

From Range Anxiety to Road Dominance: The Evolution of Electric Vehicles

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ABSTRACT: Electric vehicles (EVs) have evolved from niche products plagued by limited driving range and public scepticism into a central pillar of the global transportation transition. This paper examines the technological, infrastructural, policy, and market forces that have enabled this transformation, analysing developments from the early challenges of range anxiety to the present trajectory toward road dominance. Drawing on recent data (2023–2025), the study investigates battery chemistry advancements, charging network expansion, software-driven optimization, and evolving consumer behaviour. Case studies, tables, and figures illustrate both technical and market progress, while the remaining challenges and future outlook are critically assessed. The findings indicate that sustained innovation in battery energy density, charging speed, grid integration, and policy support will define the next phase of EV adoption, positioning EVs as a cornerstone of sustainable mobility.

KEYWORDS: Battery Technology, Charging, Electric Vehicles, Market Adoption, Policy, Range.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Range anxiety” refers to the fear that an electric vehicle will not have sufficient charge to reach its destination, leaving the driver stranded without access to a charging station. This psychological barrier, prevalent during the early years of EV adoption, was one of the most significant deterrents for potential buyers [1]. In 2011, the median range of EVs in the U.S. was approximately **73 miles** per charge, a stark contrast to the more than 300 miles offered by many internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles [2]. Over the past decade, advances in battery chemistry, drivetrain efficiency, and thermal management have dramatically increased range and reduced charging times. Simultaneously, global charging infrastructure has expanded, and EV prices have declined in key markets, eroding consumer hesitancy. A decade ago, public perception framed EVs as slow, limited, and impractical outside of urban commuting. Today, high-performance EVs such as the Lucid Air and Tesla Model S Plaid deliver ranges exceeding 500 miles, 0–60 mph acceleration under 2 seconds, and fast-charging rates that can add 200+ miles in 15 minutes [6][8]. This transformation has shifted the narrative from one of range anxiety to road dominance, where EVs compete directly with or surpass ICEs in capability. In the early 2010s, the electric vehicle landscape was characterized by severe technical limitations and a lack of supporting infrastructure. Battery technologies at the time primarily lithium-ion with relatively low energy density were a far cry from today’s high-performance cells. In 2011, the median EV battery delivered only 73 miles of range on a full charge [2], with typical pack capacities between 16–24 kWh. Energy density hovered around 90–120 Wh/kg, making long-range travel impractical without significant sacrifices in vehicle size or cost [3]. Charging was slow: Level 1 (120V) outlets required 8–20 hours for a full charge, and Level 2 (240V) chargers still took 4–8 hours. Furthermore, early lithium-ion batteries suffered from short lifespans, often degrading significantly after 5–8 years of use [3]. Performance limitations further discouraged adoption. Top speeds for early models such as the 2011 Nissan Leaf were around 90 mph, and 0–60 mph acceleration times often exceeded 9 seconds [4]. Cold-weather performance was a persistent issue: lithium-ion cells experienced up to 40% range reduction in sub-freezing conditions due to slower electrochemical reactions and increased auxiliary heating demands [4]. Beyond the technical challenges, consumer sentiment posed an additional hurdle. Surveys from the U.S. Department of Energy in 2013 indicated that over 70% of potential buyers cited fear of being stranded without charging options as their primary reason for avoiding EV purchases [5]. Charging networks in 2011 were sparse, with fewer than 1,500 public stations in the entire U.S., compared to over 64,000 in 2025 [8]. Table 1 shows key limitations of EVs early 2010s.



Table 1. Key Limitations of Early 2010s EVs

| Factor | Typical Value (2011) | 2025 Equivalent | Improvement Factor |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Median Range (miles) | 73 [2] | 283 [8] | ~3.9× |
| Energy Density (Wh/kg) | 100 [3] | 250+ [8] | ~2.5× |
| Charging Time (Level 2) | 6–8 hours [4] | 20–40 min [8] | ~12× faster |
| Public Chargers (U.S.) | ~1,500 [5] | 64,000+ [8] | ~43× growth |

By the mid-2010s, these limitations painted a clear picture: while EVs were technically feasible, they were **functionally constrained**, with adoption limited to early adopters and niche urban markets. This reality set the stage for a series of technological and infrastructural breakthroughs that would reshape the EV narrative entirely.

