Zapopan Mass Graves

Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico

Las Agujas: 20°44'34"N 103°31'41"W

Nextipac/Camino al Alemán: 20°46'44"N 103°29'33"W

Arroyo Hondo/Plan de la Noria: 20°44'26"N 103°20'31"W

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Incident Date: 2012-2026
Fatalities: At least 62 recovered
Injured: UNK

Aggressors: Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG, EN: Jalisco New Generation Cartel)

Victim Profile: UNK

Abstract

Our investigative team geolocated three mass graves in Zapopan, Jalisco located within 15km of the Guadalajara football stadium: Las Agujas, Nextipac/Camino al Alemán, and Arroyo Hondo/Plan de la Noria. Zapopan is part of the Guadalajara metropolitan area, host city of various 2026 FIFA World Cup games and epicenter of mass graves linked to the violence of the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG). Using open-source investigations and satellite imagery, our analysis was able to determine the exact locations of the three sites, whose whereabouts were previously undisclosed. Our analysis reveals the thin separation between the spectacle of the World Cup, the crisis of enforced disappearance in the state of Jalisco, and the broader violence and injustices that remain unaddressed in Mexico .

Zapopan, the World Cup, and enforced disappearance in Jalisco state

Zapopan, a major municipality in the state of Jalisco bordering the capital city of Guadalajara, has become a stark example of Mexico's ongoing enforced disappearance crisis. Jalisco currently leads the country in official reports of disappearances, with more than 16,000 people registered as missing statewide. At the same time, Zapopan is home

to Akron Stadium, one of the venues set to host matches during the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

As preparations for the tournament accelerate, the contrast between international spectacle and local humanitarian crisis has become increasingly visible. The government of Jalisco has allocated approximately $400 million MXN (roughly $23 million USD) in direct World Cup preparation spending, in addition to more than $23 billion MXN (about $132 million USD) dedicated to infrastructure and mobility projects tied to the event. By comparison, the state budgeted approximately $2.1 billion MXN (about $120 million USD) in 2026 to address disappearances and forensic investigations — a record increase that nonetheless remains dwarfed by World Cup-related investment. The previous year's disappearance budget stood at approximately $734 million MXN (about $42 million USD). Effectively, Jalisco has allotted $2.1 billion MXN for improving a fractured justice system that is trying to investigate over one hundred thousand disappearances and mitigate the corruption that impedes those investigations — as opposed to over $23 billion MXN spent on infrastructure for a tournament that lasts a few weeks.

Official government narratives have minimized the scale of what has been discovered. State authorities have repeatedly designated search sites as "excavated", even if the site was not thoroughly investigated. This pattern can be seen in other similar points of interest in Mexico such as Rancho Izaguirre. In reality, it has often been "buscadoras", voluntary search organizations, that have conducted the most thorough examinations of sites. These collectives that are often composed of relatives to the missing will frequently return to areas that the government had deemed "searched", and recover dozens and sometimes hundreds of additional remains.

For families of the disappeared and local search collectives, the imbalance reflects broader state priorities: enormous public investment aimed at presenting Guadalajara and Zapopan on the global stage, while communities across Jalisco continue to grapple with mass graves, cartel violence, forensic backlogs, and thousands of unresolved disappearances. Throughout 2025 and 2026, collectives have uncovered multiple mass grave sites in the Guadalajara metropolitan area, including in Zapopan itself, and less than 20km from Akron stadium. The search collectives have vehemently and publicly criticized this, proclaiming it reveals the government's true priorities when it comes to Mexico. They characterize it as the government putting tourism and an international image over the safety of its own people, and justice for those who have fallen victim to cartel violence.

