

SURVEY PUBLICATION | SECOND QUARTER 2025

Construction

Quarterly analysis of construction activity

EDITOR:

Craig Lemboe

✉ cjl@sun.ac.za

☎ +27 (21) 808 9780

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

Nicolaas van der Wath

Please refer to the glossary on the BER's **website** for explanations of technical terms.

Copyright & Disclaimer

This publication is confidential and only for the use of the intended recipient.

Copyright for this publication is held by Stellenbosch University.

Although reasonable professional skill, care and diligence are exercised to record and interpret all information correctly, Stellenbosch University, its division BER and the author(s)/editor do not accept any liability for any direct or indirect loss whatsoever that might result from unintentional inaccurate data and interpretations provided by the BER as well as any interpretations by third parties. Stellenbosch University further accepts no liability for the consequences of any decisions or actions taken by any third party on the basis of information provided in this publication. The views, conclusions or opinions contained in this publication are those of the BER and do not necessarily reflect those of Stellenbosch University.

Table of Content

- INTRODUCTION4**
- SUMMARY OF THE 2025Q2 CONSTRUCTION SURVEY RESULTS.....4**
 - Civil contractor confidence down once more in Q24
- CONCLUSION7**
- SURVEY RESULTS8**
 - Civil construction8
- TECHNICAL NOTE.....10**
 - The survey method.....10
 - The unique units of measurement of qualitative surveys.....11
 - Descriptive statistics in the tables.....12
 - Conventions and aids provided in the charts.....13

Introduction

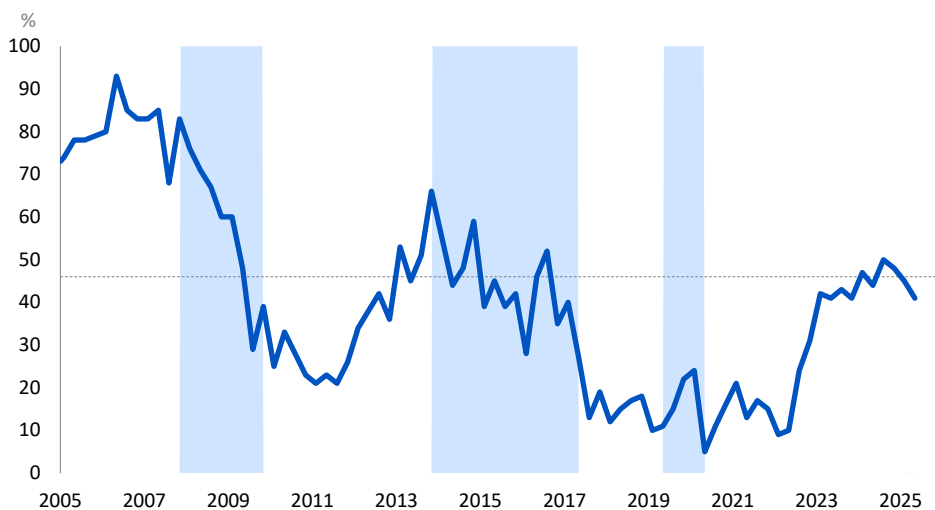
The report outlines some of the key findings of the BER's 2025Q2 Construction Survey, including the **FNB/BER Civil Confidence Index** as well as related data.

Summary of the 2025Q2¹ construction survey results

CIVIL CONTRACTOR CONFIDENCE DOWN ONCE MORE IN Q2

The FNB/BER Civil Confidence Index declined for the third consecutive quarter to register a level of 41 in 2025Q2 (Figure 1). This means that just under 60% of civil contractors are dissatisfied with prevailing business conditions.

