

1 **Evaluating the power and limitations of genome-wide association mapping in *C. elegans***

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31 **ABSTRACT**

32 A central goal of evolutionary genetics in *Caenorhabditis elegans* is to understand the genetic  
33 basis of traits that contribute to adaptation and fitness. Genome-wide association (GWA)  
34 mappings scan the genome for individual genetic variants that are significantly correlated with  
35 phenotypic variation in a population, or quantitative trait loci (QTL). GWA mappings are a  
36 popular choice for quantitative genetic analyses because the QTL that are discovered  
37 segregate in natural populations. Despite numerous successful mapping experiments, the  
38 empirical performance of GWA mappings has not, to date, been formally evaluated for this  
39 species. We developed an open-source GWA mapping pipeline called NemaScan and used a  
40 simulation-based approach to provide benchmarks of mapping performance among wild  
41 *C. elegans* strains. Simulated trait heritability and complexity determined the spectrum of QTL  
42 detected by GWA mappings. Power to detect smaller-effect QTL increased with the number of  
43 strains sampled from the *C. elegans* Natural Diversity Resource (CeNDR). Population structure  
44 was a major driver of variation in GWA mapping performance, with populations shaped by  
45 recent selection exhibiting significantly lower false discovery rates than populations composed  
46 of more divergent strains. We also recapitulated previous GWA mappings of experimentally  
47 validated quantitative trait variants. Our simulation-based evaluation of GWA performance  
48 provides the community with critical context for pursuing quantitative genetic studies using  
49 CeNDR to elucidate the genetic basis of complex traits in *C. elegans* natural populations.

## 50 **INTRODUCTION**

51 Quantitative trait variation in human populations is abundant and arises from genetic  
52 differences between individuals, as well as complementary or detrimental inputs from the  
53 environment. Genetic variation can be statistically linked to phenotypic variance using genome-  
54 wide association studies (GWAS). GWAS have uncovered genetic variants that contribute  
55 cumulatively to human disease risk and complex trait variation (Visscher *et al.* 2017). However,  
56 the most powerful and useful applications of GWAS to complex human traits rely on precise  
57 phenotype measurements from hundreds of thousands of individuals. The subsequent statistical  
58 penalties for multiple comparisons increase as the scale of GWAS increases. Also, many  
59 important sources of variation in disease risk and trait variation cannot be measured ethically,  
60 reliably, and with sufficient statistical power in human populations (*e.g.*, cellular pathology  
61 underlying behavioral traits and variation in diet or xenobiotic exposure underlying metabolic  
62 traits). Finally, GWAS studies have a historical underrepresentation among non-White ethnic  
63 groups created in part by healthcare inequities, which cause polygenic risk scores among these  
64 groups to be significantly less accurate (Martin *et al.* 2019). This gap underscores an urgent  
65 need for replicable and translatable GWA platforms with the added ability to dissect traits that  
66 are difficult to assay in humans.

67 The development of genetic reference populations of several organisms has become  
68 increasingly popular and has facilitated the analysis of complex traits. Notable examples of this  
69 include the *Drosophila* Synthetic Population Resource (King *et al.* 2012a; b), *Drosophila* Genetic  
70 Reference Panel (Mackay *et al.* 2012), the Collaborative Cross (Churchill *et al.* 2004; Chesler *et al.*  
71 *et al.* 2008; Aylor *et al.* 2011) and Diversity Outbred (Svenson *et al.* 2012; Churchill *et al.* 2012)  
72 mouse populations, the hybrid mouse diversity panel for association mapping (Bennett *et al.*  
73 2010), *Arabidopsis* MAGIC and recombinant inbred lines (Kover *et al.* 2009; Klasen *et al.* 2012),  
74 and nested association mapping lines in both maize (Yu *et al.* 2008; McMullen *et al.* 2009) and  
75 sorghum (Bouchet *et al.* 2017). These genetic reference populations offer tremendous benefits

76 for quantitative genetics because they take advantage of well characterized genomic resources,  
77 repeated measurements that can be collected from multiple genetic backgrounds, and  
78 population-wide measurements across diverse individuals that can be made in controlled  
79 environments. The free-living roundworm nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* has contributed to  
80 discoveries at every level of biology, has rich genomic resources, and can be easily genetically  
81 manipulated. Over the past few decades, the number of catalogued genetically unique *C.*  
82 *elegans* isolates has expanded, giving rise to diverse collections of strains useful for quantitative  
83 genetics (Cook *et al.* 2017; Lee *et al.* 2021). For example, the *C. elegans* Multiparent  
84 Experimental Evolution (CeMEE) lines offer fertile ground for quantitative trait locus (QTL)  
85 mapping with high-resolution and detection power (Noble *et al.* 2017, 2021). Although rich in  
86 novel haplotypes, the CeMEE panel represents only a fraction of the genetic variation present  
87 across the *C. elegans* species. Separately, since the generation of the CeMEE panel, the *C.*  
88 *elegans* Natural Diversity Resource (CeNDR) has expanded to over 500 unique *C. elegans*  
89 strains. Genome-wide association (GWA) mapping has repeatedly linked phenotypic variation of  
90 all types to alleles segregating among these strains (Ghosh *et al.* 2012; Ashe *et al.* 2013; Cook  
91 *et al.* 2016; Zdraljevic *et al.* 2017, 2019; Lee *et al.* 2017, 2019; Laricchia *et al.* 2017; Hahnel *et*  
92 *al.* 2018; Webster *et al.* 2019; Gimond *et al.* 2019; Na *et al.* 2020; Evans *et al.* 2020, 2021a; b;  
93 Zhang *et al.* 2021). However, GWA mapping has not, to date, been formally evaluated for its  
94 power and precision to detect QTL across a range of genetic architectures.

95         The ability to identify functional natural variation in complex traits in *C. elegans* using  
96 genome-wide association is confounded by idiosyncratic genomic features. For instance,  
97 adaptation to human-associated habitats is hypothesized to have caused the generation of  
98 haplotypes with signatures of selective sweeps among many wild *C. elegans* strains. Within  
99 these swept haplotypes, genetic variation is drastically reduced and long-range linkage  
100 disequilibrium is high - sometimes stretching over 85% of whole chromosomes (Andersen *et al.*  
101 2012). Approximately 66% of the *C. elegans* strains available in CeNDR contain at least one

102 chromosome of which at least 30% can be categorized as a swept haplotype. The unintended  
103 consequence in GWA mapping is that, if the phenotype of interest happens to segregate with a  
104 common swept haplotype, it is likely that insufficient ancestral recombination has occurred  
105 across the associated swept haplotype to resolve single candidate loci. By contrast, *C. elegans*  
106 strains from Hawaii harbor nearly three times the levels of genetic diversity of non-Hawaiian  
107 strains and often lack signatures of recent selection in spite of recent migration and gene flow  
108 (Crombie *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, genetically distinct *C. elegans* strains contain  
109 “hyperdivergent” regions (Thompson *et al.* 2015) (regions of the genome characterized by high  
110 allelic diversity and, therefore, uncertainty in gene content compared to the N2 reference  
111 genome) that segregate at varying frequencies. These regions are hypothesized to be  
112 maintained by balancing selection and are predicted to harbor alleles for biological processes  
113 that are crucial for environmental sensing, pathogen responses, and xenobiotic stress  
114 responses (Lee *et al.* 2021). These observations suggest that evolutionary biology is  
115 inextricable from GWA mapping performance in *C. elegans* and that the conclusions drawn  
116 about complex trait variation from these analyses are dictated by the population structure of the  
117 mapping population. However, the magnitude of the effect of population structure and  
118 segregating hyperdivergent regions on mapping performance has not been quantified. In order  
119 to assess how mapping performance varies as a function of population composition, we require  
120 an approach that can rapidly simulate GWA mappings and address important caveats unique to  
121 *C. elegans* genome biology.

122 We have developed NemaScan, an open-source pipeline for GWA mapping in *C.*  
123 *elegans*. NemaScan offers two profiles: a mapping profile where users can supply population-  
124 specific variant information and a phenotype to perform their own analyses on real data and a  
125 simulation profile where users can supply a variety of parameters to provide baseline  
126 performance benchmarks for a past, present, or prospective experiment. These parameters  
127 include trait heritability, polygenicity, a minimum minor allele frequency for variants included in

128 the marker set, custom sample populations, and specific regions of interest where QTL are  
129 simulated and mapped iteratively. NemaScan makes use of two different formulations of the  
130 genomic relationship matrix in attempts to correct for varying types of population structure  
131 known to exist across the *C. elegans* species. We present empirical estimates of detection  
132 power and false discovery rates derived from the simulation profile for GWA mapping across  
133 different genetic architectures, and we confirm that GWA mappings in *C. elegans* robustly  
134 identify most large-effect QTL. We also demonstrate that GWA performance in *C. elegans* is  
135 improved by both increasing the number of strains tested in a population and homogenizing the  
136 genetic makeup of the population in question with respect to swept haplotypes. Finally, we  
137 quantify the precision of GWA mapping when QTL are present on different chromosomes and  
138 within hyperdivergent regions that segregate in swept and divergent populations. These  
139 performance benchmarks provide the *C. elegans* community with critical context for interpreting  
140 the results of ongoing quantitative genetic studies using CeNDR, and in so doing, increase our  
141 understanding of the genetic basis of complex traits in *C. elegans*.

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## 144 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

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### 146 *Additions to the Caenorhabditis elegans Natural Diversity Resource (CeNDR)*

147 CeNDR is composed of 1,379 unique *C. elegans* isolates. The process of isolating and  
148 identifying unique *C. elegans* strains, generating whole-genome sequence data, and calling  
149 high-quality variants has been described in-depth previously (Crombie *et al.* 2019; Lee *et al.*  
150 2021). Briefly, nematodes that could be unambiguously described as *C. elegans* by both  
151 morphological characteristics and ITS2 sequencing were reared, and genomic DNA from these  
152 strains ( $n = 1238$ ) was isolated and whole-genome sequenced. High-quality, adapter-trimmed  
153 sequencing reads were aligned to the N2 reference genome and SNVs were called for each  
154 strain using BCFtools. After variant quality filtering, the pairwise genetic similarity of all strains is  
155 considered. Strains which share alleles across at least 99.97% of all segregating sites are  
156 considered members of the same isotype group. After measuring concordance among all  
157 strains, 540 unique isotype groups were identified. In this manuscript, we use the term “strain” to  
158 refer to each strain chosen to represent the collection of genetically similar strains within that  
159 isotype group (*i.e.*, “isotype reference strain”). All data used in GWA mapping simulations  
160 (isotype-level hard-filtered SNVs, sweep haplotype calls, and hyperdivergent region calls) were  
161 downloaded from the 20210121 CeNDR release  
162 (<https://www.elegansvariation.org/data/release/latest>).

163

### 164 *Genome-wide association (GWA) mapping simulations*

165 All GWA mapping simulations were completed using the simulation profile of the  
166 NemaScan pipeline, available at <https://github.com/AndersenLab/NemaScan>. The VCF file was  
167 then pruned for variants in  $r^2 \geq 0.8$  within 50 kb windows obtained in ten-variant steps and  
168 filtered to contain variants with a minor allele frequency greater than or equal to the user-

169 supplied minor allele frequency cutoff. The LD-pruned and MAF-filtered VCF was then used to  
170 construct a genomic relationship (kinship) matrix among all strains using the --make-grm and --  
171 make-grm-inbred function from GCTA. The algorithm for constructing the genomic relationship  
172 matrix and its benefits for association mapping has been described in-depth elsewhere (Jiang *et*  
173 *al.* 2019). Separately, the user-specified number of causal variants are then sampled from LD-  
174 pruned and MAF-filtered VCF and assigned effects sampled from the user-specified effect  
175 distribution (either *Uniform* [*a,b*] (where *a* = the user-specified minimum effect and *b* = the user-  
176 specified maximum effect) or *Gamma* ( $k = 0.4, \theta = 1.66$ )). Once these effects were assigned to  
177 causal variants, phenotype values were then simulated for each of the strains in the supplied  
178 population using the --simu-causal-loci function from GCTA and the user-specified trait  
179 heritability. Simulated phenotypes, filtered variants, and the genomic relationship matrix were  
180 brought together to perform rapid GWA using the --mlma-loco and --fastGWA-lmm-exact  
181 functions by GCTA. The former function accepts a limited sparse kinship matrix composed of all  
182 chromosomes except the chromosome containing the tested marker (LOCO = “leave one  
183 chromosome out”), and the latter accepts a full sparse kinship matrix specifically calculated for  
184 inbred model organisms.

