

SHORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“God has helped us, and so will AI”: How the Terrorist Group Boko Haram Uses Frontier AI

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This study presents the first on-the-ground evidence of AI use by an active terrorist organization. The findings establish that:

- Boko Haram’s factions use frontier AI systems — including ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Grok, Meta AI, and DeepSeek — in their day-to-day operations.
- The group uses AI to plan attacks, design explosive devices, service and troubleshoot weapons, and improve operational security.
- The AI systems’ safeguards have not consistently prevented misuse, and former Boko Haram members believed their AI use increased the organization’s capabilities.
- Islamic State operatives have provided in-person AI training and remote assistance, and both factions of Boko Haram have set up dedicated AI units.
- Former members described strong enthusiasm for AI within the group, and some expressed openness to mass-casualty weapons, though the group’s use of AI remains conventional.
- The vulnerabilities are structural and not actor-specific, because the tools are publicly available.

These findings are based on 57 in-person interviews with 27 former members of Boko Haram, including mid-ranking commanders and technical specialists, about whether and how the group uses AI. These interviews were conducted in northeast Nigeria in 2025 and 2026, and the accounts describe activity from 2023 through 2024, with the most recent accounts extending into mid-2025. Terrorist use of AI is thus a present and growing reality.

Significant uncertainties remain. The study relies on self-reported accounts that may be subject to over- or underreporting. The findings document AI adoption and institutionalization, and members described AI as improving operational efficiency, but they do not conclusively establish whether AI provided uplift, or whether it enabled attacks that would otherwise not have been possible. Participants were former and not active members, and were mostly mid-ranking rather than top leadership. Finally, as a case study, the findings cannot be directly generalized to other organizations, though the group's integration into transnational jihadist networks points to diffusion beyond Boko Haram itself.

A single well-documented case is sufficient for treating this as a present security problem. It requires AI developers to assess whether current safety architectures are adequate against organized adversaries rather than isolated users; policymakers to treat terrorist adoption of AI as a current national security concern; and the intelligence community and law enforcement to monitor and disrupt the evolving threat.

KEY INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

“Trial-and-error can kill you. AI gives you accuracy.”

“Anytime they did not have a clear understanding of something, they would ask the AI.”

“We mostly used it in three ways: the first one is to learn how to assemble and use guns and how to manufacture bombs. The second one is for surveillance, like how to improve our surveillance strategies to monitor what is happening in our camps and also to better understand our enemy and prepare attacks. The third one is to make plans, like, when we come up with new ideas on how to attack, we ask it for tactics on how to make it work in practice to be successful.”

“You type in the question or use your voice and it [AI] gives you a detailed answer, like ‘How can I build a bomb?’ and then it tells you how. It is like a human robot! We used it a lot.”

“Before, the bomb explosion was not that big, but then they studied it. AI told us what chemicals to put in that made the explosion heavier.”

“We used to rely on our traditional methods. We sent 200 fighters because we had a lot of strength, but then 60 got killed. With the help of AI, we learned that it sometimes makes sense to only send 20. We learned more about well-coordinated attacks and deployment of smaller units.”

“The white guys assembled the top people in a room. They used a projector to show how it [AI] works on a big screen.”

“We have people in different places who set up accounts that can’t be linked to us. They also pay for the subscriptions.”

“[B]oys that have received extensive training [...] bypass the restrictions. They say they need it for a movie or something like that.”

“God has helped us, and so will AI.”