Figure 1: FNB/BER Civil Confidence Index

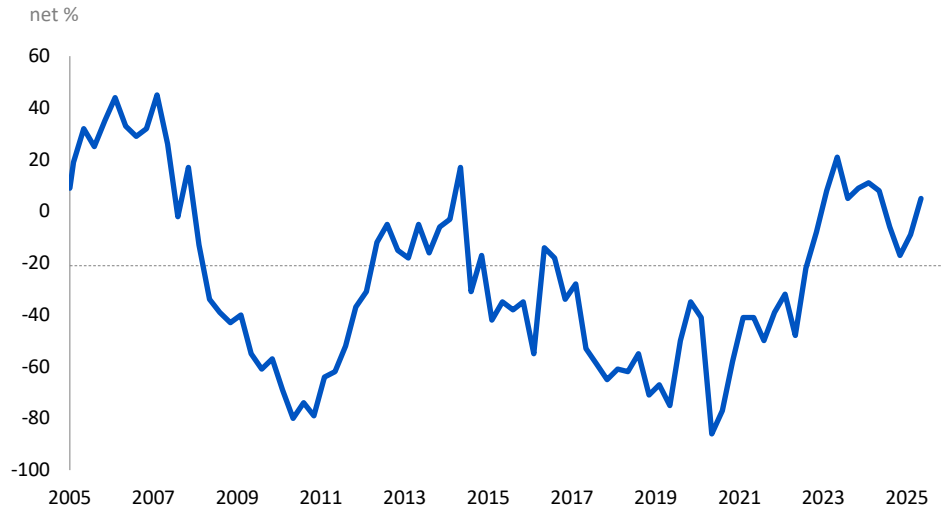


Source: BER

Sentiment moved lower even though many of the underlying indices improved relative to 2025Q1. The most notable of these was the index measuring activity growth. A net 5% of respondents indicated that construction activity was higher in 2025Q2 than a year earlier compared to 9% that stated it was lower in 2025Q1 (Figure 2). Stats SA reported a 2.4% annual decline in the real value of construction works in 2025Q1 (from a 1.8% y-o-y fall in 2024Q4), according to the survey, activity was likely better this quarter.

¹ The 2025Q2 survey was conducted between 7 and 26 May 2025.

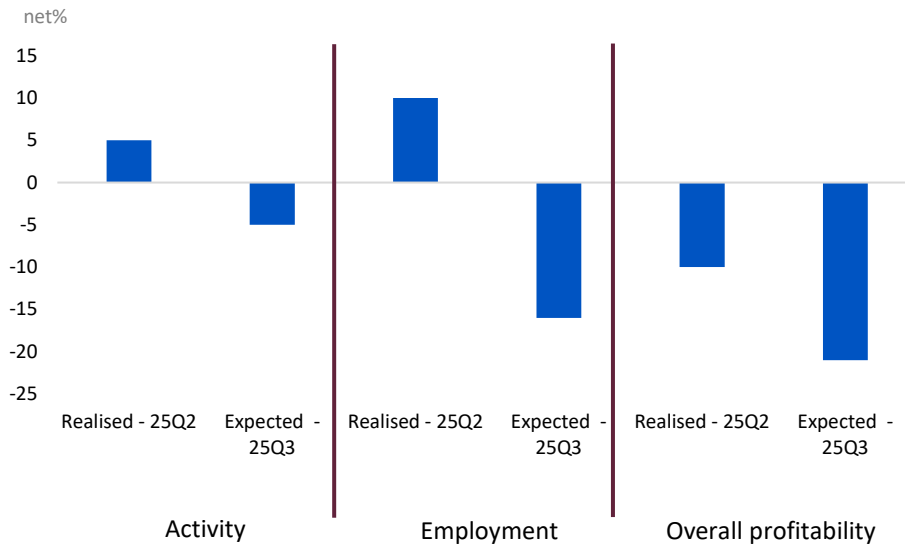
Figure 2: Civil contractors, growth in activity



Source: BER

Downbeat expectations for next quarter are most likely contributing to the lower sentiment reading. For activity, employment and overall profitability, respondents are relatively pessimistic about predicted outcomes for 2025Q3 (Figure 3).