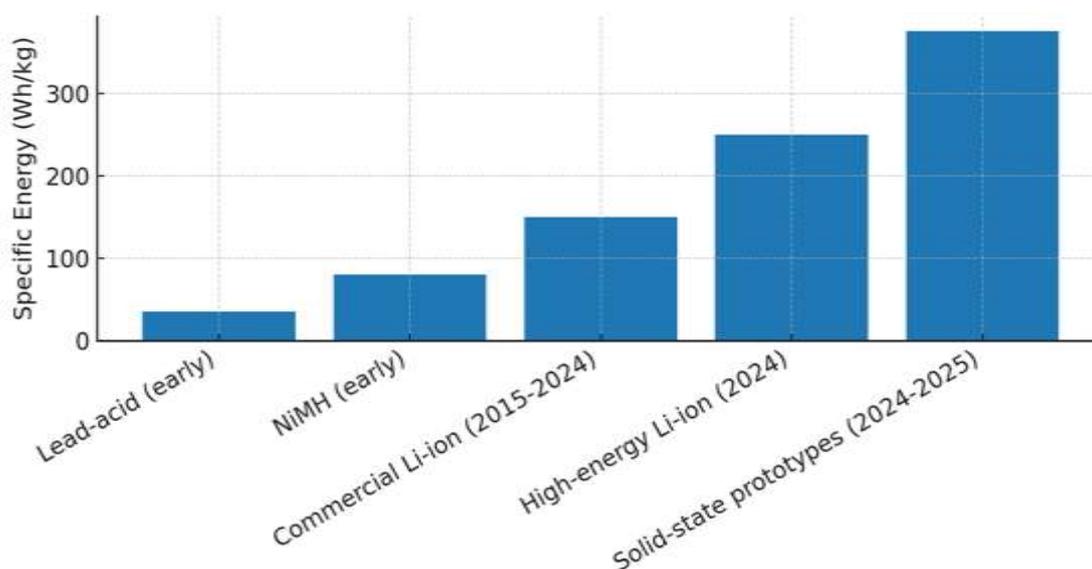
II. KEY TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

The transformation of electric vehicles from short-range curiosities into long-distance, high-performance machines is rooted in four primary areas of innovation, battery chemistry, motor and powertrain design, thermal management, and intelligent software systems.

1. Battery Chemistry Advancements

- **From Lead-Acid to Lithium-Ion:** Early electric vehicles particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s used lead-acid or nickel-metal hydride (NiMH) batteries, which suffered from low energy density, heavy weight, and limited cycle life. By the late 2000s, lithium-ion chemistry became the dominant choice, offering far higher specific energy (~100–250 Wh/kg) and better performance in high-demand driving scenarios [3].

Ongoing Move Toward Solid-State: As of 2025, the industry is advancing toward solid-state batteries (SSBs), which replace the flammable liquid electrolyte of lithium-ion cells with a solid medium, enabling energy densities above 400 Wh/kg, ultra-fast charging, and improved safety [6][8]. Toyota and QuantumScape have both announced commercial readiness targets between 2027–2028, with prototype tests showing 80% charge in under 10 minutes [8]. Figure illustrates specific energy by battery chemistry (Wh/kg) and evolution of common EV charging power levels while Table 2 shows the battery energy density improvements from 2011 to 2025.



