profile. RSP has formally adopted "pluralistic democracy" and a liberal economy with social justice as its guiding principle. However, analysts note that its political philosophy remains vague on crucial questions, including federalism and the shape of the welfare state (Ghimire, 2023). That vagueness gives unusual weight to persona. If the ideology is not yet fully clear, people read the leader's tone and demeanor as the main signal of where the party is going. In this context, Lamichhane's calm, almost didactic manner at the orientation becomes a key message. It suggests RSP wants to be seen not as a protest vehicle but as a disciplined governing force (Ghimire, 2023; Khabarhub, 2026).

The 36-Month Clock: Tapping Time and Emotion

A second crucial passage revolves around time, responsibility, and the long wait for change. Lamichhane reminded MPs that voters have already endured 35–36 years of disappointment. He warned that there is "no room for failure" this time (Khabarhub, 2026). He highlighted the five-year mandate but insisted that lawmakers must deliver "tangible results" within their first 36 months, effectively setting a moral clock inside the constitutional one (Khabarhub, 2026). On the surface, this is an appeal to *logos*, a rational framing of planning and accountability. If they do not show results by mid-term, they will deserve to be punished in the next election.

Hope is disciplined by a schedule, but not yet by a concrete program.

Yet the timeframe also carries strong pathos. By tying MPs' performance to decades of frustration and framing the next three years as a final chance to redeem politics, Lamichhane activates both the fear of betrayal and the desire for national redemption (Khabarhub, 2026). The speech converts diffuse anger at "thirty years of failure" into a tightly bounded moral deadline for his own party. It is a clever move. The leader appears to be placing heavy pressure on himself and his MPs, which impresses audiences. At the same time, he leaves the details of policy and institutional reform mostly unspecified.

A Populist's Warning Against Populism

Perhaps the most paradoxical part of the speech is Lamichhane's warning that RSP lawmakers must avoid "populism," internal factionalism, and the creation of "parallel centers of power." According to reporting, he explicitly cautioned MPs not to form groups around ministerial allocations and not to treat politics as a hunt for posts. He told them that if they failed to deliver, voters would hold them accountable in the next election, and that power struggles inside the party could undermine the entire mandate (Khabarhub, 2026). Coming from a leader whose rise depended heavily on anti-establishment rhetoric and emotional mobilization, this is a striking rhetorical reversal. A populist figure is urging his followers not to behave like populists.

This reversal does important work. First, it functions as inoculation, a pre-emptive defense. By naming populism, groupism, and minister-hunting as internal enemies from the outset, Lamichhane positions himself as the internal disciplinarian who always stood against these vices (Khabarhub, 2026). If future scandals emerge, he can point back to this speech as evidence that he tried to prevent them. Second, the warning echoes public disgust with traditional parties, especially anger at factionalism in Congress and the communist parties. However, it turns that disgust inward as something that must not be repeated (Ghimire, 2023). The audience is invited to feel that they are not like the old parties, because their leader is already scolding them not to become like them. That emotional differentiation is powerful, especially for the young voters who joined RSP precisely as a rejection of "old party" groupism.

Decorum, the Constitution, and "Going to the Streets"

A fourth set of passages completes the picture: instructions about speech, decorum, and field-oriented service. In a separate report on the orientation, Lamichhane is quoted as telling MPs that they are "no longer only a professional or an activist," but lawmakers whose "every expression" can affect foreign relations and the economy. He urges them to be cautious, to seek advice before speaking, and to maintain the "honor and dignity of their position" (The Rising Nepal, 2026). He asks them to avoid spending off-session time at foreign seminars. Instead, they should visit "villages and streets," listen to people's problems, and feel the conditions in public hospitals and schools (Khabarhub, 2026; The Rising Nepal, 2026). This language fuses a populist rhetoric of proximity with an elite rhetoric of institutional responsibility.

This fusion is especially important given the party's broader ambitions. RSP has promised rapid economic growth, aiming for a per-capita income above \$3,000 and a \$100-billion economy within five years. It also frames itself as the champion of ordinary citizens tired of corruption and slow service delivery (Bhattarai, 2026; Khabarhub, 2026). Lamichhane's call for MPs to use government hospitals and travel in their constituencies attempts to make these big promises feel grounded in everyday experience. It suggests that RSP's governing style will combine technocratic ambition with physical presence among the people. At the same time, some of its ideological positions, such as its criticism of the provincial tier in the federal system, remain contested (Ghimire, 2023; Kathmandu Post, 2023).

Hope, Strategy, and the Need for Democratic Vigilance

For many citizens, especially young voters, this orientation speech felt like confirmation that their emotional investment in RSP was not foolish. The leader looked serious, sounded responsible, and spoke the language of accountability, decorum, and service rather than the usual blame game (Khabarhub, 2026; The Rising Nepal, 2026). From a rhetorical perspective, the speech was a carefully planned performance. It took the "wave" energy and tried to convert it into disciplined hope. It was "opposite Rabi" in style, and that very opposition created the "wow-effect" that stunned many listeners.

Yet for a liberal democrat, the key question is not whether the speech was good, but what citizens do with that goodness. Nepal has heard powerful speeches before, from all parties, for more than three decades. Institutions have remained weak, patronage strong, and reforms partial at best. RSP is a new party with a huge mandate and minimal governing track record. It has also been criticized for vague ideology and for leaning on populist framing of "alternative power" (Ghimire, 2023; Kathmandu Post, 2023). In such a situation, the healthiest stance for citizens is to be both hopeful and skeptical. They should welcome a higher tone in political rhetoric while simultaneously insisting that trust must be earned through institutional reforms, transparent decision-making, and measurable improvements in people's lives.

Lamichhane's own words provide the standard by which his party should be judged. If he tells lawmakers there is "no room for failure," that populism and factionalism will destroy the mandate, and that their expressions have consequences for the economy and foreign relations, then citizens are justified in holding him and RSP to those same expectations. A research-backed, rhetorically aware public has the right to be moved by a speech. Then it should step back, analyze how it worked, and watch very carefully what happens in the next 36 months.

Speeches cost nothing. Delivery costs everything. Lamichhane has said all the right things—discipline over populism, service over self-interest, humility over arrogance. But rhetoric is not governance. The real test will not be in what he told his MPs behind closed doors, but in whether those words translate into behavior once the parliament session begins, once ministerial posts are distributed, once the old habits of Nepali politics reassert themselves. For now, the speech is just that: a speech. The action, or the absence of it, is what will tell the real story.

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