185

### 186 *Performance Assessment*

187 Raw mapping results were aggregated by finding the lowest *p*-value for each marker  
188 comparing the GWA mapping results from both functions. This aggregation step is performed to  
189 take advantage of the benefits provided by the LOCO approach and the inbred kinship matrix  
190 simultaneously. The aggregated mapping results were then processed to determine whether  
191 each SNV exceeds the user-specified threshold of statistical significance. The user has three  
192 choices of significance thresholds: i) Bonferroni correction using all tested markers (“BF”), ii)  
193 Bonferroni correction using the number of independent tests determined by eigendecomposition  
194 of the population VCF (“EIGEN”), or iii) any nominal value supplied by the user. The phenotypic

195 variance explained by each SNP was also calculated using a simple ANOVA model using the  
196 simulated phenotypes as a response and the allelic state of each strain as a factor. SNVs  
197 exceeding the user-specified significance threshold were then grouped into QTL “regions of  
198 interest”, motivated by the fact that *C. elegans* can be rapidly crossed to generate NILs  
199 harboring small introgressed regions to localize candidates using fine mapping. Regions of  
200 interest were determined by finding significantly associated markers within one kilobase of one  
201 another. Once no more markers met this criterion, the region of interest was extended on each  
202 flank by a user-specified number of markers. The QTL region of interest was denoted by the  
203 peak association found within the region and was assigned the phenotypic variance explained  
204 by that peak marker and its frequency in subsequent analyses.

205 We then cross-referenced simulated causal variants for each mapping and asked  
206 whether any detected QTL region of interest overlapped with a simulated causal variant. The  
207 possible outcomes regarding the performance of GWA mapping to detected simulated causal  
208 variants were (1) a simulated causal variant was significantly associated with phenotypic  
209 variation and was the peak association within a region of interest, (2) a simulated causal variant  
210 was significantly associated with phenotypic variation but was *not* the peak association within a  
211 region of interest, (3) a simulated causal variant was *not* significantly associated with phenotypic  
212 variation but still fell within a QTL region of interest, and (4) a simulated causal variant was  
213 neither associated with phenotypic variation nor fell within a QTL region of interest. For each  
214 replicate mapping, we calculated detection power as the number of causal variants that adhered  
215 to criteria (1) or (2) and divided them by the total number of causal variants simulated for that  
216 mapping. QTL regions of interest that did not contain a simulated causal variant were tabulated  
217 as false discoveries, and the false discovery rate (FDR) was calculated as the number of QTL  
218 regions of interest that did not contain a simulated variant divided by the total number of QTL  
219 regions of interest for each mapping. For analyses assessing the ability of GWA mappings to  
220 detect causal variants explaining a particular amount of phenotypic variance, detection power

221 was calculated by first determining the number of causal variants that adhered to criteria (1) or  
222 (2) *and* that explained that amount of phenotypic variance. We then divided them by the total  
223 number of causal variants simulated that explained the same amount of phenotypic variance  
224 across *all* mappings (instead of individual replicates).

225

## 226 *Demographic Characterization of Strains*

227 Haplotype data for 540 *C. elegans* strains was obtained from the 20210121 CeNDR  
228 release. The degree of swept haplotype sharing among strains was determined in a similar  
229 fashion to that previously described (Crombie *et al.* 2019; Lee *et al.* 2021; Zhang *et al.* 2021).  
230 Briefly, the length of every haplotype present in each strain was recorded, and if regions sharing  
231 the most common haplotype were longer than 1 Mb, these haplotypes were recorded as swept  
232 haplotypes. Haplotypes outside of these highly shared regions were recorded as divergent  
233 haplotypes. Only swept haplotypes on chromosomes I, IV, V, and X were considered in strain  
234 classification because selective sweeps are not found on chromosomes II and III. If swept  
235 haplotypes composed greater than or equal to 30% of the length of these chromosomes, that  
236 chromosome was considered swept. Swept strains were determined as those strains that  
237 contain at least one swept chromosome, and divergent strains are those strains that do not. In  
238 total, 357 swept and 183 divergent strains were identified. Some populations used in  
239 simulations were constructed by sampling among these swept and divergent strains (**Figure 3**),  
240 and others were sampled from the overall collection of 540 strains (**Figure 2, Figure 3**). In  
241 simulations comparing QTL simulated in hyperdivergent regions from those simulated outside of  
242 such regions, we compared 182 swept strains to 183 divergent strains selected on the basis of  
243 containing at least 37 hyperdivergent regions, regardless of their population frequency.  
244 Dendrograms representing population differentiation were constructed for these swept and  
245 divergent populations by filtering genetic variants identically to NemaScan and passing these  
246 variant calls to vcf2phylip (Ortiz 2019) and QuickTree (<https://github.com/khowe/quicktree>).

247

## 248 *Statistical Testing*

249 Determinations of significant differences in performance among experimental factors  
250 were determined using both parametric and non-parametric specifications of power or empirical  
251 FDR as a response. Simulation regimes where only one QTL was specified for each simulated  
252 mapping resulted in a binary distribution of power output, and therefore differences in  
253 performance as a function of experimental factors were determined using the Kruskal-Wallis  
254 test. Differences between all pairwise contrasts of factor levels were determined using the  
255 Dunn's test. In cases where multiple experimental factors were considered simultaneously (for  
256 example, whether mapping strain set and the location of the single simulated QTL *interacted* to  
257 determine performance), factors were combined to make an aggregate factor and tested using  
258 the Kruskal-Wallis test. When the specified number of QTL were greater than one, differences  
259 in performance as a function of single and multiple factors were determined using the One-Way  
260 ANOVA and Two-Way ANOVA tests, respectively, and followed up with *post hoc* tests using  
261 Tukey's HSD.

262

## 263 *Data Availability*

264 The simulation and mapping profiles of NemaScan are available for download at  
265 <https://github.com/AndersenLab/NemaScan> and are accessible with the same pipeline. Users  
266 are invited to use NemaScan to perform GWA mappings on their own traits of interest or  
267 leverage the simulation framework to explore the potential of GWA for their own traits of interest  
268 or to assess the likelihood of previous mapping results. In addition, all parameter specifications  
269 used to generate the mappings in this manuscript are contained in **Supplemental Table 1**. All  
270 code and data used to replicate the data analysis and figures presented are available for  
271 download at [https://github.com/AndersenLab/nemascan\\_manuscript](https://github.com/AndersenLab/nemascan_manuscript). All variant calls,  
272 hyperdivergent region calls, and selective sweep haplotype calls are available at

273 <https://www.elegansvariation.org/data/release/latest>. Finally, prospective users are also

274 encouraged to use NemaScan to perform their own mappings at

275 <https://www.elegansvariation.org/mapping/perform-mapping/>.

276

## 277 **RESULTS**

### 278 *GCTA software improves C. elegans GWA power and precision*

279         The previous GWA mapping workflow, cegwas2-nf (Zdraljevic *et al.* 2019), was built on  
280 the foundation of kinship matrix specification using EMMA or EMMA<sup>X</sup> (Kang *et al.* 2008, 2010)  
281 implemented by R/rrBLUP (Endelman 2011) as the association mapping algorithm. However,  
282 with the advent of more efficient and flexible algorithms, we wondered whether GCTA offered  
283 better performance. We first optimized the algorithm used for fitting linear mixed models and  
284 estimating kinship among individuals in the GWA mapping. Simulations were performed using  
285 four different association mapping algorithms, of which three are different implementations of  
286 association mapping using GCTA software (Yang *et al.* 2011; Jiang *et al.* 2019). (1) EMMA:  
287 GWA mapping using R/rrBLUP fits a kinship matrix and performs association using variance  
288 components using the “P3D = TRUE” option. (2) LMM-EXACT-LOCO: GCTA-LOCO fits a  
289 kinship matrix constructed using all chromosomes except for the chromosome harboring the  
290 tested genetic variant (“leave one chromosome out”). (3) LMM-EXACT: fastGWA fits with a  
291 sparse kinship matrix using all chromosomes. (4) LMM-EXACT-INBRED: fastGWA fits a sparse  
292 kinship matrix tailored towards populations composed of inbred organisms.

293         We next used convenient features offered by GCTA to simulate quantitative traits (--  
294 simu-qt) and assign effects to QTL (--simu-causal-loci) across a panel of real *C. elegans*  
295 genomes. The statistical properties of each mapping algorithm have been reported elsewhere  
296 (Yang *et al.* 2011; Jiang *et al.* 2019). To begin, we used a population of 203 isolates that were  
297 previously measured for susceptibility to albendazole (Hahnel *et al.* 2018). We simulated 50  
298 quantitative traits with increasing narrow-sense heritability (the proportion of phenotypic  
299 variance explained by specific genetic differences between strains,  $h^2$ ), ranging from 0.1 to 0.9,  
300 supported by either a single QTL or five independent QTL. Each QTL was assigned a large  
301 effect size sampled from a uniform distribution (**Supplemental Figure 1**) to increase the  
302 likelihood that at least one true QTL was detected in each simulation.

303 We measured the statistical power and the empirical false discovery rate (FDR; the  
304 proportion of detected QTL regions that lack a simulated causal variant exceeding the multiple  
305 testing correction significance threshold) of each association mapping workflow across varying  
306 levels of trait heritability and for traits supported by either one or five QTL. We observed that  
307 GCTA-based workflows were more powerful than EMMA for almost every simulated genetic  
308 architecture (**Supplemental Figure 2A**). When mapping a single causal QTL, we observed that  
309 algorithms exhibited almost identical power when that QTL explained at least 30% of the  
310 phenotypic variance (Kruskall-Wallis test,  $p \geq 0.295$ ). However, when traits were supported by  
311 five QTL, power varied among algorithms and increased as a function of trait heritability. When  
312  $h^2 < 0.4$ , the algorithms exhibited no significant differences in detection power (Kruskall-Wallis  
313 test,  $p \geq 0.276$ ). When  $h^2 \geq 0.4$ , algorithms diverged in performance, with LMM-EXACT and  
314 LMM-EXACT-INBRED algorithms generally exhibited lower power than both the EMMA and  
315 LMM-EXACT-LOCO algorithms (Dunn test,  $p_{adj} \leq 0.01385$ ). Furthermore, the LMM-EXACT-  
316 LOCO algorithm exhibited significantly greater power than EMMA for traits with  $h^2 > 0.7$  (Dunn  
317 test,  $p_{adj} \leq 0.00826$ ) (**Supplemental Table 2**). We also observed only modest differences in  
318 empirical false discovery rates (FDR) among algorithms at different trait heritabilities, among  
319 them being that the LMM-EXACT-LOCO and LMM-EXACT-INBRED algorithms often exhibited  
320 lower empirical FDR than both the EMMA and LMM-EXACT algorithms (**Supplemental Figure**  
321 **2B, Supplemental Table 3**). These results indicated that mapping algorithms implemented by  
322 GCTA have equal or greater power for QTL detection and lower FDR in *C. elegans* than the  
323 previous implementation of GWA mapping using EMMA.

324 The observation that either the LMM-EXACT-LOCO or LMM-EXACT-INBRED algorithms  
325 exceeded the QTL detection power of EMMA across a range of trait heritabilities motivated us to

326 integrate both mapping algorithms into new simulation and mapping profiles. In future  
327 simulations presented here and in the mapping workflow available on CeNDR, traits are  
328 mapped using both the LMM-EXACT-LOCO and LMM-EXACT-INBRED algorithms, and  
329 mapping results from each are combined by taking the lower  $p$ -value from each algorithm's  
330 association test for every marker. Although this approach may inflate the FDR for a given  
331 mapping, we prioritized a more flexible range of detection power in order to provide researchers  
332 with greater potential for QTL discovery for diverse types of traits and differentially stratified  
333 populations given that the algorithms specify genetic covariance differently. Mapping results  
334 provided using CeNDR include the combined mapping results with metadata, as well as raw  
335 individual mapping outputs for both algorithms if researchers prefer the handling of the genomic  
336 relatedness from one algorithm over the other. This combined output integrated into distinct  
337 simulation and mapping profiles is the foundation of our new GWA mapping workflow, called  
338 NemaScan.

