

AI firm considers banning creation of political images for 2024 elections

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The groundbreaking artificial intelligence image-generating company Midjourney is considering banning people from using its software to make political images of Joe Biden and Donald Trump as part of an effort to avoid being used to distract from or misinform about the 2024 US presidential election. “I don’t know how much I care about political speech for the next year for our platform,” Midjourney’s CEO, David Holz, said last week, adding that the company is close to “hammering” – or banning – political images, including those of the leading presidential candidates, “for the next 12 months”. In a conversation with Midjourney users in a chatroom on Discord, as reported by Bloomberg, Holz went on to say: “I know it’s fun to make Trump pictures – I make Trump pictures. Trump is aesthetically really interesting. However, probably better to just not, better to pull out a little bit during this election. We’ll see.” AI-generated imagery has recently become a concern. Two weeks ago, pornographic imagery featuring the likeness of Taylor Swift triggered lawmakers and the so-called Swifties who support the singer to demand stronger protections against AI-generated images. The Swift images were traced back to 4chan, a community message board often linked to the sharing of sexual, racist, conspiratorial, violent or otherwise antisocial material with or without the use of AI. Holz’s comments come as safeguards created by image-generator operators are playing a game of cat-and-mouse with users to prevent the creation of questionable content. AI in the political realm is causing increasing concern, though the MIT Technology Review recently noted that discussion about how AI may threaten democracy “lacks imagination”. “People talk about the danger of campaigns that attack opponents with fake images (or fake audio or video) because we already have decades of experience dealing with doctored images,” the review noted. It added: “We’re unlikely to be able to attribute a surprising electoral outcome to any particular AI intervention.” Still, the image-generation company Inflection AI said in October that the company’s chatbot, Pi, would not be allowed to advocate for any political candidate. Co-founder Mustafa Suleyman told a Wall Street Journal conference that chatbots “probably [have] to remain a human part of the process” even if they function perfectly. Meta’s Facebook said last week that it plans to label posts created using AI tools as part of a broader effort to combat election-year misinformation. Microsoft-affiliated OpenAI has said it will add watermarks to images made with its platforms to combat political deepfakes produced by AI. “Protecting the integrity of elections requires collaboration from every corner of the democratic process, and we want to make sure our technology is not used in a way that could undermine this process,” the company said in a blog post last month. OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman said at an event recently: “The thing that I’m most concerned about is that with new capabilities with AI ... there will be better deepfakes than in 2020.” In January, a faked audio call purporting to be Joe Biden telling New Hampshire voters to stay home illustrated the potential of AI political manipulation. The FCC later announced a ban

on AI-generated voices in robocalls. "What we're really realizing is that the gulf between innovation, which is rapidly increasing, and our consideration – our ability as a society to come together to understand best practices, norms of behavior, what we should do, what should be new legislation – that's still moving painfully slow," David Ryan Polgar, the president of the non-profit All Tech Is Human, previously told the Guardian. Midjourney software was responsible for a fake image of Trump being handcuffed by agents. Others that have appeared online include Biden and Trump as elderly men knitting sweaters co-operatively, Biden grinning while firing a machine gun and Trump meeting Pope Francis in the White House. The software already has a number of safeguards in place. Midjourney's community standards guidelines prohibit images that are "disrespectful, harmful, misleading public figures/events portrayals or potential to mislead". Bloomberg noted that what is permitted or not permitted varies according to the software version used. An older version of Midjourney produced an image of Trump covered in spaghetti, but a newer version did not. But if Midjourney bans the generation of AI-generated political images, consumers – among them voters – will probably be unaware. "We'll probably just hammer it and not say anything," Holz said.