

# Did the #bringbackourgirls campaign make a difference in Nigeria?

Tuesday 30 October 2018, by [SHEARLAW Maeve](#) (Date first published: 14 April 2015).

**Last year the world united in outrage over the 276 girls abducted in Chibok by Boko Haram. But was it activism or clicktivism?**

Today marks one year since 276 school girls were abducted by [Boko Haram](#) in the northern Nigerian village of Chibok.

It was an event - [like the assault on the town of Baga in January](#) - which outraged Nigerians and, somewhat belatedly, tugged at the world's heart strings.

As Nigerians marched to the capital Abuja to demand action the global social media community rallied around a call to #bringbackourgirls.

In less than three weeks the hashtag had been used over 1 million times with everyone from supermodel Cara Delevingne to the first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama adding their selfies to the mounting social media noise.

A year on the hashtag begun to trend globally again as the world marks a year since the girls disappeared: but [whilst some of the girls have escaped](#) the majority remain missing, leaving their families with nothing to do [but to wait in hope](#).

## Clicktivism or activism?

Although their plight has gained awareness are western supporters guilty of falling in to the trap of clicktivism? The lure of supporting a campaign perceived to be in vogue - before swiftly moving on to the next.

Whilst not disputing the power of collective sentiment, Jumoke Balogu from [Compare Afrique](#) argued that the western outcry over the campaign was misplaced.

Calling on western powers to "do something" only served to strengthen America's "military legitimacy", said Balogu. She felt that the campaigning and solidarity would be better placed to support journalists and campaigners seeking to hold the Nigerian government to account.

The fervour was also mocked by American conservatives who [dismissed it as "simply an exercise in self esteem"](#), that would be of no concern to the Nigerian Islamist group.

But Ben Hewitt from [A World At School](#) argues that most of the high profile campaigning has been in direct support of the grassroots #bringbackourgirls campaign in Nigeria: "Some people raise their

voice once in solidarity and others keep a much longer vigil” but both are valid campaigning tactics, he says.

Hewitt says the campaign group, set up by Sarah Brown, were one of the first of the international groups to write about the abduction – [on 17 April](#) – who then leveraged their international networks to put pressure on the UN and fundraised their school programme in Nigeria.

In the meantime the kidnappings are ongoing. Amnesty International estimate that over 2000 girls have been abducted by Boko Haram since the beginning of 2014, with many forced into sexual slavery.

The rights group lament Nigerian security forces for not doing enough to protect civilians and point to an absence of investigations or prosecutions of Boko Haram members for crimes under international law.

When asked if #bringbackourgirls campaign has been a success Hewitt said: “the girls are still missing ... that is the ultimate measure of success and we are not there yet.”

## Nigerian-led campaigning

Oby Ezekwesili was one of the three Nigerian campaigners to set up the grassroots campaign calling it #bringbackourgirls. [Speaking to the Guardian](#) at the end of 2014 she described her incredulity at the lack of action that drove her to start campaigning.

Ezekwesili’s group organised the initial march in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, which sparked the online movement and regular vigils in the capital.

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*Oby Ezekwesili*

When asked if her pressure group made progress she said: “As long as one person is still holding out a candle for the kidnapped, we haven’t failed. That one voice can grow into millions eventually”.

She also described the harassment designed to intimidate their group. In July security operatives tried to prevent her from catching a flight to appear on a BBC programme. Hostility which was ongoing on the [eve on the anniversary](#):

This morning her tweets read like a heartfelt open letter to the missing girls. [She told the BBC she hoped the girls were still alive](#) and went on to share a host of pictures of yesterday’s protests, as thousands marched in silence to keep the [issue on top the government’s agenda](#).

## Political appropriation

Politicians and hashtags don’t always make an easy mix, especially when a hashtag is appropriated for political aims.

In September 2014 supporters of the then incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan attempted to

galvanise support for his re-election using [#bringbackgoodluck2015](#), with some supporters [reported to have](#) turned up at the park where the daily #bringbackourgirls vigil was taking place to display their banners.

The plan backfired and Jonathan was criticised for being disrespectful and insensitive, and his [office later demanded](#) that posters carrying the call be torn down.

Nigerian commentator [Max Siollun thinks that](#) the reason Goodluck Jonathan lost the recent presidential election to Muhammadu Buhari was in part due to his failure to take the mass kidnapping seriously. It took two weeks for him to address the issue publicly, while his wife Patience was accused of melodrama smacking of insincerity when she met mothers of the kidnapped girls.

[Nigerians have since expressed](#) hope that new president Buhari – who will come into power later this year – will be able work with campaigners to find the girls, and find a solution to fight Boko Haram.

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**P.S.**

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/14/nigeria-bringbackourgirls-campaign-one-year-on>