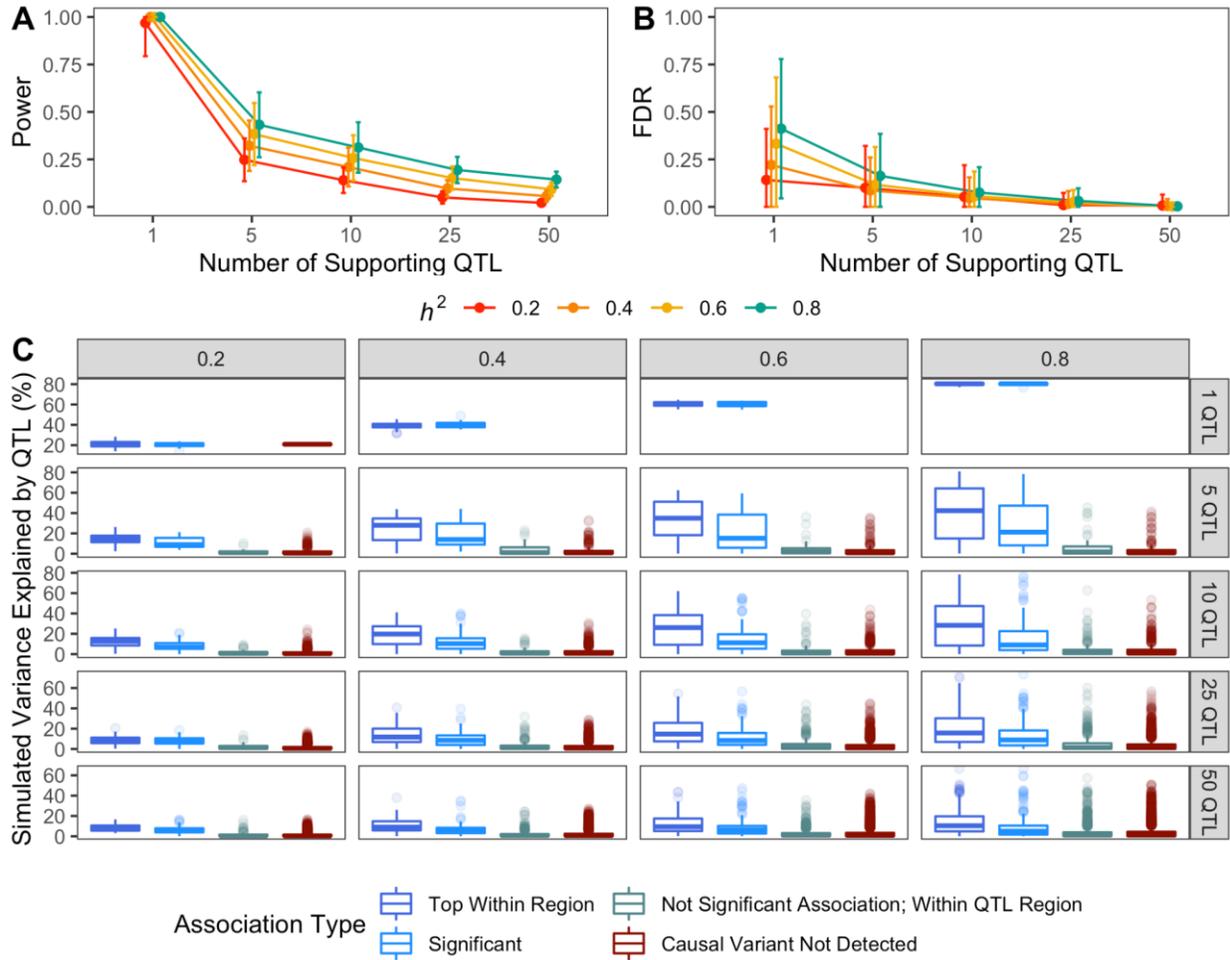
339

#### 340 *Genetic architecture dictates the spectrum of C. elegans QTL detection using GWA mapping*

341 One of the most critical benchmarks for GWA mapping in *C. elegans* is the number of  
342 QTL underlying complex traits that can be detected. Traits of particular interest are noisy or  
343 highly sensitive to environmental perturbations, controlled by many genes with relatively small  
344 effects, or controlled by collections of alleles at varying frequencies in the sample population. In  
345 order to quantify the ability of NemaScan to identify QTL in natural populations of wild isolates,  
346 we performed simulations making changes to the genetic architectures of simulated traits. First,  
347 simulated QTL effects were drawn from a *Gamma* ( $k = 0.4$ ,  $\theta = 1.66$ ) distribution, conforming to  
348 the assumption that the natural genetic variants underlying complex traits and adaptation  
349 primarily contribute small phenotypic effects but occasionally

350

351



352  
 353 **Figure 1: Performance benchmarks for GWA mapping of complex traits in *C. elegans*.**  
 354 Estimates of power (A) and false discovery rate (B) as a function of the narrow-sense heritability  
 355 [0.2 (red), 0.4, (orange), 0.6 (yellow), 0.8 (green)] and number of causal QTL (ranging from 1-50  
 356 QTL) underlying quantitative traits (x-axis). (C) The empirical phenotypic variance explained by  
 357 each simulated QTL among all architecture regimes, broken out by whether the causal QTL was  
 358 the top association within a QTL region of interest (dark blue), significant (and thereby  
 359 exceeding the threshold of significance by multiple testing, light blue), or not a significant  
 360 association but residing within the QTL region of interest (slate grey) or outside any region of  
 361 interest (red). Lines stretching from each point represent the standard deviation of the  
 362 performance estimate among all replicate mappings in (A) and (B). Square boxes linked to black  
 363 dots in (C) contain the median simulated variance explained by each QTL for that association  
 364 category within an architecture regime.  
 365

366 exert moderate or large effects (Supplementary Figure 3). Second, because experimenters  
 367 have limited control over the realized heritability of their trait of interest, traits were simulated  
 368 with  $h^2 = 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, \text{ or } 0.8$ . For each heritability specification, traits were either supported by  
 369 1, 5, 10, 25, or 50 QTL to examine GWA performance across a broad spectrum of genetic

370 architectures. Third, we simulated each of these genetic architectures in the complete set of 540  
371 wild isolates currently available from CeNDR to determine the expected performance in the  
372 theoretical case where every available genetic background is assayed for a phenotype of  
373 interest.

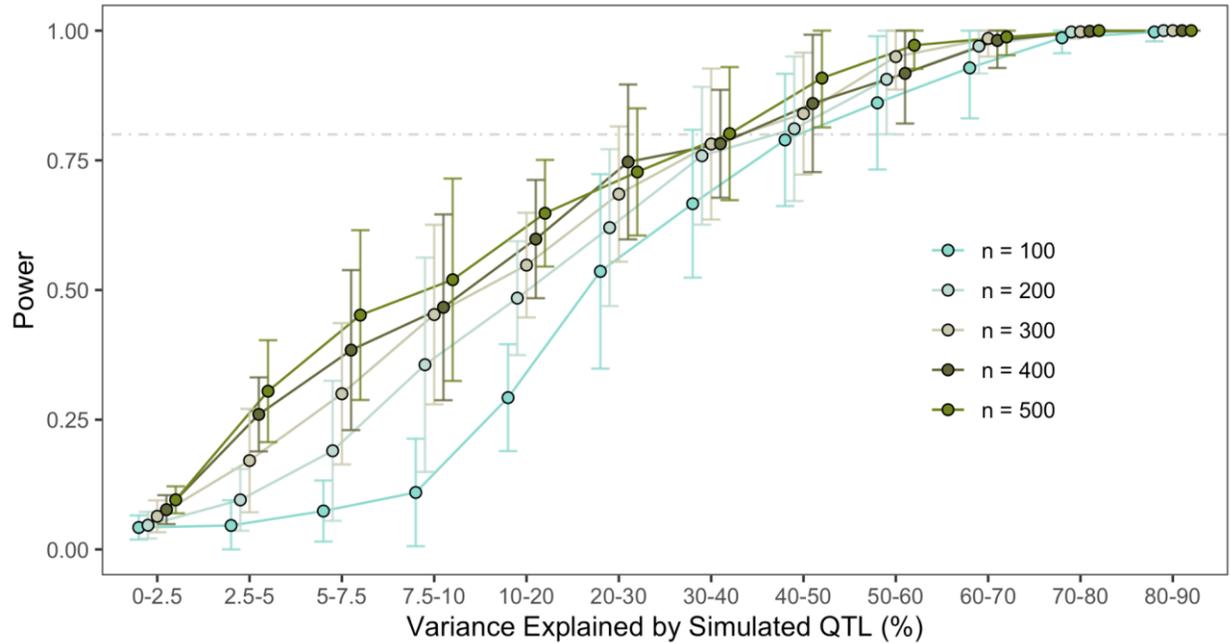
374 We observed that detection power decreased as a function of the number of supporting  
375 QTL for each simulated trait, regardless of its heritability. In the simplest case where a single  
376 QTL accounted for all of the phenotypic variance, mappings exhibited at least 97% power to  
377 detect it on average. However, detection power decreased as simulated trait complexity  
378 increased, especially for less heritable traits (**Figure 2A**). NemaScan exhibited only 33.2%  
379 power to detect five QTL architectures and only 7.6% power to detect 50 QTL architectures,  
380 corresponding to detecting on average 1.66 true QTL out of five or 3.78 true QTL out of 50,  
381 respectively. Depending on the number of simulated QTL, detection power increased by  
382 between a two-fold (five QTL) to six-fold (50 QTL) magnitude by increasing trait heritability from  
383 0.2 to 0.8. The empirical FDR also decreased as a function of genetic complexity (**Figure 2B**).  
384 Mappings of five QTL architectures produced a mean FDR of 11.8%, and mappings of 50 QTL  
385 architectures produced a mean FDR of 0.41%. Among traits supported by the same number of  
386 QTL, FDR increased with trait heritability but to a much lesser extent than detection power.  
387 These results demonstrated that features of complex traits that alter performance of GWA  
388 mappings in other model systems generally also extend to relatively small *C. elegans* sample  
389 populations. By quantifying increases in power and FDR across various genetic architectures,  
390 we also provide performance benchmarks for GWA mappings in *C. elegans* and emphasize that  
391 obtaining more precise phenotype measurements, and thereby reducing environmental noise,  
392 improves the prospects of precise QTL detection across *C. elegans* strains.

393 In *C. elegans* as well as other systems, the power to detect causal alleles underlying  
394 QTL in natural populations is limited in part by their frequency and effect size, which together  
395 contribute to the fraction of phenotypic variance explained by that QTL. We calculated the

396 phenotypic variance explained by each causal QTL across all simulations and found that true  
397 positive QTL (simulated QTL with significant trait associations) had significantly greater  
398 explanatory power than false negative QTL (causal QTL without significant trait associations)  
399 within all combinations of trait heritability and polygenicity regimes (One-Way ANOVA, Tukey  
400 HSD,  $p_{adj} < 0.05$ ) except for one QTL and  $h^2 = 0.2$  (One-Way ANOVA, Tukey HSD,  $p_{adj} \geq 0.962$ )  
401 (**Figure 2C**). We also observed that the simulated variance explained by significantly associated  
402 true positive markers was significantly different among all trait heritability and polygenicity  
403 combinations. The median simulated variance explained by top hits in polygenic architecture  
404 simulations ranged from 7.41% ( $h^2 = 0.2$ ; 50 QTL) to 42.35% ( $h^2 = 0.8$ ; five QTL), and the  
405 median simulated variance explained by false negative QTL consistently remained below 2%.  
406 When markers with the highest statistical association were also the causal markers, they  
407 explained significantly more phenotypic variance than significantly associated causal markers  
408 that were not peak associations (One-Way ANOVA, Tukey HSD,  $p_{adj} < 0.05$ ), except for traits  
409 supported by one QTL (One-Way ANOVA, Tukey HSD,  $p_{adj} \geq 0.073$ ). We conclude from these  
410 patterns that QTL detected through GWA mapping in *C. elegans* were indeed enriched for  
411 alleles with outsized effects on trait variation, explaining smaller amounts of the total trait  
412 heritability as trait complexity increased.

413  
414 *Sample size and population structure modulates the sensitivity of GWA mapping in C. elegans*

415 A common practical limitation of the scope and performance of any GWAS is the size of  
416 the sample population for which phenotypes have been measured. *C. elegans* GWA mappings  
417 are no exception, despite high-throughput phenotypic platforms becoming more commonplace  
418 in studies of natural phenotypic variation (Yemini *et al.* 2013; Andersen *et al.* 2015). We  
419 quantified the detection power of NemaScan when applied to complex traits given the finite



420 sampling potential of a typical GWA experiment. To accomplish this simulation, we subsampled  
421 the 540 CeNDR isolates at five different depths ( $n =$

422 **Figure 2: Impact of sample size and strain selection on sensitivity of QTL detection.**  
423 Power estimates (A) for GWA mappings conditioning on the variance explained by underlying  
424 QTL as a function of sample size and strain selection are shown. The corresponding breakdown  
425 of the abundance of QTL explaining increasing phenotypic variance (B) and the minor allele  
426 frequencies (MAF, C) of these QTL are shown.  
427

428 100, 200, 300, 400, or 500) 50 times each. We then measured the sensitivity of GWA mappings  
429 to detect simulated QTL according to the phenotypic variance that they explained by grouping  
430 simulated QTL into bins representing increasing influence on trait variation. Among all QTL  
431 simulated, we found no clear differences in minor allele frequencies among populations of  
432 different sizes (**Supplemental Figure 4**).