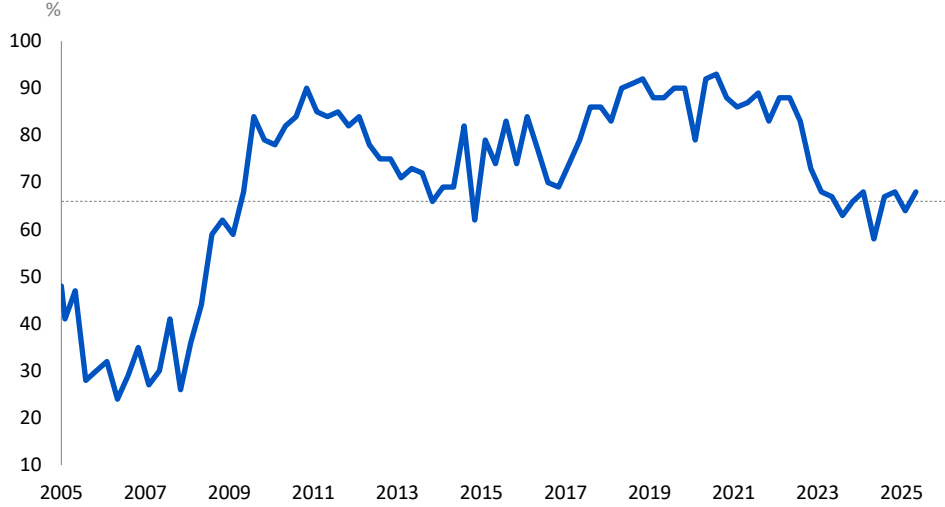
Figure 3: Civil contractors, expectations for 2025Q3



Source: BER

A slight deterioration in order books also points to some loss of momentum in terms of construction work. In 2025Q1, 64% of respondents rated insufficient demand for new work as a business constraint, 68% indicated as such in 2025Q2 (Figure 4). However, the counterargument is that the index is merely back to the level registered in 2024Q1 and is still around the long-term average (of 66%), so neither too optimistic nor pessimistic a reading.

Figure 4: Civil contractors, rating of insufficient new demand as a business constraint



Source: BER

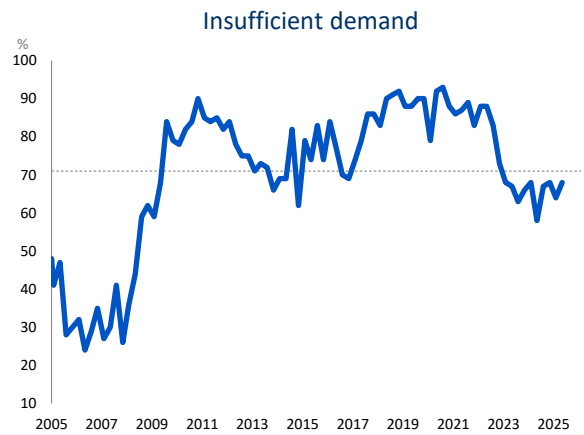
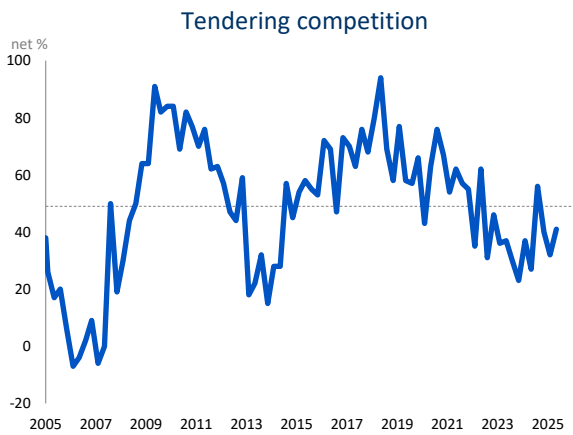
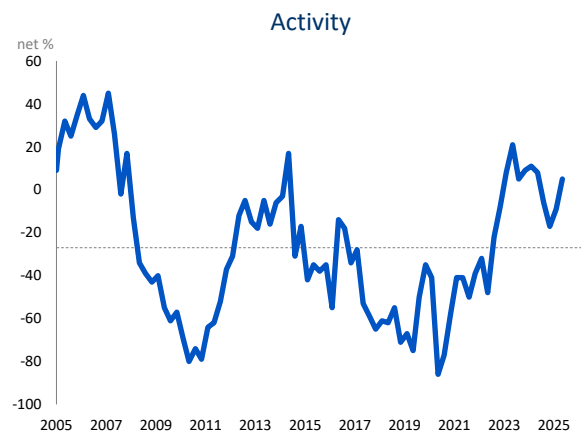
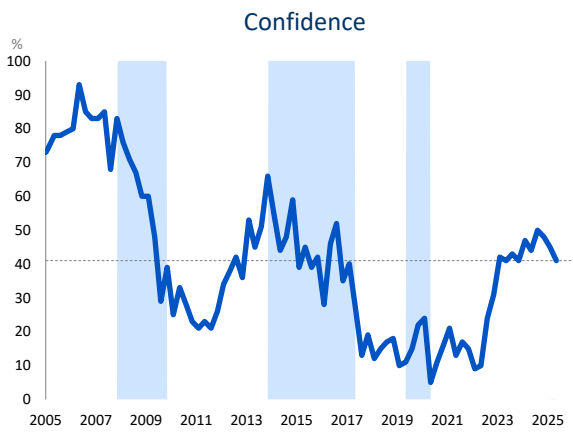
Conclusion

