INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
Security Command Center
TLP:CLEAR
2026-06-15 14:31 UTC

# phpBB Authentication Bypass Vulnerability Enables Unauthenticated Admin Account Takeover

SECURITY ANALYSIS | HIGH | CVSS 7.5

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| SCC Item ID | SCC-STY-2026-0212 |
| Type | Security Analysis |
| Severity | HIGH |
| CVSS Base Score | 7.5 |
| Affected Products | phpBB forum software (versions affected for approximately 10 years; specific version range unconfirmed from available sources, verify at phpbb.com/downloads/) |
| Published | 2026-06-12T14:19:34 |
| Discovery Source | Rss |

## Executive Summary

A critical authentication bypass vulnerability in phpBB forum software, present for approximately ten years, allows unauthenticated attackers to take over any account, including administrator accounts, without a valid password. Any organization running phpBB as a community forum or customer-facing discussion platform is exposed to full administrative compromise, data exfiltration, and potential server-side access. phpBB has released a patch; organizations that have not applied it remain fully exposed to unauthenticated account takeover.

## Technical Analysis

The vulnerability is classified under CWE-287 (Improper Authentication), CWE-306 (Missing Authentication for Critical Function), and CWE-288 (Authentication Bypass Using an Alternate Path or Channel). An unauthenticated remote attacker can authenticate as any registered user, including board administrators, without supplying valid credentials. Successful exploitation maps to MITRE ATT&CK T1190 (Exploit Public-Facing Application), T1078 / T1078.001 (Valid Accounts: Default Accounts), and T1556 (Modify Authentication Process). Post-exploitation impact includes full forum administrative access, account takeover, content manipulation, potential data exfiltration of user records and private messages, and server-side compromise depending on hosting configuration. The flaw is reported to have persisted for approximately ten years; specific affected versions should be confirmed at phpbb.com/security/ before operational use. CVSS base score is reported at 7.5 (High). No CVE identifier was present in the source data; the canonical identifier

should be confirmed at NVD or the official phpBB security advisory at phpbb.com before operational use. A patch has been released by phpBB. Affected version range should be verified at phpbb.com/downloads/.

## Action Checklist

1. Step 1: Containment, Identify all phpBB deployments in your environment immediately. If internet-facing and unpatched, place the forum behind a WAF rule blocking unauthenticated POST requests to login and authentication endpoints, or take the forum offline until the patch is applied. Do not rely on IP allowlisting alone, as exploitation requires no prior access.
2. Step 2: Patch and Validate, Apply the phpBB-released patch immediately. Verify the installed phpBB version against the patched release listed at phpbb.com/downloads/. After patching, force-invalidate all active sessions and require all users, especially administrators, to reauthenticate.
3. Step 3: Credential Rotation, Rotate all administrator account passwords and API credentials stored within or accessible through the forum. Apply credential rotation per NIST AC-2 (Account Management) for all privileged accounts.
4. Step 4: Post-Patch Verification, After patching, verify that authentication endpoints return 401 or redirect-to-login responses for unauthenticated requests attempting to access user or admin functions. Review administrator account activity logs for unauthorized changes: new moderator assignments, template modifications, plugin additions, or database exports. Monitor for residual web shells or unauthorized file additions to the phpBB installation directory.
5. Step 5: Post-Incident Review, Conduct a review of the patch management lifecycle for third-party forum and CMS software. This vulnerability persisted for approximately ten years, indicating a gap in vendor advisory monitoring. Establish a Vulnerability Management Process per NIST IA-4 and implement automated patch management for community and web platform software. Assess whether user data accessed during the exposure window triggers breach notification obligations under applicable data protection regulations. Verify AC-6 (Least Privilege) is enforced; forum administrator accounts should not have OS-level or database-level access beyond what phpBB requires.

## Detection Guidance

Query web server access logs for POST requests to phpBB authentication endpoints (typically /ucp.php?mode=login) that result in HTTP 200 or 302 (redirect to board index or admin panel) responses from sessions with no prior authentication history. Flag any access to the administrator control panel (/adm/index.php) where the corresponding session shows no valid credential submission event preceding it. Look for account activity anomalies: administrator actions (user bans, permission changes, plugin installs, file uploads) occurring outside normal hours or from IP addresses not associated with known admins. If your phpBB installation is proxied, inspect X-Forwarded-For headers in logs for IP inconsistencies. Behavioral indicator: any unauthenticated session that transitions directly to a privileged user context is a high-confidence indicator of exploitation. Enable comprehensive audit logging per NIST AU-2 and ensure logs are being collected and reviewed per NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, and Reporting).

## Framework Mappings

**MITRE-ATTACK**

- **T1078.001** — Default Accounts
- **T1190** — Exploit Public-Facing Application
- **T1556** — Modify Authentication Process
- **T1078** — Valid Accounts

### NIST-800-53R5

- **CA-8** — Penetration Testing
- **RA-5** — Vulnerability Monitoring and Scanning
- **SC-7** — Boundary Protection
- **SI-2** — Flaw Remediation
- **SI-7** — Software, Firmware, and Information Integrity
- **AC-6** — Least Privilege
- **IA-2** — Identification and Authentication (Organizational Users)
- **IA-5** — Authenticator Management
- **SI-4** — System Monitoring
- **AC-2** — Account Management
- **IA-8** — Identification and Authentication (Non-Organizational Users)

### OWASP-TOP10-2021

- **A07:2021** — Identification and Authentication Failures

### CIS-V8

- **6.3** — Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications
- **6.4** — Require MFA for Remote Network Access
- **6.5** — Require MFA for Administrative Access
- **7.3** — Perform Automated Operating System Patch Management
- **7.4** — Perform Automated Application Patch Management

### SOC2-TSC

- **CC6.1** — The entity implements logical access security software, infrastructure, and architectures over protected information assets
- **CC7.4** — Responds to identified security incidents

### HIPAA-SECURITY

- **164.312(d)** — Person or Entity Authentication
- **164.308(a)(6)(ii)** — Response and Reporting

### ISO-27001-2022

- **A.8.8** — Management of technical vulnerabilities
- **A.5.34** — Privacy and protection of personal information

## MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

| Technique ID | Technique Name | Tactic |
|---|---|---|
| T1078.001 | Default Accounts | Defense-Evasion |
| T1190 | Exploit Public-Facing Application | Initial-Access |
| T1556 | Modify Authentication Process | Credential-Access |
| T1078 | Valid Accounts | Defense-Evasion |

## Sources

| Source | URL | Tier |
|---|---|---|
| **Security News** | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/phpbb-forum-fixes-au... | T3 |
| **PhpBB Server Side Request Forgery Vulnerability** | https://sec-consult.com/vulnerability-lab/advisory/phpbb-server-sid... | T3 |
| **PHPBB security best practices or tweaks** | https://www.phpbb.com/community/viewtopic.php?t=2169958 | T3 |
| **Our forum Phpbb vulnerability** | https://forums.linuxmint.com/viewtopic.php?t=386693 | T3 |
| **The security analysis of PhpBB forum** | https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/7106866/ | T1 |



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