433 We first observed that, as expected, overall detection power generally increased as a  
434 function of sampling depth. The average power to detect five QTL among 100 subsampled  
435 strain mappings was  $0.33 \pm 0.15$  (roughly one QTL out of five), increasing to  $0.46 \pm 0.18$  (at  
436 least two QTL out of five) among 500 subsampled strain mappings (**Table 1**). The observation  
437 of roughly 46% power to detect five QTL at  $h^2 = 0.8$  among 500 subsampled strains is

438 consistent with our previous simulation results (**Figure 1A**) and indicates that as the number of  
439 strains in CeNDR expands so will the potential for NemaScan to detect all of the QTL for a given

Sample Size	Power	FDR
100	0.33 ± 0.15	0.61 ± 0.25
200	0.39 ± 0.16	0.48 ± 0.27
300	0.42 ± 0.17	0.41 ± 0.27
400	0.44 ± 0.18	0.32 ± 0.25
500	0.46 ± 0.18	0.27 ± 0.24

440 **Table 1:** Power and FDR estimates for GWA mappings performed with subsampled populations  
441 of increasing depth.  
442

443 trait. We also observed that the impact of increasing sample size was most striking when  
444 considering the sensitivities of mappings to detect QTL with smaller effects (**Figure 2**). Both  
445 100-strain and 500-strain mappings had greater than 80% power to detect QTL that explained  
446 greater than 50% of the phenotypic variance. However, the power of 500-strain mappings to  
447 detect QTL explaining as little as 7.5% of the phenotypic variance ( $0.52 \pm 0.2$ ) was nearly five  
448 times greater than that of 100-strain mappings ( $0.11 \pm 0.1$ ) (**Supplemental Table 4**). These  
449 results indicate that power to detect QTL with large effects increased only marginally with  
450 increasing sampling depth, and power to detect QTL with smaller effects improves significantly  
451 by adding more strains to mapping populations.

452 We then measured GWA mapping performance in sets of strains that were distinguished  
453 by presence of haplotypes shaped by past selective sweeps (Andersen *et al.* 2012; Crombie *et*  
454 *al.* 2019; Zhang *et al.* 2021). Using the criterion of whether strains harbored at least one  
455 chromosome composed of at least 30% swept haplotypes, we divided the 540 strains into two  
456 groups: “swept” strains ( $n = 357$ ) and “divergent” strains ( $n = 183$ ). We then simulated and  
457 mapped 50 quantitative traits supported by 10 QTL and  $h^2 = 0.8$ , and QTL effects were once  
458 again sampled from a *Gamma* ( $k = 0.4$ ,  $\theta = 1.66$ ) distribution. We performed these simulations

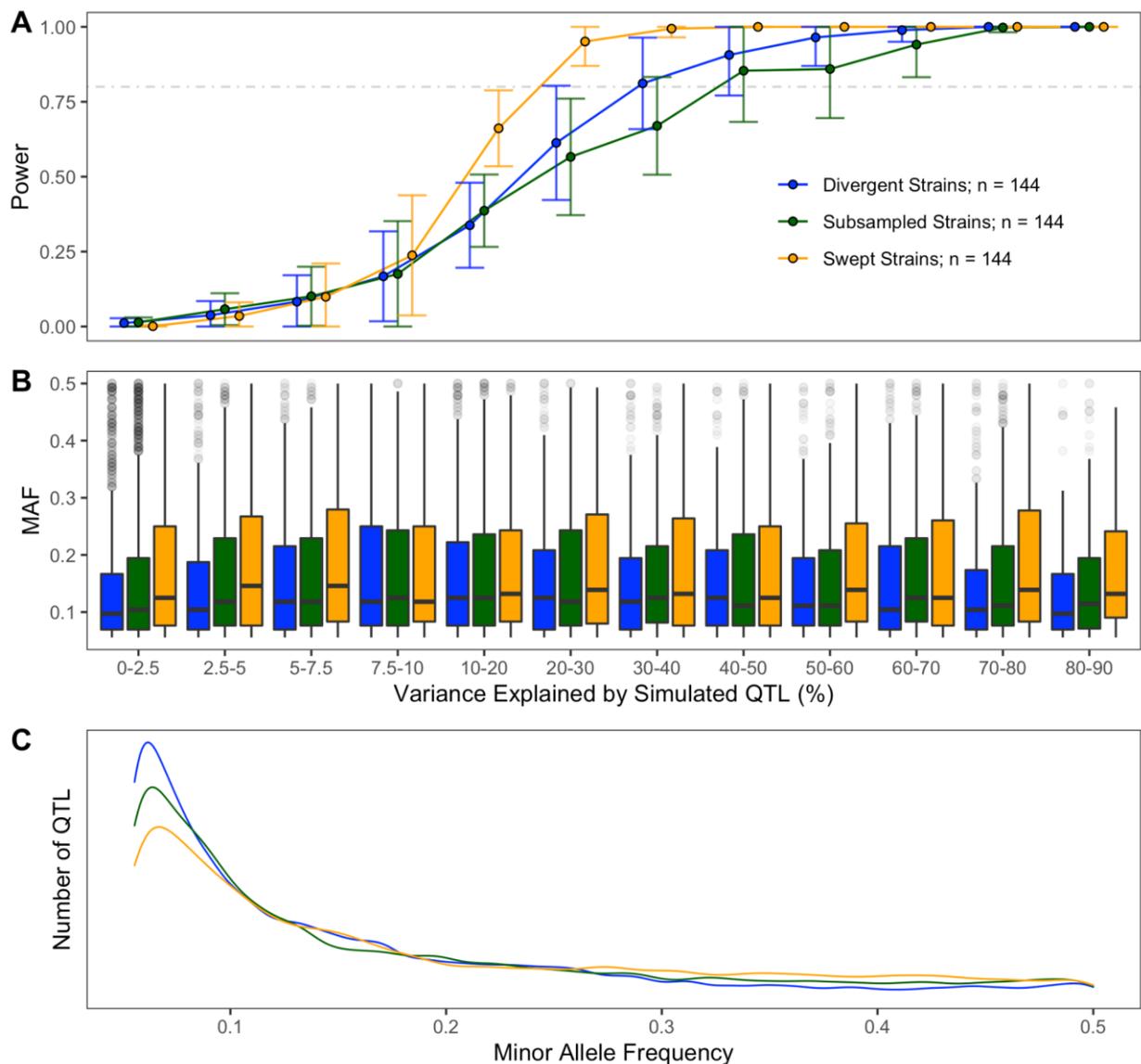
459 using populations of equal sampling depth ( $n = 144$ ) from swept strains, divergent strains, and  
460 144 randomly sampled strains from the entire CeNDR strain collection.

461           We observed that strain selection has a large impact on the sensitivity with which QTL of  
462   varying importance are detected. We also observed that the power to detect QTL explaining  
463   increasing amounts of phenotypic variance differed dramatically between mappings among  
464   strains with similar genome-wide signatures of positive selection and randomly subsampled  
465   populations of equal depth (**Figure 3A**). Two patterns emerged from these results. First, swept  
466   populations exhibited greater detection power than other populations for QTL that explained

467 greater than 10% of the phenotypic variance. Furthermore, for QTL that explained more than  
468 20% of the phenotypic variance, swept strains exhibited roughly 95% power and other

469 **Figure 3: Population composition alters performance and underlying distribution of**  
470 **variants.** The fraction of simulated QTL detected by GWA (A) and their minor allele frequencies  
471 (B) are plotted as a function of the variance they explain and strain selection. (C) The underlying  
472 distributions of minor allele frequencies and effects of all simulated QTL for each population are  
473 displayed.  
474

475 populations exhibited less than 62% power (**Supplemental Table 5**). Second, for QTL



476 explaining greater than 20% of the phenotypic variance, populations assembled without regard  
477 for selective sweep haplotypes exhibited lower power than both swept and divergent  
478 populations, despite divergent populations having, on average, lower minor allele frequencies of  
479 detected and simulated QTL with detected QTL explaining similar amounts of phenotypic  
480 variance (**Figure 3B,C**). Nevertheless, these initial simulated mappings provide evidence that  
481 strain choice as well as sampling depth dictate the realized genetic architecture of *C. elegans*  
482 quantitative traits.

483

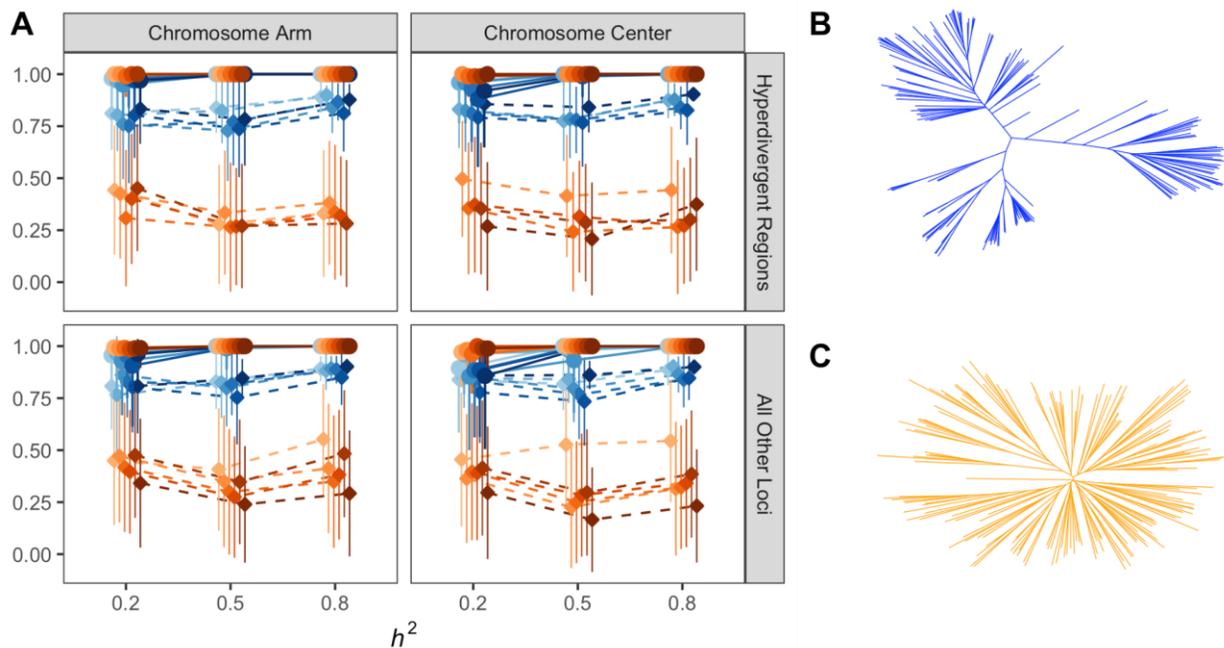
#### 484 *Fine-scale genomic landscape of GWA performance in C. elegans*

485 The genomes of *C. elegans* wild isolates have been heavily shaped by the evolution of  
486 self-fertilization. The recombination rate across the arms of chromosomes is significantly higher  
487 than across centers (Rockman and Kruglyak 2009). Many *C. elegans* strains harbor selective  
488 sweep haplotypes from which recent adaptation to human-associated niches has purged  
489 genetic diversity (Andersen *et al.* 2012; Zhang *et al.* 2021) and hyperdivergent regions that  
490 maintain the variation necessary for evolvability (Lee *et al.* 2021). Selective sweep and  
491 hyperdivergent region haplotype frequencies and distributions vary across wild isolates,  
492 motivating us to ask whether heterogeneity in GWA sensitivity among populations with different  
493 demographics can be partly explained by which chromosomes QTL are located and whether  
494 these QTL are also located in hyperdivergent regions. In order to assess these points, we  
495 simulated 100 mappings of a single QTL with a defined effect size in a population of 182 swept  
496 strains and a population of 183 divergent strains. For each set of 100 mappings, the locations of  
497 the simulated QTL were constrained to i) a particular chromosome, ii) the region of the  
498 chromosome (arms or centers), or iii) within or outside of divergent regions. For each mapping,  
499 the heritabilities of the simulated traits were also set to 0.2, 0.5, or 0.8.

500 We observed several critical differences in mapping performance across different  
501 regions of the genome and between divergent and swept mapping populations (**Figure 4A**). At

502 low trait heritability, power to detect QTL was significantly lower among divergent strains than  
503 swept strains across all chromosomes, regardless of whether they were in divergent regions,  
504

505 **Figure 4: Evolutionary history dictates the fine-scale landscape of GWA performance.** A)  
506 The mean fraction of simulated QTL detected by GWA (circles, solid lines) and the empirical  
507 FDR (diamonds, dashed lines) are plotted as a function of different genomic locations where  
508 QTL were simulated: among hyperdivergent regions with respect to the N2 reference genome,  
509 or among all other loci, as well as on the low-recombination centers or high-recombination arms  
510 of chromosomes. Shading of blue and orange points in A) corresponds to chromosome I (lightest)  
511 (lightest) to chromosome X (darkest) in order. The phylogenetic relationship of each mapping  
512 population are shown in B) (183 divergent strains, blue) and C) (182 swept strains, orange).



