

DeSantis ad uses fake AI images of Trump hugging and kissing Fauci, experts say



Enlarge / Screenshot from Ron DeSantis ad shows a collage of real and fake images.

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A Ron DeSantis presidential campaign video shows three pictures of Donald Trump hugging and kissing Anthony Fauci, all of which seem to be fake images generated by artificial intelligence. One professor told Ars today that there is “no doubt” the ad uses fake AI images.

As reported by AFP yesterday, media forensics experts say the images, which the DeSantis ad passed off as photographs taken during Trump’s presidency, have telltale signs of AI. Even non-experts may notice oddities, such as incomprehensible text

on a sign that should say “White House” and “Washington.”

Of course, another giveaway is that then-President Trump and Fauci weren’t really on hugging and kissing terms. Trump repeatedly attacked Fauci and resisted measures to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fauci, who is now retired, was the longtime director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

The DeSantis video advertisement released Monday slams Trump for not firing Fauci. About halfway through, there is a collage of six images (seen at the top of this article) of Trump and Fauci.

“No doubt in my mind” that they’re fake

“There is no doubt in my mind that the top-left and bottom-middle pictures are fakes,” V.S. Subrahmanian, an AI researcher and professor of computer science at Northwestern University, told Ars today. “As pointed out in the AFP piece, the top-left image shows incorrect lettering on the picture of the White House. The bottom-middle image shows a number of weird white streaks between the stars in the US flag.”

As some people pointed out, Trump’s hair looks unnatural in the images. Ars Technica AI and Machine Learning Reporter Benj Edwards told me today that he noticed, among other problems, a “lack of detail in the hair. AI synthesis models are still bad at rendering accurate details and better at getting general things approximately correct.”

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We contacted the DeSantis campaign today and will update this article if we get a response.

The three real photos in the collage show Trump and Fauci sitting or standing near each other. One of the real pictures

can be found on Getty Images, another is on the National Institutes of Health website, and the third is from Reuters.

Though DeSantis is slamming Trump for not firing Fauci, DeSantis himself reportedly praised Fauci on March 25, 2020, as “really doing a good job” in a “tough, tough situation.”

Sneaky intermixing of real and fake images

“It was sneaky to intermix what appears to be authentic photos with fake photos, but these three images are almost certainly AI-generated,” University of California, Berkeley Professor Hany Farid told AFP. Farid’s research focuses on areas including digital forensics, misinformation, image analysis, and human perception. Problems in the bottom-right image include “differences in the shape of Trump’s ear as compared to stock photos,” Farid said.

The three suspicious images “contain many signs indicating that they were AI-generated,” AFP was told by Matthew Stamm, a Drexel University professor and expert on detecting falsified images and videos.

“For example, if you look closely at Donald Trump’s hair in the top-left, bottom-middle, and bottom-right images, you can see that it contains inconsistent textures and is significantly blurrier than other nearby content such as his ears or other regions of his face,” Stamm told AFP.

University of Buffalo Professor Siwei Lyu, director of the school’s Media Forensic Lab, “told AFP the [top-left] image also portrays Trump’s right arm in an abnormal position, with it appearing to extend too far as it wraps fully around Fauci’s body,” the news organization reported. In the lower-middle picture, Trump’s right hand is “clearly generated with the thumb in an unnatural position,” Lyu told AFP.

“At the same time, Stamm noted that Trump’s left hand does not appear to have a thumb in the image, instead blending into his right hand,” AFP wrote.

The DeSantis campaign ad is not the first to use AI. In April, the GOP released an anti-Biden ad that used AI-generated images.

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