Civil construction activity improved in 2025Q2. As a result, overall profitability was also better. However, civil contractors are downbeat about expectations for next quarter with respect to activity, overall profitability and employment. This saw confidence, as measured by the **FNB/BER Civil Confidence Index**, slip to 41, from 45 in 2025Q1.

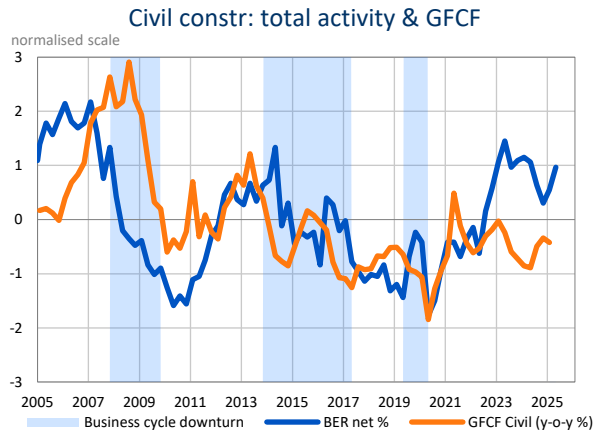
Survey results

CIVIL CONSTRUCTION

Indicator	Unit	$\mu-\sigma$	μ	$\mu+\sigma$	23Q3	23Q4	24Q1	24Q2	24Q3	24Q4	25Q1	25Q2	Δ	σ_{Δ}
Confidence	%	18	40	63	43	41	47	44	50	48	45	41	-4	9
Activity	Net %	-60	-27	6	5	9	11	8	-6	-17	-9	5	14	15
Tendering competition	Net %	25	50	74	30	23	37	27	56	40	32	41	9	16
Insufficient demand	%	52	71	90	63	66	68	58	67	68	64	68	4	7



SUMMARY



Technical note

Short-term planning is hampered as official (quantitative or numeric) data is released with a time lag. Business tendency survey (BTS) results reveal what happened between the release of the last official figures and the current state of affairs. The survey results not only reveal earlier developments in activity, employment etc. (for which official figures are published), but also provide unique information, such as business confidence, tendering prices, business conditions, constraint indicators and respondents' expectations (or forecast) for the next quarter for which no official figures exist. It is now widely recognised that such subjective individual expectations play a key role in economic developments. Furthermore, the survey results of successive quarters provide a means of tracking cyclical movements, pinpointing trend changes and establishing forecasts.

THE SURVEY METHOD

The survey results are obtained from questionnaires completed by senior executives in the trade, manufacturing and building sector during the middle month of every calendar quarter.

The business survey questionnaire contains a small number of questions. These questions are qualitative in nature, e.g. "Compared to the same quarter a year ago, is the volume of building activity up, the same or down?". No figures are requested.

The sample of executives remains the same from one survey to the next. A panel is in effect established. The sample provides for the main sectors. The list of participants is reviewed every few years to replace those firms that went out of business or stopped responding during the previous two years with new ones.