513  
514 arms, or centers of the chromosome (Kruskall-Wallis test;  $p < 0.0004$ ). We also observed subtle  
515 differences in the relative detection power for QTL within certain chromosomes within these  
516 classes (**Supplemental Table 6**). Strain sets exhibited identical power to detect QTL genome-  
517 wide when  $h^2 = 0.8$ . The empirical false discovery rate of mappings was significantly greater in  
518 mappings among divergent strains than swept strains regardless of the location of simulated  
519 QTL (Kruskall-Wallis test;  $p < 0.00001$ ). These differences are likely caused by the large extent  
520 to which the divergent population was structured into distinct clusters (**Figure 4B**), and the

521 swept population much closely approximates a star phylogeny because most variation in the  
522 population segregates on a much more common genetic background of swept haplotypes  
523 (**Figure 4C**). These results confirm a clear effect of population structure and evolutionary history  
524 in the species on both genome-wide precision and local detection power of GWA mapping.

525 We also investigated whether certain genomic regions provided varying performance for  
526 GWA mapping in *C. elegans*, motivated by the observation of varying population recombination  
527 rates on the arms and centers of chromosomes (Rockman and Kruglyak 2009), common  
528 selective sweep haplotypes in certain *C. elegans* populations (Andersen *et al.* 2012; Zhang *et*  
529 *al.* 2021), and hyperdivergent haplotypes that segregate among wild strains (Lee *et al.* 2021).  
530 Within the swept population, we observed no significant differences in power to detect QTL  
531 simulated in hyperdivergent regions nor on chromosome arms compared to centers ( $h^2 = 0.2$ ,  
532 Kruskal-Wallis test;  $p = 0.0795$ ). By contrast, power to detect QTL within the divergent  
533 population differed as a function of whether they were simulated in hyperdivergent regions or  
534 different parts of the chromosome ( $h^2 = [0.2, 0.5]$ ; Kruskal-Wallis test,  $p < 0.0001$ ; Dunn test,  
535  $p_{adj} < 0.02$ ) (**Supplemental Table 7**). Once again, the empirical false discovery rate among  
536 divergent regions and different chromosomal regions varied significantly for all trait heritabilities  
537 within both the divergent and swept strain set (Kruskal-Wallis test;  $p < 0.02$ ) (**Supplemental**  
538 **Table 8**).

539 Finally, we asked whether GWA mapping performance varied between chromosomes  
540 controlling for historic recombination rate differences or the population divergence of  
541 haplotypes. We only observed one case where detection power varied significantly among  
542 chromosomes - power to detect QTL outside of hyperdivergent regions on the center of  
543 chromosome III was significantly lower than that observed for chromosomes I, IV, V, and X at  $h^2$   
544 = 0.5 (Dunn test,  $p_{adj} \leq 0.0103$ ) among divergent strains (**Supplemental Table 9**). Notably, this  
545 chromosome also harbors the fewest sweep haplotypes in the *C. elegans* population, which

546 could indicate that this local dip in power could be caused by a local enrichment of rare  
547 haplotypes among more divergent strains in the population. Empirical FDR varied significantly  
548 among chromosomes in several instances among both divergent and swept strain sets  
549 (Kruskall-Wallis test;  $p < 0.05$ ) (**Supplemental Table 10**). Taken together, these results  
550 demonstrate that differences in GWA mapping performance arising from strain composition  
551 differences are likely caused in part by the unique patterns of genetic variation throughout the  
552 *C. elegans* genome.

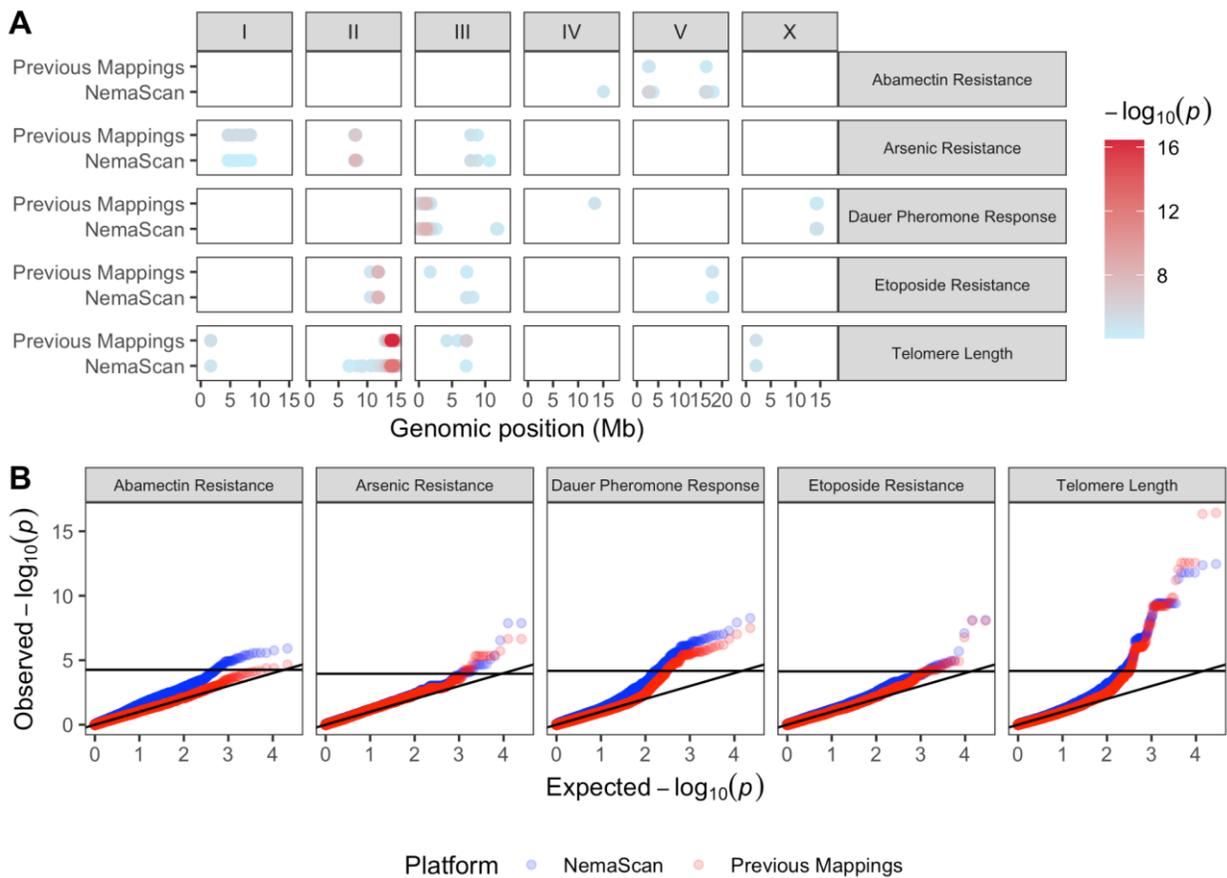
553

#### 554 *NemaScan recapitulates previously validated genetic associations*

555 Previous work has used GWA mappings to identify QTL and subsequently identify  
556 quantitative trait variants (QTV) in *C. elegans* (Evans et al. 2021b). In order to test whether  
557 NemaScan performs similarly in practice to cegwas2-nf, the previous mapping pipeline  
558 (<https://github.com/AndersenLab/cegwas2-nf>) that used the EMMA algorithm (Kang et al. 2008)  
559 implemented by R/rrBLUP (Endelman 2011), we re-mapped five quantitative traits using both  
560 cegwas2-nf and NemaScan. Raw trait files were downloaded from the supplemental materials  
561 for each published mapping and re-mapped using the 20210121 CeNDR release VCF. In each  
562 case, the major QTL underlying each trait were mapped using both platforms (**Figure 5A**). Of  
563 the 16 QTL identified across the previously mapped traits, 14 were recovered by NemaScan.  
564 Furthermore, in some instances NemaScan was qualitatively more specific with respect to QTL  
565 identification. For example, in the original mapping of arsenic resistance, two QTL in significant  
566 LD were identified on chromosomes I and III. Because these sets of markers have identically  
567 significant association scores across the interval, the most likely cause of this association is that  
568 population structure among the phenotyped strains is causing an entire shared haplotype to be  
569 tagged as significant. When mapped with NemaScan, the significance of this association was  
570 slightly lower than that of the previous mapping. Similarly, the two previously mapped abamectin  
571 resistance QTL were detected and assigned greater significance by NemaScan (**Supplemental**

572 **Figure 5).** These findings confirm that NemaScan has sufficient detection power to recapture  
 573 known genetic architectures of real traits, including many with empirically proven QTV. Among  
 574 each of these mappings, we observed that the aggregated

575 **Figure 5: GWA mapping with NemaScan recaptures previously validated QTVs.** A)  
 576 Significant genetic associations are shown genome-wide for five quantitative traits that were re-  
 577 mapped using the 20210121 CeNDR release both with cegwas2-nf (“Previous Mappings”) and  
 578 NemaScan, and the strength of the association is displayed increasing from blue to red. B)  
 579 Quantile-quantile plots of all  $-\log_{10}$  transformed  $p$ -values are plotted against their expected rank,  
 580 with the horizontal line in each panel indicating the trait-specific multiple testing correction  
 581 significance threshold.  
 582



583 NemaScan  $p$ -values (the collection of top associations from either the LMM-EXACT-INBRED or  
 584 the LMM-EXACT-LOCO algorithm for each marker) exhibited varying levels of inflation relative  
 585 to both the EMMA mappings and to expected  $p$ -values for each trait (**Figure 5B**). Although the  
 586 relative inflation of arsenic resistance, etoposide resistance, and telomere length association

587 mapping statistics were relatively similar, mappings of abamectin resistance and dauer  
588 pheromone responses were quite different. This difference can be ascribed in part to the fact  
589 that mapping statistics derived from NemaScan are the maximum between two matrix  
590 construction options and that, when we compared each set of algorithm-specific raw  $p$ -values to  
591 their expected quantiles, one of the algorithms often displayed less inflation. However, in some  
592 cases, like abamectin resistance, the algorithm producing lower  $p$ -values failed to detect any  
593 significant QTL (**Supplemental Figure 6**), indicating that the flexibility of algorithm choice in  
594 NemaScan mappings could be a source of strength when population structure of phenotypes  
595 interacts with trait heritability to have an outsized influence on QTL detection.

596

597 **DISCUSSION**

598 *GWA mapping as a tool for QTL discovery in C. elegans*

599 The *C. elegans* community has contributed steadily to the catalog of species-wide  
600 genetic variation. As the number of genetically characterized unique strains expands the  
601 CeNDR collection, we learn more about genomic patterns of diversity all over the world. The  
602 prospects for using GWA mapping to dissect the genetic underpinnings of complex traits have  
603 improved in tandem. Although the community has successfully employed GWA mappings in *C.*  
604 *elegans* to discover novel genes related to a variety of traits, we lack a robust characterization  
605 of the power and precision with which this resource is equipped to detect QTL. Evaluating  
606 population-based genetic resources for other systems using simulations has provided key  
607 benchmarks for their respective communities (Kover *et al.* 2009; Bennett *et al.* 2010; King *et al.*  
608 2012a; b; Bouchet *et al.* 2017; Noble *et al.* 2017; Gage *et al.* 2018; Keele *et al.* 2019). The  
609 burgeoning *C. elegans* quantitative genetics community has applied GWA mapping to a growing  
610 collection of wild strains and identified genetic variants linked to complex traits with novel  
611 biomedical and evolutionary implications. In the simulations presented here, we systematically  
612 tested a robust framework for GWA against a variety of genetic architectures and sample  
613 populations to contextualize past, present, and future studies using CeNDR. However, some  
614 important limitations of our simulation framework have implications in real populations. First,  
615 simulated causal variants were selected from the minor allele frequency and LD-filtered variant  
616 set, meaning that all QTL are perfectly tagged and at greater than 5% frequency in the  
617 population, upwardly biasing their detection in simulations. In practice, GWAS may  
618 underestimate the effects of rare QTVs imperfectly tagged by filtered variants or fail to detect  
619 these variants altogether. Future work should prioritize rare variant detection, especially given  
620 their implied frequency in divergent populations (**Figure 3C**). Second, effects assigned to  
621 simulated causal variants were drawn from a *Gamma* ( $k = 0.4$ ,  $\theta = 1.66$ ) distribution  
622 (**Supplementary Figure 3**) creating genetic architectures heavily biased against detection of

623 causal alleles with very small effects. In practice, traits supported by fewer QTL of greater effect  
624 will be more amenable to GWA mapping, even at low heritability (**Figure 1C**). In spite of these  
625 limitations, we hope to provide the community with a flexible platform for QTL detection and  
626 simulation-based performance evaluation.