Government sources and human rights organizations have attributed this violence to the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), the dominant organized criminal group in the region and the organization generally regarded as Mexico's most powerful cartel. Notably, the CJNG is known for negotiating with local and state authorities and using corruption as a safeguard for their activities, which they are able to conduct with relative

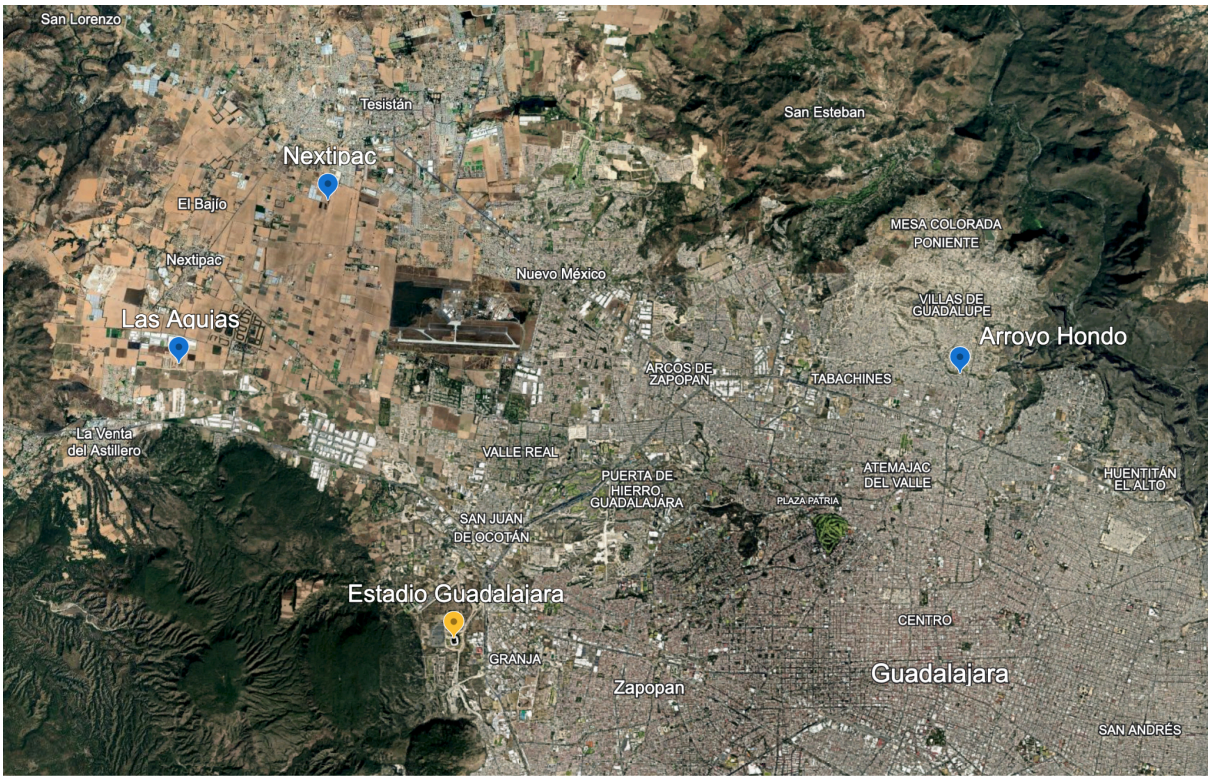
impunity. Large, international events such as the FIFA World Cup have been connected to surges in trafficking and sexual exploitation, a realm in which CJNG is notoriously prevalent.

The timing of these discoveries has drawn heightened international attention as Mexico prepares to host matches for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in Guadalajara. While state officials seek to present Jalisco as a modern and secure global destination, the recent discovery of mass graves near World Cup infrastructure has exposed the stark contrast between the image projected to international visitors and the ongoing humanitarian crisis experienced by local communities.





Flyers for victims of forced disappearance, designed by family members to look like official photos of the 2026 Mexican national football team. Source: El Universal.



Map showcasing location of mass grave sites and Guadalajara (Akron) Stadium, the site of Guadalajara's World Cup games. All sites are less than 20km from the stadium.

Our investigative team examined three mass grave sites in Zapopan to identify their exact locations.