To provide for widely differing sizes, each firm in the manufacturing and trade sectors is allocated a weight based on its turnover. Firms in the building sector are not weighted. Participants have to complete a "participant details form" at the time of recruitment and every few years to ensure that their sector classification and turnover (optional) are correct.

The BER conducted its first survey of the manufacturing and trade (i.e. retail, wholesale and motor trade) sectors in 1954. The sector coverage was expanded to the building sector (i.e. main contractors and sub-contractors) in 1969. The BER also took responsibility for a quantitative building cost survey in that year. The breadth of the building survey was expanded on two occasions: 1) architects and quantity surveyors were added in 1986 in order to track developments along the whole building pipeline (i.e. from the initiation to the completion of projects) and 2) civil engineering contractors were added in 1997.

Consult the BER web page (www.ber.ac.za) for more information about the business tendency and building cost survey methods.

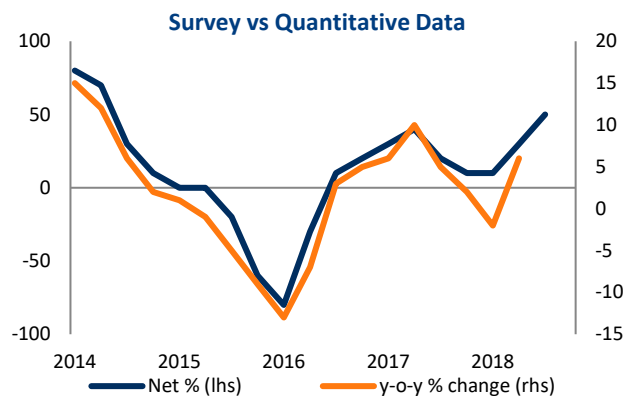
THE UNIQUE UNITS OF MEASUREMENT OF QUALITATIVE SURVEYS

Net percentage (net %)

The responses related to the change in activity, prices, employment, business conditions etc. are presented as a “net percentage” (also called a “net balance” or a “net majority”). If, for example, the percentages of respondents rating building activity as “higher”, the “same” or “lower” compared to a year ago are 70%, 10% and 20% respectively, then one can conclude that the majority of participants experienced higher activity. The net percentage is calculated as the percentage of respondents rating “activity” as higher less the percentage rating it as “lower”. The percentage rating it as the “same” is ignored. The net percentage in this example is therefore 50%, being the difference between the 70% “higher” and the 20% “lower”. A net percentage of –10%, for instance, would indicate a decline in activity compared to a year ago. Take note that this does not mean a year-on-year contraction of 10%. It only means that the activity of a majority of 10% of the respondents was lower compared to a year ago.

The net percentage, or net balance statistic, can theoretically vary between a minimum of -100 (when all participants replied “lower”) and a maximum of +100 (when all respondents replied “higher”). Theoretically a value of zero, therefore, indicates no change, between 0 and 100 reflects a rise (or improvement) and between 0 and –100 a decline (or deterioration) compared to the same quarter a year ago. The net balance statistic is a diffusion index, i.e. it indicates the degree to which the indicated change is “diffused” (spread) throughout the sample population. It indicates both the direction and size of the change.

Given that it reflects respondents’ estimation of the change in the phenomenon/variable in the current quarter relative to the same quarter a year ago, the net percentage corresponds to a year-on-year percentage change/growth rate in the corresponding/equivalent official data series (see the figure on the right).



Percentage (%)

The responses relating to business confidence and constraints are presented as percentages.

In the case of business confidence, respondents have to rate prevailing business conditions as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory”. The percentage of respondents rating prevailing business conditions as satisfactory is taken as an indicator (proxy) for business confidence. A reading of 10 for business confidence, for instance, means that only 10% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied. In this example, 90% were, therefore, unsatisfied.

In the case of the constraints, respondents have to rate if a particular issue – for instance, a shortage of skilled labour – “seriously”, “slightly” or “not at all” hampers their activity. Composite constraint indices are calculated by weighting the responses as follows: The answers of respondents rating a particular constraint as “serious” are weighted by 0.67%; “slightly” by

0.33% and “not a constraint at all” are discarded. The results are then multiplied by $100/67 = 1.49$ to convert it to an index that can vary between zero and 100.