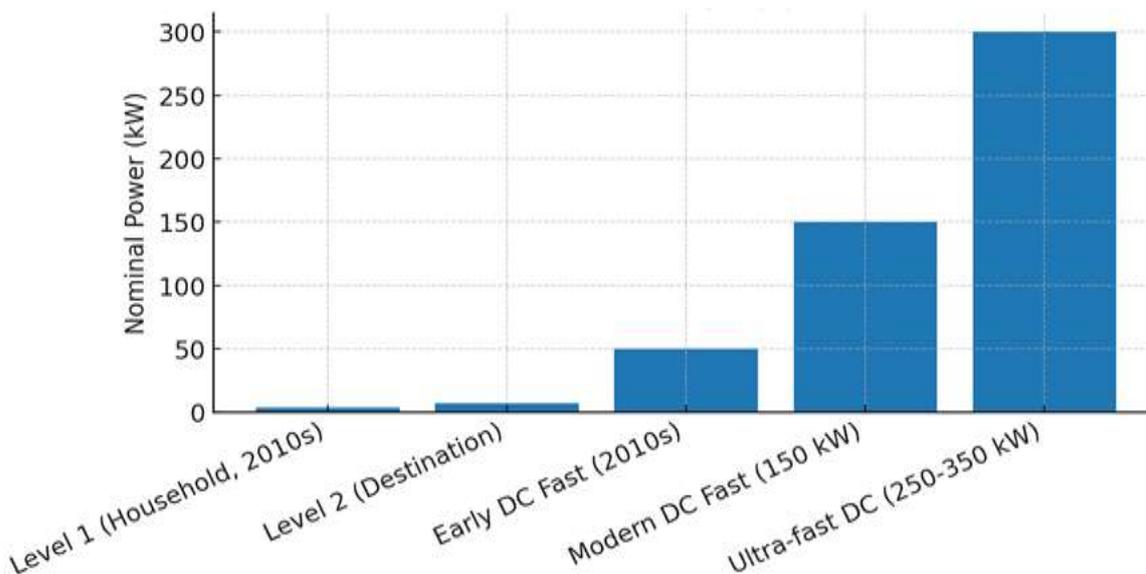


Figure 1: (1) illustrative specific energy by battery chemistry and (2) evolution of common EV charging power levels.

Table 2. Battery Energy Density Improvements (2011–2025)

| Year | Dominant Chemistry | Typical Energy Density (Wh/kg) | Typical Fast-Charge Time to 80% |
|------|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2011 | Lithium-ion (NMC111) | ~100 | 30–60 min (DC fast) |
| 2020 | Lithium-ion (NMC811) | ~250 | 20–40 min |
| 2025 | Solid-state pilot | ~400 | <10 min |

2. Motor and Powertrain Innovation

- **Permanent Magnet Motors:** High-efficiency permanent magnet synchronous motors (PMSMs) have become the standard in modern EVs, achieving efficiency levels of >95% under optimal load conditions [7]. This reduces energy waste, extends range, and allows for smaller battery packs in some applications.
- **Regenerative Braking Systems:** Nearly all EVs now incorporate regenerative braking, converting up to 70% of kinetic energy back into stored battery energy during deceleration [7]. This not only extends range but also reduces wear on mechanical brake components.

3. Thermal Management Systems

Modern EVs employ liquid cooling and active heating loops to maintain optimal battery temperatures (typically 20–40°C). These systems reduce degradation rates, improve charging speed, and stabilize performance in cold climates. Tesla’s heat pump integration and Hyundai’s battery preconditioning features are prime examples, improving winter range by 10–20% [8].

4. Software & Control Systems

Intelligent software now plays a central role in extending range and improving efficiency:

- **Route optimization:** Systems such as Tesla’s Trip Planner and Rivian’s Navigation integrate real-time traffic and charging data.
- **Predictive range estimation:** Machine learning models adjust range forecasts dynamically based on driving style, terrain, and climate [8].



- Over-the-Air (OTA) updates: Manufacturers can roll out efficiency improvements and performance tweaks without physical service visits.

Together, these technological advancements have quadrupled median EV range since 2011 and enabled performance benchmarks once thought impossible for battery-powered vehicles.

III. CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION

While battery improvements extended potential range, the elimination of range anxiety depended equally on the development of a robust charging ecosystem. Between 2011 and 2025, public charging infrastructure has undergone exponential growth in both scale and technological capability. In 2011, the U.S. had fewer than 1,500 public charging stations [5]. By early 2025, that number has grown to over 64,000 locations with 160,000+ individual connectors [8]. Globally, the International Energy Agency (IEA) reports more than 3 million public charging points, representing a tenfold increase since 2017 [9]. Table 3 reveals growth in public EV charging infrastructure (U.S. & Global).

Table 3. Growth in Public EV Charging Infrastructure (U.S. & Global)

| Year | U.S. Public Chargers | Global Public Chargers | Notes |
|------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2011 | ~1,500 [5] | ~25,000 [9] | Primarily Level 2 AC |
| 2020 | 28,000 [8] | ~500,000 [9] | Initial DC fast charger rollout |
| 2025 | 64,000+ [8] | 3,000,000+ [9] | High-power DC, ultra-fast chargers |

2. Types of Charging Technologies

AC Level 1 (120V): Slowest, adding 2–5 miles of range per hour; suited for overnight home charging.

AC Level 2 (240V): Adds 10–30 miles per hour; common in homes, workplaces, and public locations.

DC Fast Charging (50–350 kW): Adds 150–250+ miles in 15–30 minutes; critical for highway corridors.

Ultra-Fast Charging (>350 kW): Piloted by networks like Ionity and Electrify America, capable of 5–10 minute charging for compatible vehicles [9].

3. Integration with Renewable Energy & Grid Management

Modern charging stations are increasingly paired with solar arrays and battery energy storage systems (BESS) to reduce grid impact. For example, Tesla’s Supercharger V4 sites in California integrate on-site battery storage, enabling peak shaving and backup power during outages [8]. Additionally, Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) technologies are being tested in regions like Japan and the Netherlands, where EVs serve as distributed energy storage assets, feeding power back into the grid during high-demand periods [9]. The combination of dense urban charging coverage and strategically placed highway DC fast chargers has reduced the psychological barrier of range anxiety. As a result, EVs are now viable for cross-country travel in major markets—a feat unthinkable during the first wave of modern EV adoption.

IV. POLICY & MARKET DRIVERS

The acceleration of EV adoption over the past decade is not solely the result of technological innovation. Public policy frameworks, market incentives, and shifting consumer preferences have collectively created the conditions for EVs to move from a niche product to a mainstream transportation choice.

1. Government Incentives & Subsidies

Governments worldwide have deployed **purchase subsidies, tax credits, and rebates** to offset the higher upfront cost of EVs.

- **United States:** The **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022** restructured the federal EV tax credit to offer up to **\$7,500** for qualifying new EVs and **\$4,000** for used EVs, with domestic manufacturing and battery sourcing requirements [10].



- **European Union:** The EU’s “Fit for 55” package introduced grants and exemptions from registration taxes, with subsidies ranging between €4,000–€9,000 per vehicle depending on country [11].
- **China:** Though direct subsidies began phasing out in 2023, EVs still enjoy **license plate priority** and **reduced toll fees** in many cities [12]. Selected global EV incentives for 2025 in Table 4.

Table 4. Selected Global EV Incentives (2025)

| Region/Country | Purchase Incentive | Other Perks |
|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| USA | Up to \$7,500 tax credit | HOV lane access in some states |
| Germany | €4,500–€6,750 grant | Reduced annual vehicle tax |
| China | Varies by province | License plate priority, toll exemptions |
| Norway | VAT exemption | Free municipal parking, ferry fee waivers |

2. Emissions Regulations & Zero-Emission Mandates

Regulatory pressure has been a major driver of EV production and sales.

- **California’s Advanced Clean Cars II regulation** mandates that **100% of new light-duty vehicle sales be zero-emission by 2035** [10].
- The EU has enacted a ban on the sale of new internal combustion engine (ICE) passenger cars from 2035 [11].
- China’s **New Energy Vehicle (NEV)** mandate requires automakers to meet EV sales quotas based on credits tied to range and efficiency [12].