627         Similar to multiparent mapping populations in other systems, we confirmed that the  
628 prospects of identifying QTL that explain a less than substantial proportion (~10%) of overall  
629 trait variance depend primarily on three factors: (1) the number of strains being phenotyped, (2)  
630 the precision with which phenotypes can be measured, and (3) the composition of the mapping  
631 population. For instance, we observed that measuring only 100 wild isolates is expected to  
632 provide almost 80% power to detect QTL that explain greater than 40% of the phenotypic  
633 variance. For many traits, it is no small feat to measure 100 strains with sufficient replication for  
634 line means to robustly represent that genetic background in a GWA mapping population. A  
635 recent GWA analysis of sperm size among 96 wild strains and N2 revealed no significant  
636 associations despite the nomination of the candidate gene *nurf-1* using segregating mutations  
637 between the N2 and LSJ lineages (Gimond *et al.* 2019). Another recent GWA analysis of  
638 starvation resistance using population RAD-seq read abundance in a 96 strain co-culture  
639 revealed a single large-effect QTL on chromosome III whose effect was validated using near-  
640 isogenic lines and was present in 11% of wild strains (Webster *et al.* 2019). These applications  
641 of GWA mappings represent mixed outcomes, providing some practical support for the  
642 conclusions of our simulations – lower sampling depths are not expected to capture entire  
643 genetic architectures, including small-effect loci or impactful alleles that segregate at low  
644 frequency (less than 5% of the population). Larger sample sizes (300-500 strains) and  
645 potentially less experimentally strenuous trait measurements are optimal for identifying loci that  
646 confer more modest effects (roughly 5-10% of the phenotypic variance) with greater likelihoods.  
647 Traits that can be measured in high-throughput (Hahnel *et al.* 2018; Evans *et al.* 2021a) or as  
648 intermediate traits (*e.g.*, mRNA abundances) lend themselves to dissection in hundreds of

649 strains and QTL conferring more subtle effects can be more easily resolved. At the current size  
650 of CeNDR, the primary driver of sampling depth of GWA mapping populations should be the  
651 balance between phenotyping effort for the trait of interest and the end goal of association  
652 mapping given the roughly estimated heritability of the trait (**Figure 2**) and the lower bound of  
653 the effect of QTL that will be detected (**Figure 3**). In many cases, evaluating the same trait using  
654 linkage mapping in complementary populations (*i.e.*, traits segregate similarly between parental  
655 strains of the cross and in the association mapping population) can validate effect sizes and  
656 provide additional support for candidates from GWA (Zdraljevic *et al.* 2019; Webster *et al.* 2019;  
657 Evans *et al.* 2021a).

658

#### 659 *Population structure is a major determinant of performance*

660 In this study, we also quantified the impact of mapping population structure on the power  
661 and precision of GWA mapping. In comparing mappings derived from (1) choosing strains from  
662 CeNDR at random, (2) swept strains, and (3) divergent strains of equal sampling depth, we  
663 confirmed that the most power to map QTL was provided by sampling swept strains (**Figure**  
664 **3A**). We also found from these comparisons that the empirical FDR among the divergent strain  
665 mappings was significantly higher than the swept strain mappings when a single QTL was  
666 simulated (**Figure 4A**). This result aligns with outcomes of past GWA analyses in model  
667 organisms, wherein mappings among structured populations provided less specific inference of  
668 genetic architectures (Kang *et al.* 2008). *C. elegans* populations also harbor highly variable  
669 patterns of genetic variation across the genome in these distinct populations, which contribute  
670 to subtle differences in local performance and inference of associations (**Figure 4A**). However,  
671 we chose only one collection of strains to represent both divergent and swept mapping  
672 populations when considering local performance differences, which limits the general  
673 extensibility of these particular benchmarks in other populations. As different combinations of  
674 strains with varying landscapes of selective sweeps and hyperdivergent regions are tested, we

675 will learn more about the relative influences of these regions on performance. Before concluding  
676 that an experimenter's particular mapping population will be less powerful because it contains  
677 many divergent strains, one is advised to perform their own population-specific simulations.  
678 Below, we outline some limitations to pursuing GWA in only swept strains in certain contexts.

679 First, trait heritability is a major driver of detection power, which means that if the  
680 phenotype of interest does not vary significantly among swept strains, the prospects for  
681 mapping its genetic architecture heavily rely on low experimental noise. Divergent strains have  
682 been shown to exhibit distinct population-wide phenotypic differences from swept strains (Zhang  
683 *et al.* 2021) and therefore might be expected to contribute significantly to estimates of narrow-  
684 sense heritability of other traits. Second, swept populations will be enriched for alleles that have  
685 arisen relatively recently on swept haplotypes. Some QTL will be slightly more common in the  
686 population in swept populations (**Figure 3C**), but swept populations provide a limited view of  
687 whether these QTL identified are meaningful in divergent populations that are more  
688 representative of the ancestral niche of *C. elegans* (Lee *et al.* 2019, 2021; Crombie *et al.* 2019).  
689 We know of many examples where strains more closely associated with human colonization  
690 and laboratory domestication express trait differences uncharacteristic of "wild" *C. elegans*  
691 isolates (Sterken *et al.* 2015; Schulenburg and Félix 2017). Third, one kinship matrix  
692 construction algorithm used in our GWA platform was designed, in part, to collapse extremely  
693 close relatedness among inbred individuals by creating sparse genetic covariance. This  
694 calculation is expected to provide more power in swept populations than divergent populations  
695 because the covariance among swept strains will be small enough for the algorithm to collapse  
696 more often than among divergent strains.

697 A helpful comparison for the prospects of *C. elegans* GWAS is the successes of  
698 identifying disease risk alleles in human populations. *Trans*-ethnic GWAS has successfully  
699 identified common variants linked to complex human diseases by leveraging rich data and  
700 population sizes (Wojcik *et al.* 2019; Pendergrass *et al.* 2019; Hu *et al.* 2021). However,

701 generalized predictions of disease risk in the form of polygenic risk scores suffer from sampling  
702 bias, genetic heterogeneity, and varying frequencies of risk alleles among distinct  
703 subpopulations (Li and Keating 2014; Márquez-Luna *et al.* 2017; Martin *et al.* 2019, 2020). As  
704 the community sampling of diverse *C. elegans* strains grows, GWAS will provide more power to  
705 detect QTL with more modest effects, and we will achieve more success in identifying common  
706 genetic variants linked to complex traits. However, one advantage of *C. elegans* is that  
707 complementary techniques for quantitative genetics are easily achievable and essential for  
708 validating candidate loci from GWA mappings. Near-isogenic lines (NILs) and recombinant  
709 inbred lines (RILs) can be derived from individual strains with large phenotypic contrasts and  
710 used for fine mapping alleles, making hypothesis-driven inferences of GWA candidate gene  
711 identification and functional tests more addressable than could be hoped for in many other  
712 species. As genomic resources for comparative evolutionary studies in *C. elegans* grow, we will  
713 characterize hyperdivergent regions more completely so that variants identified in GWA within  
714 these regions can be more confidently nominated as candidates. Furthermore, future endeavors  
715 of GWA mapping should explicitly control for the extensive population structure present among  
716 divergent strains using statistical techniques being actively applied to significantly larger cohorts  
717 of stratified human populations (Wojcik *et al.* 2019).

718

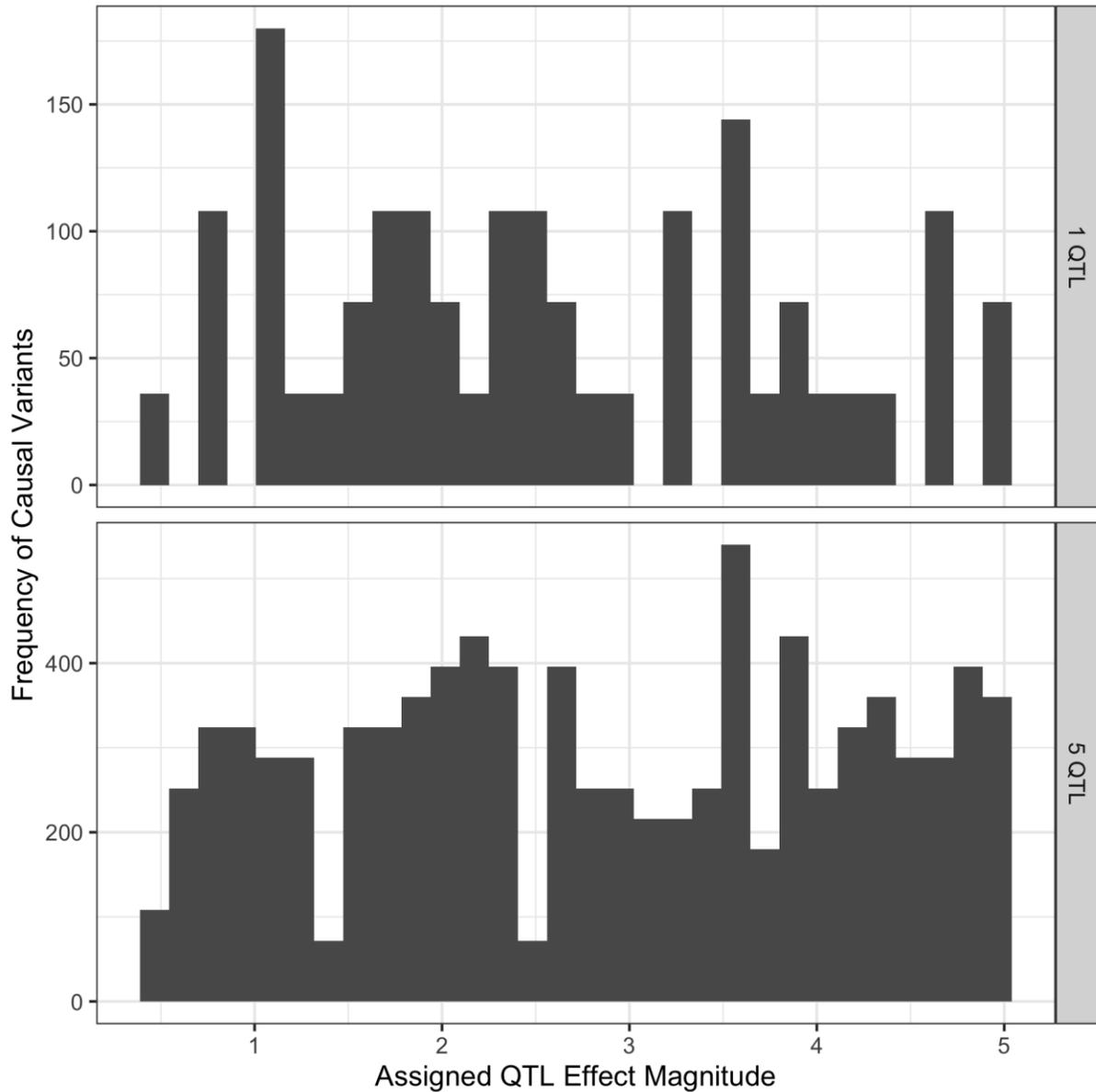
## 719 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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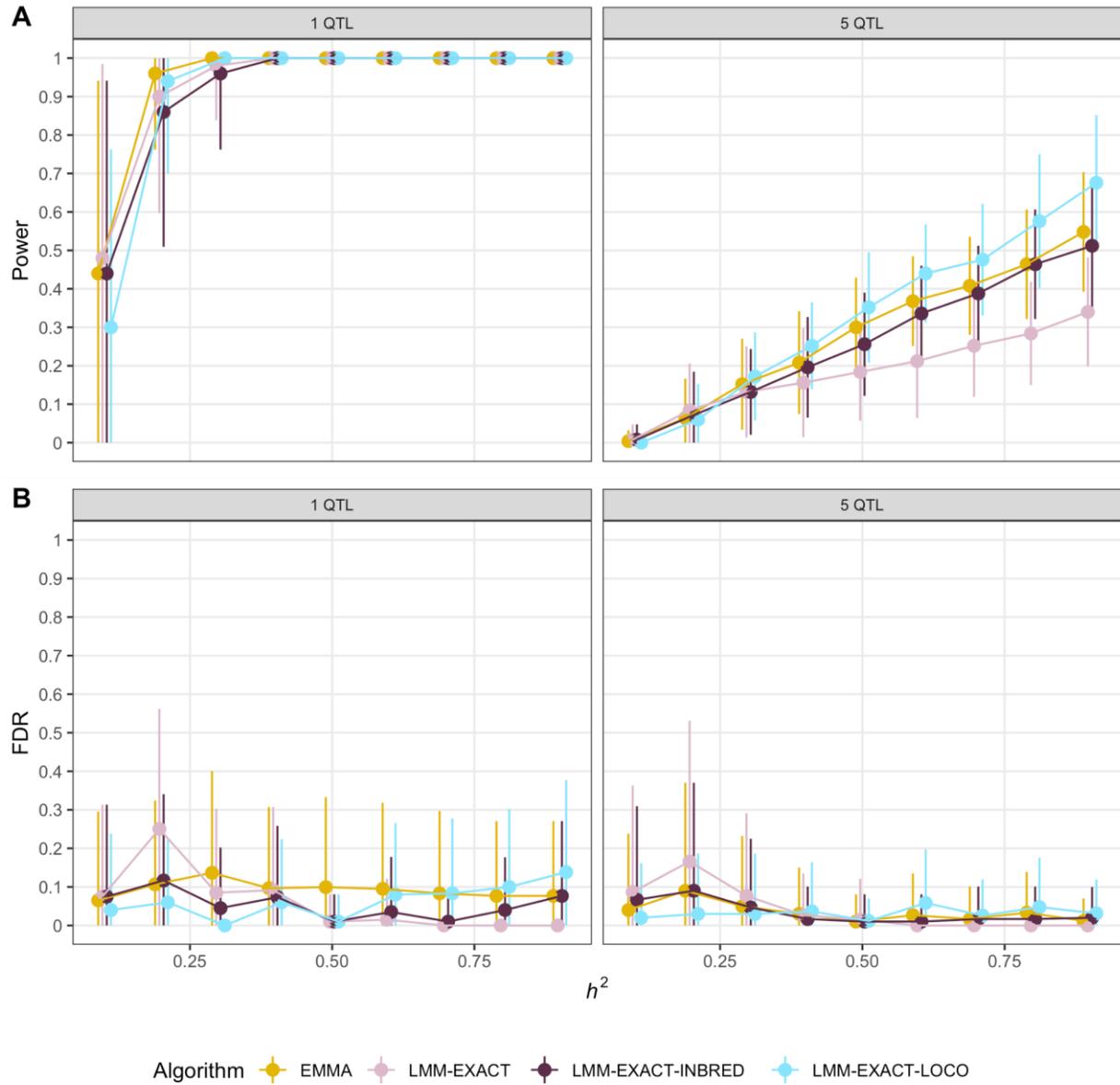
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725 **Supplemental Figures**