Las Agujas

In February 2025, construction workers found plastic bags containing human remains on their work site. Authorities were alerted and excavated 169 plastic bags in the area surrounding the construction site. In July, members of the collective Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco conducted their own search, discovering 54 more bags with human remains. Since then, a joint effort between the collective and authorities has resulted in the discovery of at least 265 bags. Bags do not equal the number of victims, since in this type of mass graves the bodies of victims are usually dismembered and distributed among different bags. As of August of 2025, authorities claim that they have recovered the remains of 56 people, of which 25 have been identified.

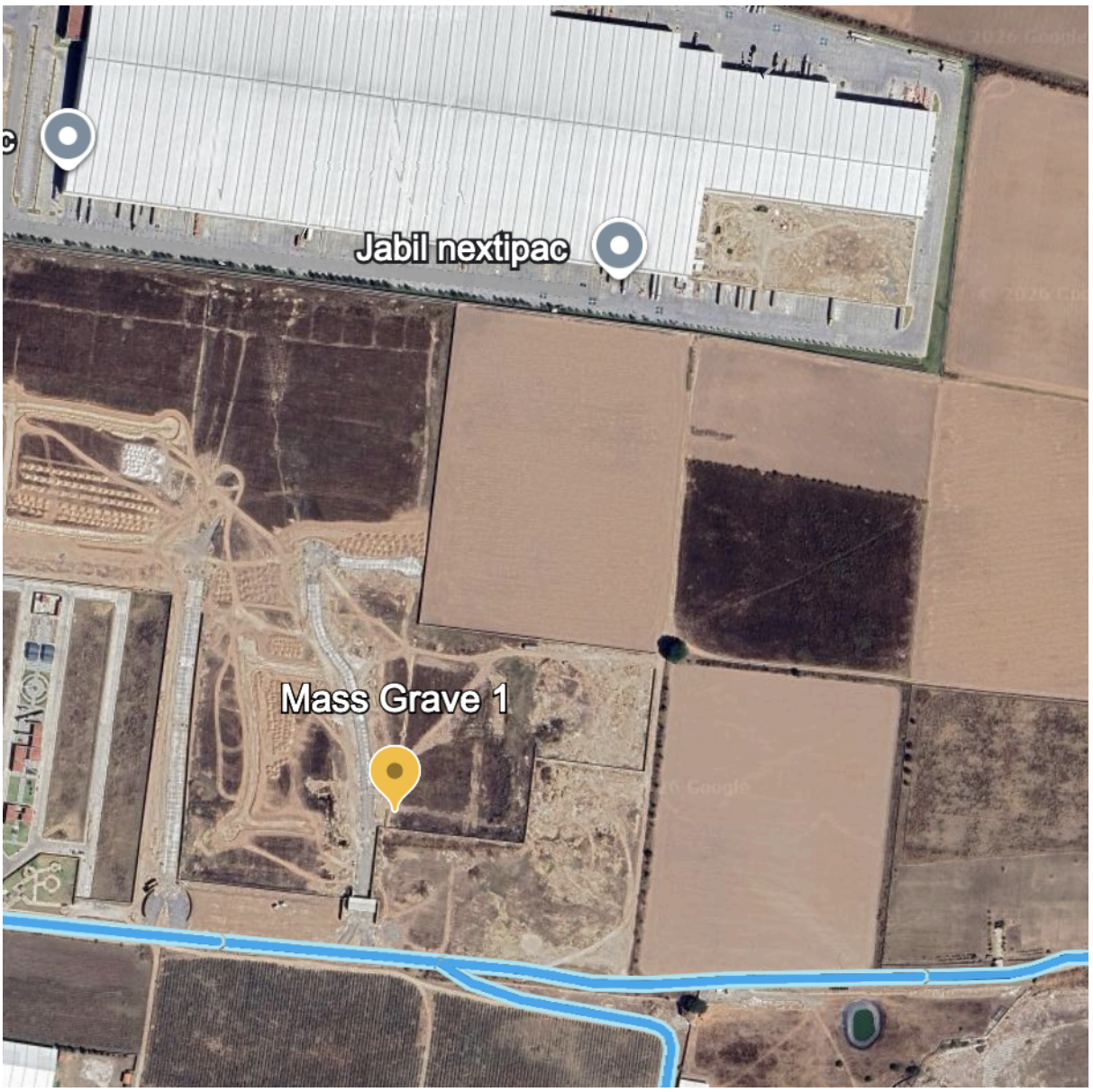
Guerreros Buscadores De Jalisco
hace aproximadamente 11 meses