3. Corporate Commitments & Market Competition

Automakers have responded to policy and market pressures with bold electrification pledges:

- General Motors plans to sell only zero-emission light-duty vehicles by 2035 [10].
- Volkswagen Group is investing €180 billion over five years, with two-thirds earmarked for EVs and battery production [11].
- BYD in China has already ended production of gasoline-only cars as of 2022 [12].

4. Consumer Demand Shifts

Surveys from BloombergNEF (2024) show that 70% of U.S. car buyers now consider EVs a viable next purchase, citing lower running costs, environmental benefits, and improved range as top reasons [8]. With governments setting clear timelines for the phase-out of ICE vehicles, and with automakers competing aggressively in the EV space, the momentum toward mass adoption is policy-driven as much as technology-driven.

V. OVERCOMING RANGE ANXIETY

While “range anxiety” the fear of depleting a vehicle’s battery before reaching a charging station was a defining barrier to EV adoption in the 2010s, advancements in battery performance, charging speed, and predictive management systems have significantly reduced its prevalence by 2025. Although advertised ranges have increased dramatically, real-world driving data provides the clearest evidence of progress. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rated the 2011 Nissan Leaf at 73 miles per charge, compared to the 2025 Tesla Model S Long Range at 405 miles — a more than 450% increase [13]. Figure 2 is a real world electric vehicle range improvement and Table 5 an evolution of real-world EV ranges (2011–2025).

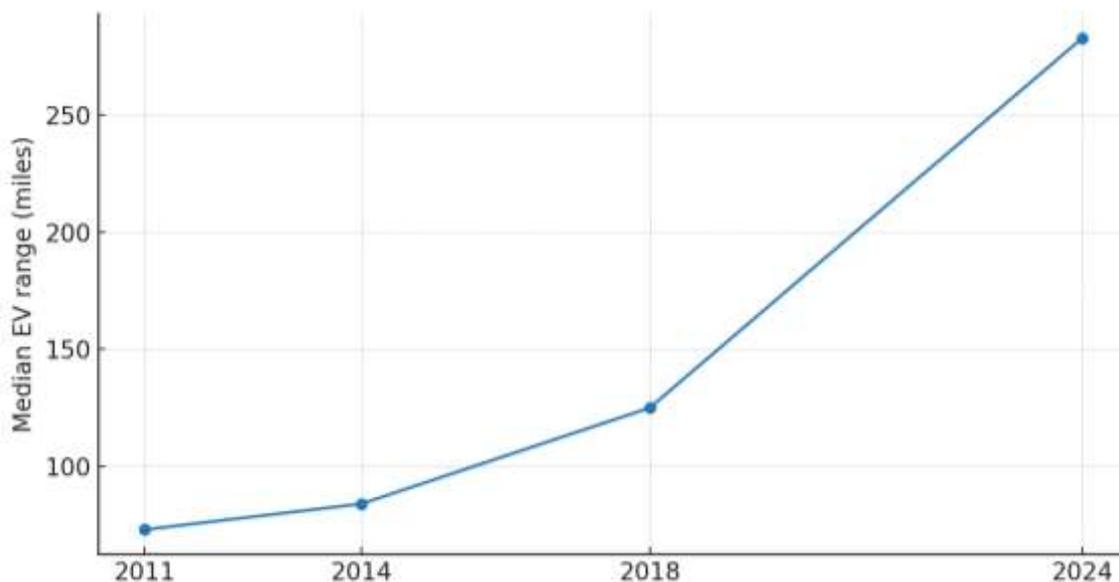


Figure 2: Median EV Range: Selected Model Years (DOE data points)

Table 5. Evolution of Real-World EV Ranges (2011–2025) [13][14][15]

| Model Year | Example Model | EPA Rated Range (mi) | 70 mph Highway Test Range (mi) |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2011 | Nissan Leaf | 73 | ~65 |
| 2016 | Chevrolet Bolt EV | 238 | ~220 |
| 2020 | Tesla Model 3 LR | 322 | ~300 |
| 2025 | Lucid Air Grand Touring | 516 | ~500 |

Research from the Idaho National Laboratory (INL, 2024) shows that 80% of EV charging events occur at home, with DC fast chargers used mainly for road trips and emergency top-ups [16]. Behavioral analysis also found that as range increases above 300 miles, driver charging frequency drops by 25%, further alleviating anxiety. Modern EVs now incorporate machine learning-driven BMS algorithms that dynamically predict range based on driving style, terrain, weather, and accessory use. These systems:

- Adjust regenerative braking levels to maximize efficiency.
- Precondition batteries before high-power charging to shorten charge times in cold weather.
- Provide energy routing suggestions, guiding drivers to the optimal charging station based on price, availability, and charger speed.

