

Builders Broke More Ground Than Expected in February

The Census Bureau released its New Residential Construction report this week, frequently referred to by its principal component "housing starts" (a term for the start of the first phase of new home construction, aka "breaking ground"). In addition to housing starts, the data also logs building permits as well as completions.

As we often note, building permits are more even-keeled while housing starts and completions can experience much more month-to-month volatility. February was the latest example of that as permits came in right in line with forecasts while housing starts surged higher.



Single family homes accounted for the vast majority of the improvement, rising to their highest levels in a year, and close to the highest levels since early 2022.



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There's often quite a bit of variation across geographies in housing starts. This time around, 2 regions did most of the heavy lifting with the Northeast surging 75% from last month, bringing the annual pace for single family homes up to 84k from 48k.

The South only posted a 19.6% gain, but because it's a much larger housing market, that resulted in an annual pace increase of more than 100k units.

In contrast, the Midwest slid backward by 34k units, or about 25% from last month's annual pace.

The West was the most uneventful region, with a modest 1.8% increase, or 5k units in terms of annual pace.

The full text and tables of the release are available at the Census Bureau's site, here:
<https://www.census.gov/construction/nrc/pdf/newresconst.pdf>