Esto es lo que hemos podido ver sobre las bolsas con segmentos humanos recuperadas en la FOSA DE LAS AGUJAS la cual está en el municipio de Zapopan donde fueron recuperadas 169 bolsas por las autoridades desde el mes de febrero. Guerreros buscadores de Jalisco acudimos el día 1 de julio dónde localizamos nuevamente una fosa a unos cuantos metros, en la cual hasta el día de hoy se han recuperaron 54 bolsas mas. Da un total de 223 bolsas

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News covering the discovery of this mass grave stated it was located near the Centro Universitario de Ciencias Biológicas y Agropecuarias, about 16km from Zapopan city center. Using these data points, alongside photographs and videos published by online news media showing the entrance to the construction site, as well as nearby buildings, we were able to determine the site's location.



Google Earth image of the site showcasing nearby buildings with white roofs. 20°44'34.46"N 103°31'41.81"W





Images of authorities exhuming bags and working on the site.



Aerial image of the site.

Nextipac/Camino al Alemán

On September 6, 2025, members of the collective Manos Buscadoras announced that they had discovered 16 bags containing human remains at a site on the outskirts of Zapopan. Over the course of the following weeks, the collective discovered more bags containing dismembered human remains at the site, including some that were attributed to two men and a woman in advanced stages of decay. By September 19 the collective reported that 40 of these bags had been discovered at the site; according to a social media post from Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco, 89 bags containing human remains were discovered at the Nextipac site as of October 17.

News reports on the discovery of the site did not disclose a specific location, and different sources included conflicting information, calling the site "Nextipac," "C. al Alemán," and "Los Ángeles de Nextipac" and saying in turn that the site was located in "brecha San José"; between colonias Santa Lucía and Nextipac; and 8.0-8.8km from the "Las Agujas" site, all of which are distinct locations.

We were able to determine the site's location using photographs and video that appeared in online news media. These images revealed that the site was located at the intersection of two dirt roads that dead-ended in a pine tree clearing surrounded by corn fields. From the northwest, one can see mountains and transmission lines in the background with smaller power lines on both sides of the road in the foreground. We mapped the transmission lines in the area using publicly available geospatial data from the Jalisco

state government and then cross-referenced them with the surrounding geographic features and smaller power lines visible in more recent satellite imagery.



Eastern view of the site. Source: N+.



Eastern view of the site from ground level. Source: NTR Guadalajara.



Northwest view of the site. Source: Guardia Nocturna



Northwest view of the site as of May 2021 from 20°46'43.43"N 103°29'34.65"W in street view imagery. Source: Google Street View.



Foreground power lines and background transmission lines in Zapopan. Sources: Google, Airbus, INEGI, March 2025 (yellow power lines, mapped by investigative team); Mapa Jalisco, approx. 2020 (red transmission lines).

Arroyo Hondo/Plan de la Noria

In September 2025, members of the collective Guerreros Buscadores de Jalisco received an anonymous tip reporting the location of a mass grave. An initial search of the site, located on Vicente Guerrero Street near Guadalupe Victoria Avenue, resulted in the discovery of 5 bags containing human remains. Since the search began, at least 41 bags have been recovered containing the remains of at least 15 victims, of which 3 victims have been identified. Only a quarter of the area has been searched since there is a thick concrete layer that needs to be removed, so search efforts will likely continue.

We were able to locate the site through photographs published by online news media and the above information.