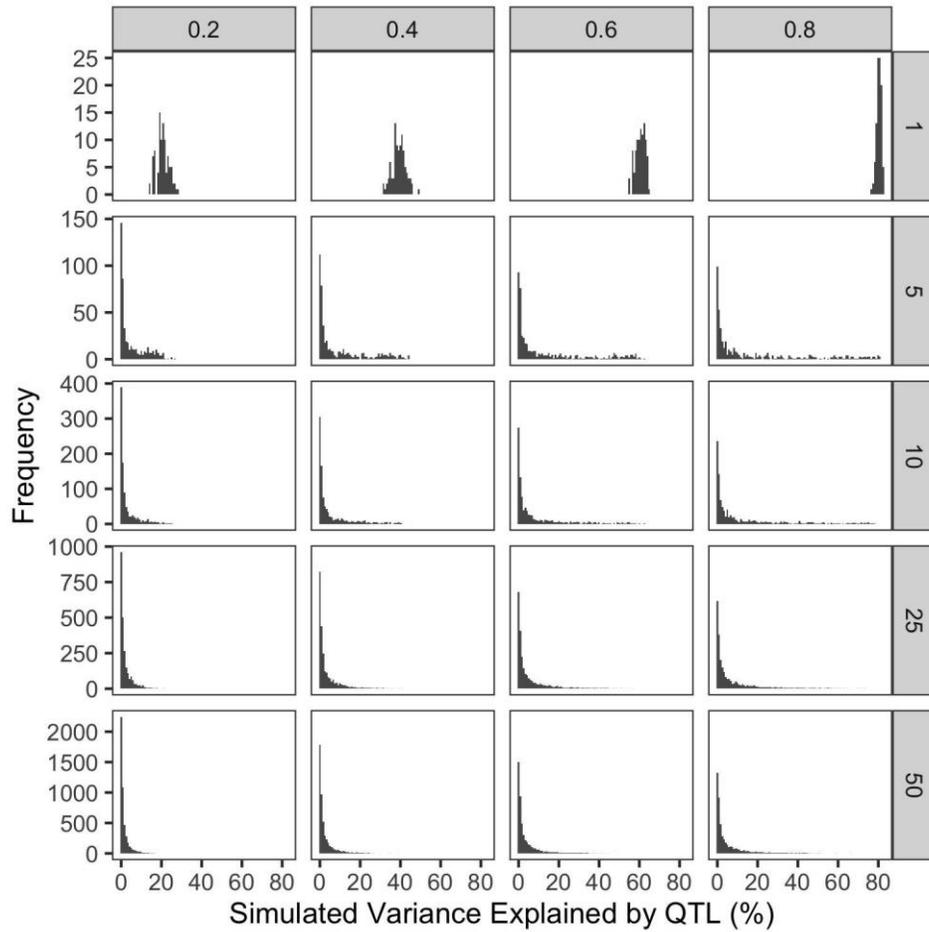


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Supplemental Figure 1: Effect size distribution of simulations comparing algorithm performance

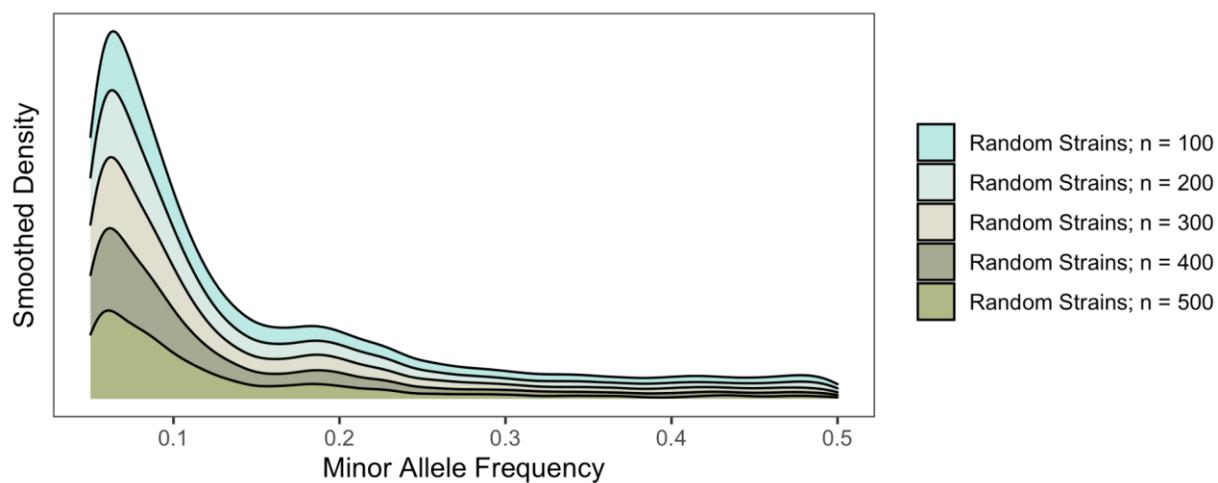


730 Supplemental Figure 2: Power and false discovery rate of GWA mapping across various  
731 algorithms

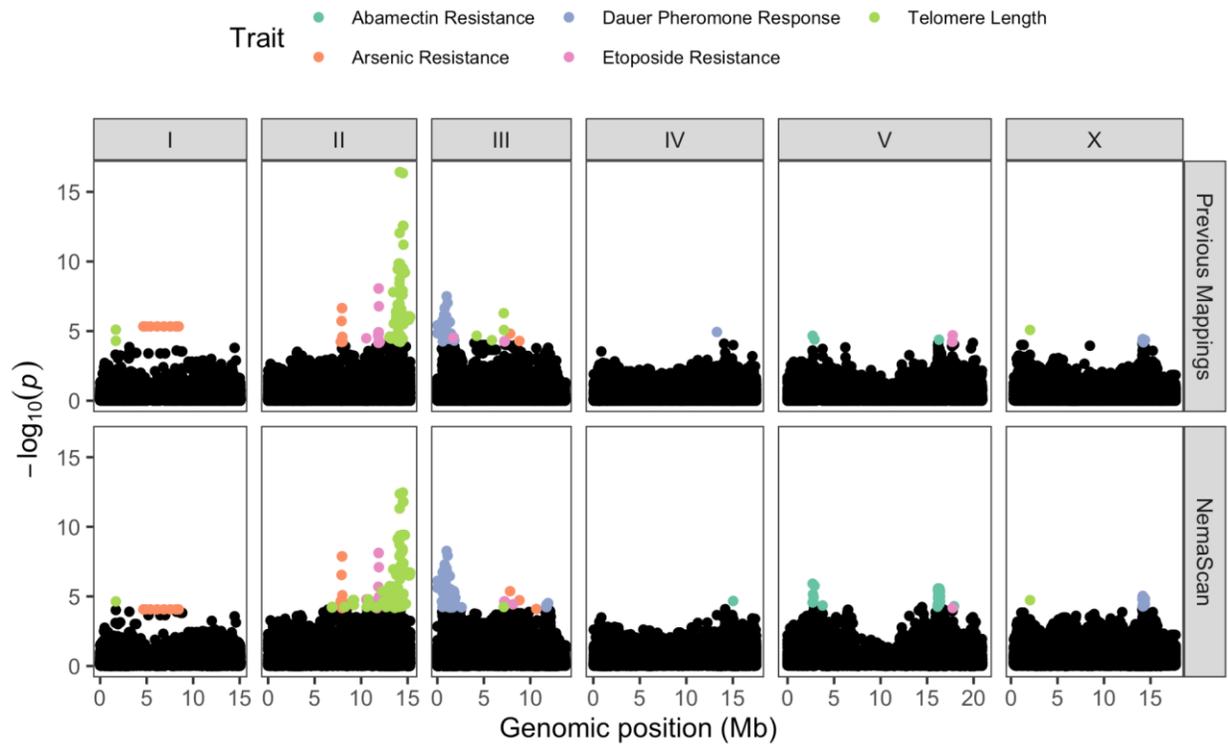


732 Supplemental Figure 3: Distributions of simulated QTL effects expressed as the fraction of  
733 phenotypic variance explained. Horizontal panels denote the number of simulated QTL per trait  
734 and vertical panels denote the heritability of each simulated trait.

735  
736  
737  
738



739  
740 Supplemental Figure 4: Distributions of all simulated QTL minor allele frequencies among  
741 mapping populations of increasing size  
742



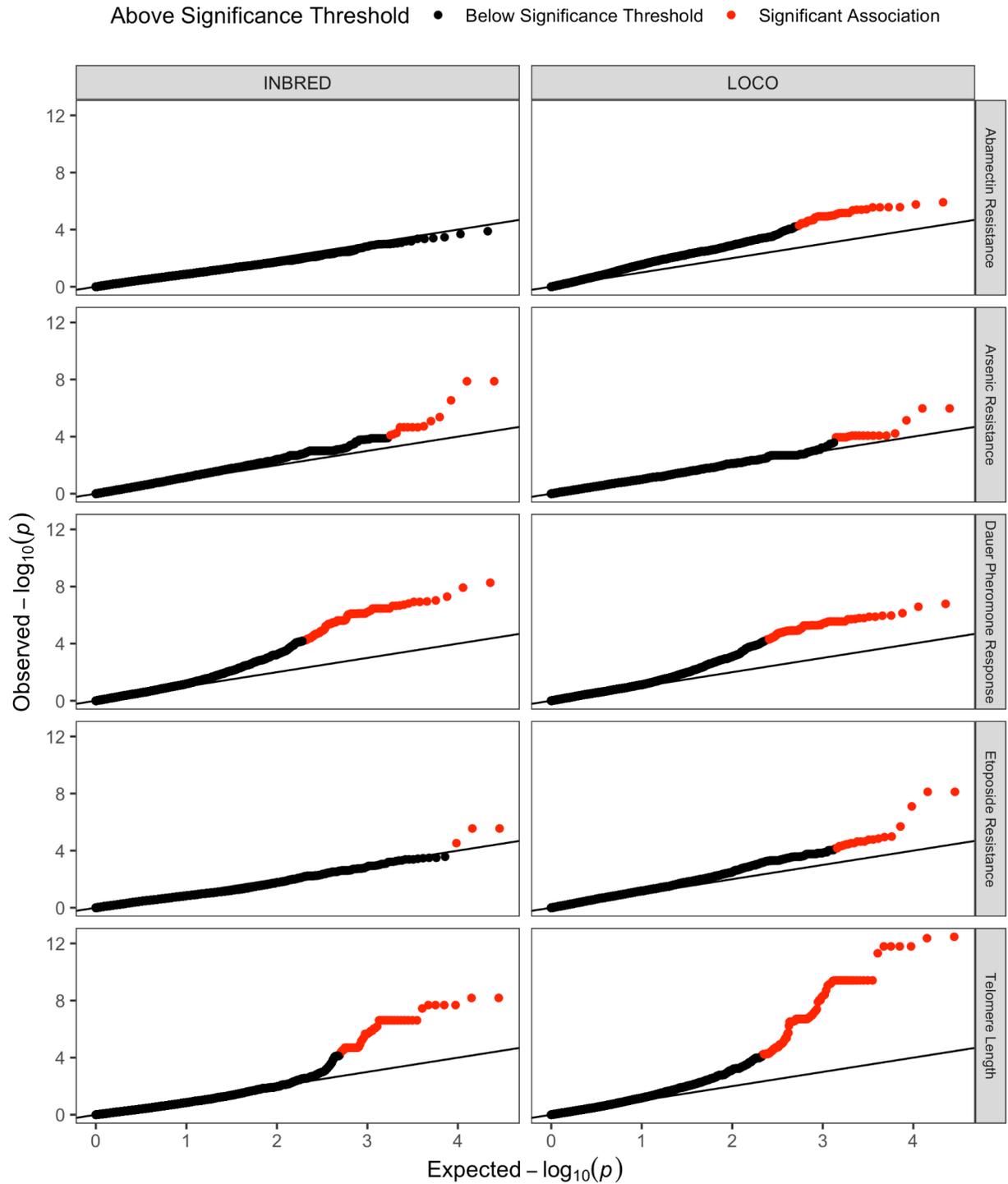
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744 Supplemental Figure 5: Manhattan plots of previous GWA mappings and NemaScan mappings.