Care must be taken when making inferences from the constraints indices given that the list of constraints (issues) remains unchanged over time. Each constraint ought to be analysed relative to its own historical performance rather than comparing the ratings of the different constraints at a specific point in time. The latter inference would be more appropriate if respondents had to list all issues hampering their activity at a particular point in time and rank them in order of their impact.

Theoretically, the confidence and constraints series can vary between a minimum of zero and a maximum of 100. A value of zero would reflect an extreme lack of confidence/no limitation at all and 100 extreme confidence/complete limitation. These results reflect respondents’ evaluation of the phenomenon/the survey variable in respect to that specific survey quarter, i.e. not relative to some period in the past or future.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS IN THE TABLES

Three-quarter centred moving average (smoothed)

Some series show erratic/volatile movements, i.e. data jumps around quite a bit between consecutive quarters. In such cases, it is necessary to smooth these movements over a longer period to obtain a general trend. Another case where we added moving averages is when the correlation between the survey results and the corresponding reference series is low or non-existent.

Three-quarter centred moving averages (3qcm) were selected in order to not disturb turning points too much, e.g. the moving average of 17Q4 is calculated as the average of 17Q3, 17Q4 and 18Q1, that of 18Q1 is calculated as the average of 17Q4, 18Q1 and 18Q2 etc. In order for the smoothed series to run up to the last unsmoothed data point, the last smoothed data point is only the average of two quarters, namely the previous and current quarter.

When a smoothed series is added, it is prudent not to attach too much value to the unsmoothed results of a particular quarter, but rather to evaluate it in its historical context.

Seasonal adjustment (SA)

In theory, the time series ought to display no seasonal patterns because respondents are instructed to compare the current quarter with the same one of a year ago (e.g. they have to compare the current Festive Season or wet/dry winter period with the same time a year ago). However, in practice, some series nevertheless reveal seasonal patterns, probably because some respondents incorrectly compare the survey quarter with the one directly preceding it. In such cases, a seasonally adjusted series (i.e. where such seasonal variation is eliminated with X12 ARIMA) is added.

Average (μ)

The neutral level of the time series for the two measurement types, net percentage and percentage, is 50 or zero respectively. The long-term average (mean) is often not equivalent to this neutral level. In such cases, it is more useful to evaluate the current results relative to such a long-term average than the neutral level.

One standard deviation below ($\mu-\sigma$) and above ($\mu+\sigma$) the average

The standard deviation indicates the common variation in or dispersion of the values. Data points falling between one standard deviation below and above the average could be regarded as common. Any data point falling outside these ranges, therefore, displays statistically significant variation.

Change (Delta: Δ)

This statistic indicates the change in the results of the latest quarter relative to the preceding quarter.

Volatility (standard deviation of the deltas: σ_{Δ})

This statistic indicates the volatility of the quarter-on-quarter change. If the size (regardless if it is an increase or decline) of the change is greater than the standard deviation of the deltas, then it displays a statistically significant variation.

CONVENTIONS AND AIDS PROVIDED IN THE CHARTS

Shaded areas

Indicates cyclical downturns as demarcated by the South African Reserve Bank. Users need to take note that the business cycle could have already reversed course towards the end of the period covered in the chart, but usually we wait until the bank determines a turning point before changing the shaded areas.

Solid vs. dotted horizontal (X) axes:

A solid line indicates the theoretical mid-points of 50 or zero respectively, while a dotted line indicates the long-term average (mean). Also see the section on the “average” above.

Normalised scale

Time series data is normalised (standardised) when one wishes to observe the co-movement among indicators with different units of measurement, say for instance, between a diffusion index (confidence) and the growth rate in a volume index (GDP growth). Normalisation converts both series to the same scale (unit) by subtracting the long-term average from each series and dividing it by its standard deviation. This ensures that one compares “apples” with “apples” when making a visual inspection and not mistakenly identify co-movements or deviations that different scales could produce.