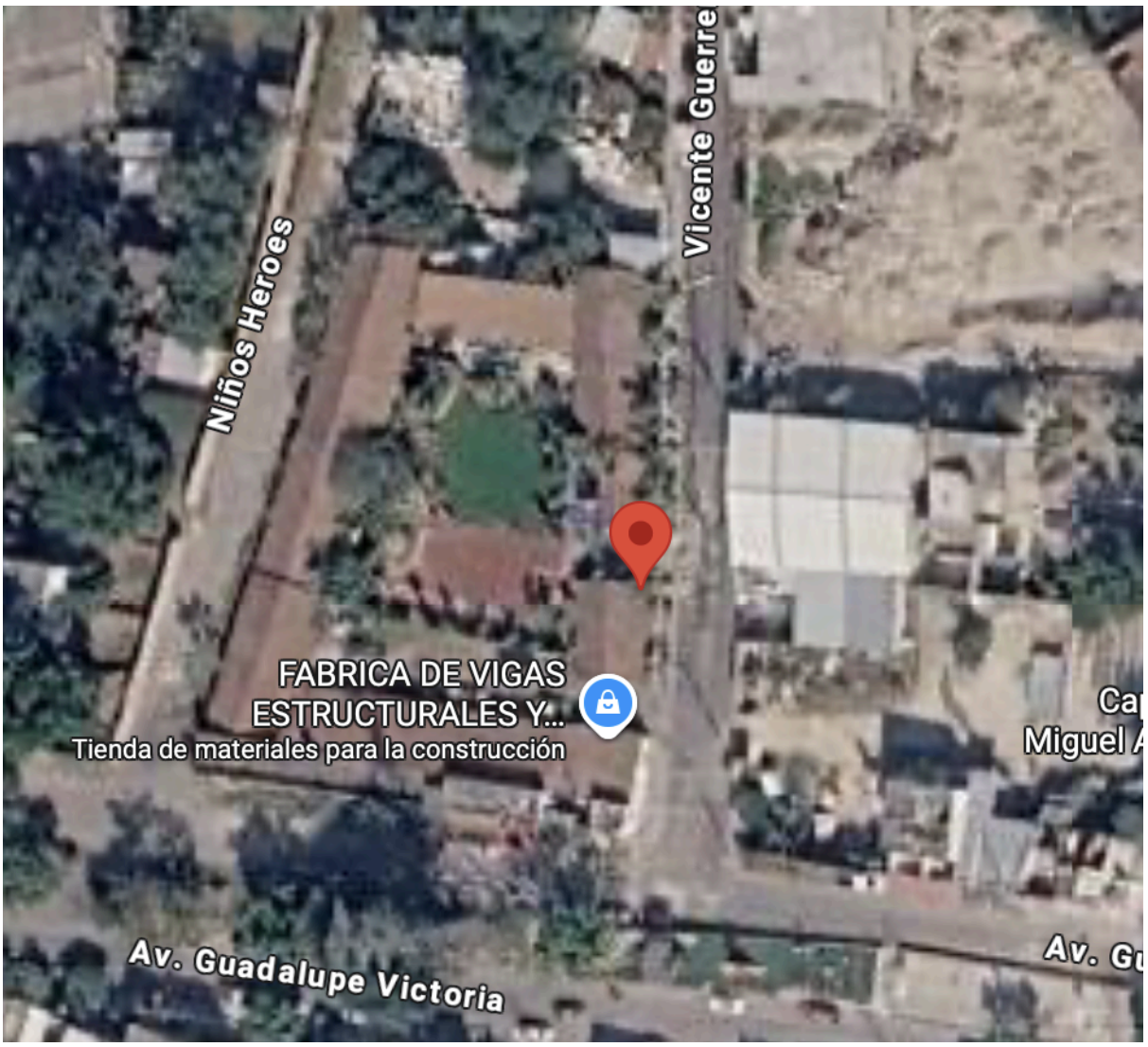


Photograph of the site being secured by authorities.





Google Maps images of the street where the site is located.



Location of the site. 20°44'26.6"N 103°20'31.2"W

These mass graves are only three of the hundreds found in Guadalajara. As the World Cup draws closer, the pressure is on for the Mexican government and Jalisco officials to guarantee security from the CJNG and address the national and local crisis of enforced disappearance.



Mothers of victims of enforced disappearance protest in Guadalajara. Source: Milenio

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