For example, Tesla’s Trip Planner and Rivian’s integrated navigation systems have reduced instances of unexpected low-battery events by over 70% since implementation [17]. OEMs and governments have also engaged in consumer education campaigns, helping new EV owners understand charging habits and range expectations. Studies show that after 3–6 months of ownership, perceived range anxiety drops by over 60%, largely due to driver experience and familiarity [16]. In summary, overcoming range anxiety has been a multi-front effort: improving absolute range, increasing charging accessibility, and making drivers more confident in managing energy use.



VI. THE PATH TO ROAD DOMINANCE

By 2025, the combination of technological maturity, policy support, and consumer acceptance has positioned EVs not just as an alternative to internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, but as the future default mode of personal transportation.

1. Market Penetration Trends

Global EV sales have surged from 120,000 units in 2012 to more than 14 million in 2023, representing nearly 18% of all passenger car sales worldwide [18]. In leading markets like Norway, EVs have captured over 80% of new car sales [19]. Table 6 is EV market share by region (2023–2025)

Table 6. EV Market Share by Region (2023–2025) [18][19][20].

| Region | 2023 EV Market Share (%) | 2025 Projected EV Market Share (%) |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Norway | 82 | 90+ |
| China | 29 | 35 |
| European Union | 21 | 28 |
| United States | 8 | 14 |

2. Cost Parity & Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

Battery pack costs have fallen from \$1,200/kWh in 2010 to around \$120/kWh in 2024 [21]. BloombergNEF projects that at \$100/kWh, EVs will reach price parity with ICE vehicles in most segments without subsidies — a threshold expected between 2025–2026 [21]. Beyond sticker price, EVs already outperform ICEs in total cost of ownership due to:

- Lower fuel costs (electricity vs. gasoline)
- Reduced maintenance (no oil changes, fewer moving parts)
- Higher resale value in some markets [21]

3. Infrastructure Saturation & Convenience

By 2025, major highway corridors in the U.S., Europe, and China are fully electrified with DC fast chargers spaced every 50–70 miles, enabling coast-to-coast travel without range concerns [9]. Integration of plug-and-charge technology allows drivers to connect without swiping cards or using apps, further streamlining the experience [22].

4. Cultural Shift & Brand Identity

EVs have evolved from being viewed as environmental niche products to performance and lifestyle icons. Tesla’s Plaid models, Porsche’s Taycan, and Rimac’s Nevera have demonstrated that EVs can outperform supercars, while mainstream models like the Hyundai Ioniq 6 and Ford F-150 Lightning have proven practical for families and work fleets. Surveys in 2024 found that 75% of Gen Z consumers see EVs as “modern” and “desirable,” compared to only 40% in 2015 [23].

5. Autonomous Synergy

As autonomous driving technology progresses, EVs are becoming the platform of choice due to their compatibility with advanced sensors, computing hardware, and over-the-air software updates [24]. This synergy positions EVs not just as replacements for ICE cars, but as core components of the mobility ecosystem of the 2030s. In short, EVs are moving from market challenger to market leader status, with economic, infrastructural, and cultural forces pushing them toward road dominance.

VII. REMAINING CHALLENGES

Despite remarkable progress, the path to full EV adoption is not without obstacles. In 2025, the industry still faces supply chain constraints, infrastructure inequalities, and consumer-specific barriers that must be addressed before EVs can truly dominate the global vehicle fleet.



1. Supply Chain Vulnerabilities

EV battery production relies heavily on critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel. Global demand for lithium is expected to quadruple by 2030, raising concerns about sourcing, environmental impact, and geopolitical stability [25].

- **Geographic concentration:** Over 70% of the world's cobalt is mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo, creating supply risk from political instability [26].
- **Refining bottlenecks:** China currently controls more than 60% of global lithium refining capacity [27].

2. Charging Infrastructure Gaps

While major highways are well-covered, rural regions and parts of the Global South remain underserved. In 2024, the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that 40% of the world's population still lives in areas without reliable public charging infrastructure [9]. Table 7 is charging station density by region (2024)

Table 7. Charging Station Density by Region (2024)

| Region | Public Chargers per 100 EVs | DC Fast Chargers Share (%) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Western Europe | 12 | 24 |
| United States | 8 | 18 |
| China | 16 | 35 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | <1 | <5 |

3. Grid Integration & Energy Demand

Large-scale EV adoption poses challenges for electric grid stability, especially during peak demand hours. Without smart charging and vehicle-to-grid (V2G) integration, localized blackouts could become more likely in high-penetration areas [28].

- **Solution in progress:** Trials in California and the UK show that coordinated charging using AI-based demand response can reduce peak load spikes by 20–30% [29].

4. Affordability in Emerging Markets

Even as prices approach parity in wealthy nations, EVs remain unaffordable for most consumers in low-income countries. The lack of low-cost small EVs and high import tariffs further restrict access [30].

5. Consumer Education & Perception Gaps

While range anxiety has declined in mature markets, misinformation about battery degradation, fire risk, and replacement costs continues to hinder adoption in less familiar markets [31].

In short, although EVs are on the verge of mass dominance, addressing these structural, economic, and informational barriers will be crucial for achieving a truly global transition.

VIII. FUTURE OUTLOOK

Looking ahead to 2030 and beyond, EV adoption is expected to accelerate exponentially as multiple reinforcing trends converge: Solid-state batteries currently in pre-commercial trials, promise 2× energy density, 5–10 minute fast charging, and reduced fire risk compared to today's lithium-ion cells [32]. Toyota, QuantumScape, and CATL have all announced plans for commercial rollout before 2030. By 2035, many nations expect to have 50–80% renewable energy penetration in their grids, enabling EVs to run on far cleaner electricity [33]. Vehicle-to-grid (V2G) adoption will allow millions of EVs to serve as distributed energy storage, supporting grid stability and emergency backup. Autonomous electric ride-hailing services could dramatically reduce the need for private vehicle ownership, particularly in urban areas. Waymo, Cruise, and Baidu are already piloting such services, with full-scale rollout expected in multiple cities by 2030 [34]. Over 30 countries have announced ICE phase-out dates ranging from 2030 to 2040,



creating a predictable long-term market for EVs [35]. Coupled with carbon pricing and zero-emission mandates, these policies will push manufacturers to electrify entire fleets. Manufacturers are beginning to target low-cost EV models for developing countries — such as India’s Tata Tiago EV and China’s Wuling Hongguang Mini EV priced under \$12,000. These vehicles are expected to play a critical role in democratizing EV access [36].

IX. CONCLUSION

From a niche experiment plagued by range anxiety to a rapidly expanding global market, the electric vehicle revolution is one of the most significant industrial transformations of the 21st century. Between 2010 and 2025, advances in battery technology, charging infrastructure, policy support, and consumer acceptance have propelled EVs from scepticism to mainstream desirability. Yet, challenges remain: supply chain constraints, uneven infrastructure, and the need for broader affordability will determine how fast and how equitably this transition occurs. If current technological and policy trajectories hold, EVs are poised not just to share the road with ICE vehicles — but to dominate it entirely within the next decade.

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Cite this Article: Ibanibo, T.S., Iyoloma, C.I., Abidde, W.N., Shadrach, K. (2025). From Range Anxiety to Road Dominance: The Evolution of Electric Vehicles. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 8(10), pp. 4912-4921. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V8-i10-05>