745 Markers exceeding the multiple testing correction threshold are colored according to the

746 mapped trait of interest.

747



748  
749  
750  
751

Supplemental Figure 6: QQ plots of raw NemaScan GWA mappings corresponding to the mapping algorithm that generated association scores for each trait, colored by whether the significance of each association exceeds the multiple testing threshold.

752 **Supplemental Tables**

753

754 Supplemental Table 1: Simulation summary

755

756 Supplemental Table 2: Differences in power to detect QTL between mapping algorithms at  
757 increasing heritability for one and five underlying QTL.

758

759 Supplemental Table 3: Differences in empirical FDR between mapping algorithms at increasing  
760 heritability for one and five underlying QTL.

761

762 Supplemental Table 4: Average power to detect QTL explaining increasing phenotypic variance  
763 among subsampled populations of increasing sampling depth

764

765 Supplemental Table 5: Average power to detect QTL explaining increasing phenotypic variance  
766 among 144 randomly sampled divergent strains, 144 randomly sampled swept strains, and 144  
767 randomly sampled strains from the overall CeNDR population

768

769 Supplemental Table 6: Differences in power to detect QTL between different chromosomes  
770 controlling for hyper-divergence and historic recombination groups (arms vs. centers)

771

772 Supplemental Table 7: Power to detect simulated in hyperdivergent regions or different parts of  
773 the chromosome within the mapping populations

774

775 Supplemental Table 8: Empirical FDR of mappings as a function of whether QTL were  
776 simulated in divergent regions and different chromosomal regions

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778 Supplemental Table 9: Power to detect simulated QTL on different chromosomes, within  
779 hyperdivergent regions, historic recombination groups, and strain sets

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781 Supplemental Table 10: Empirical FDR of mappings as a function of whether QTL were  
782 simulated on different chromosomes, within hyperdivergent regions, historic recombination  
783 groups, and strain sets

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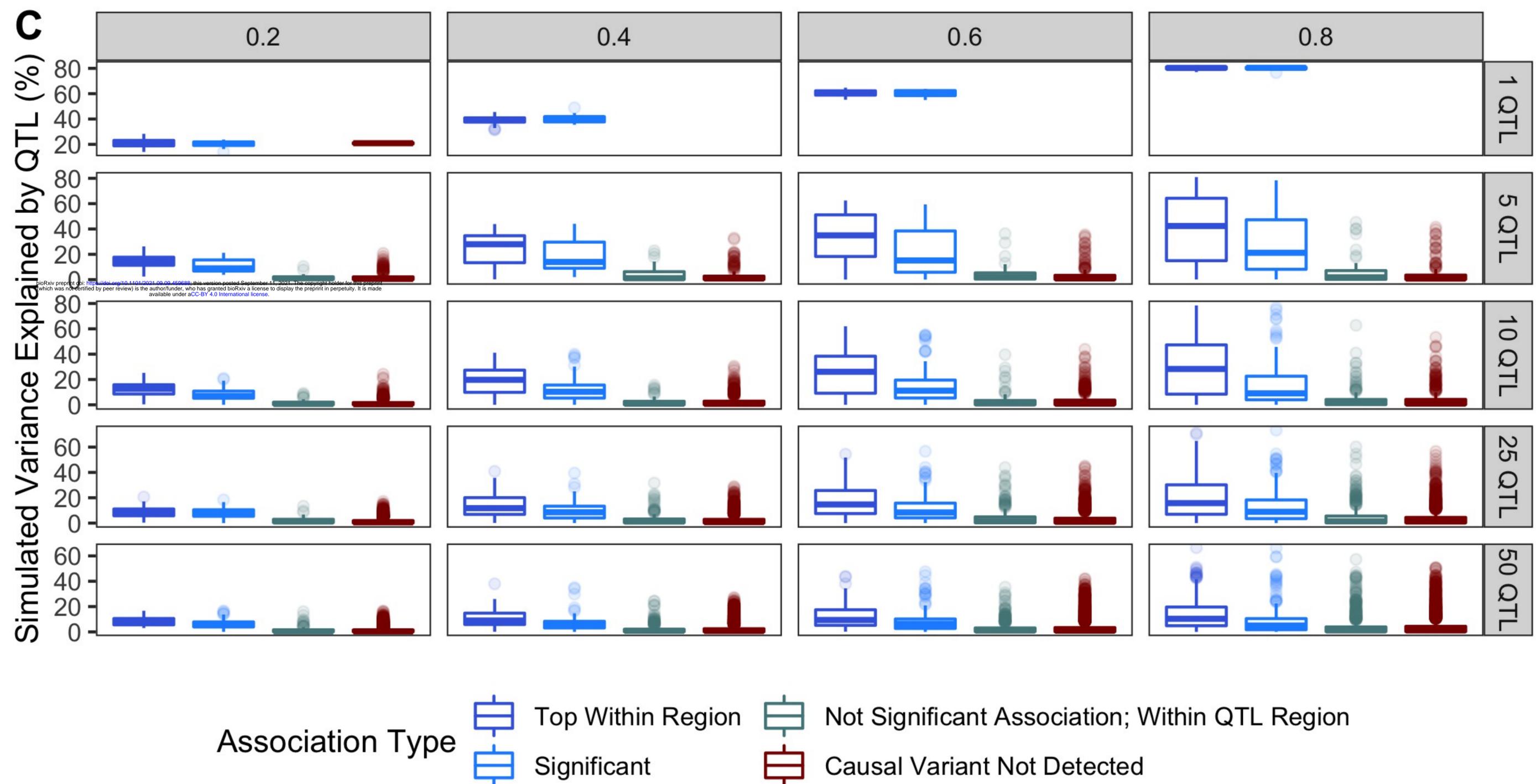
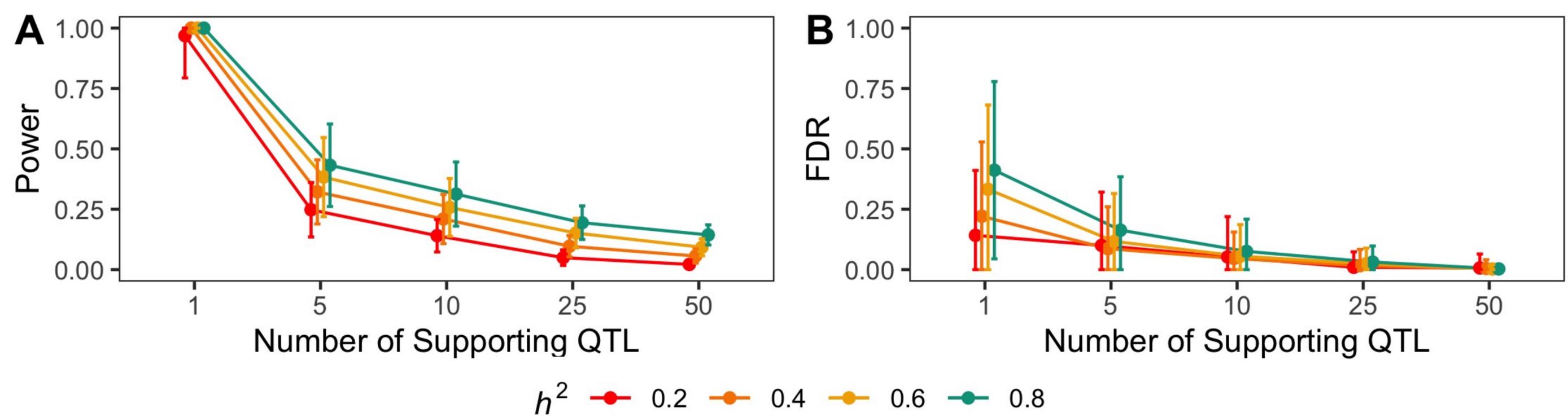
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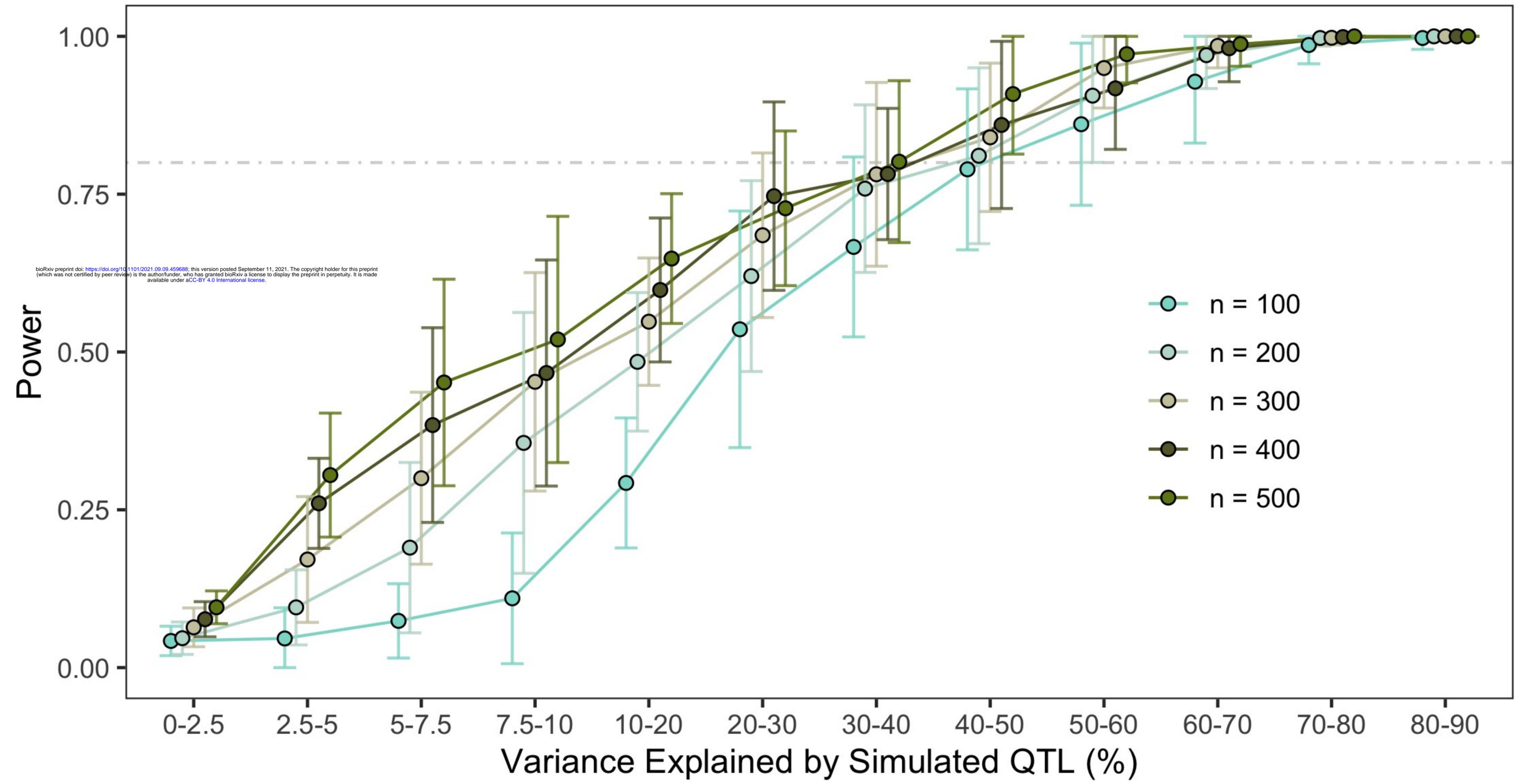
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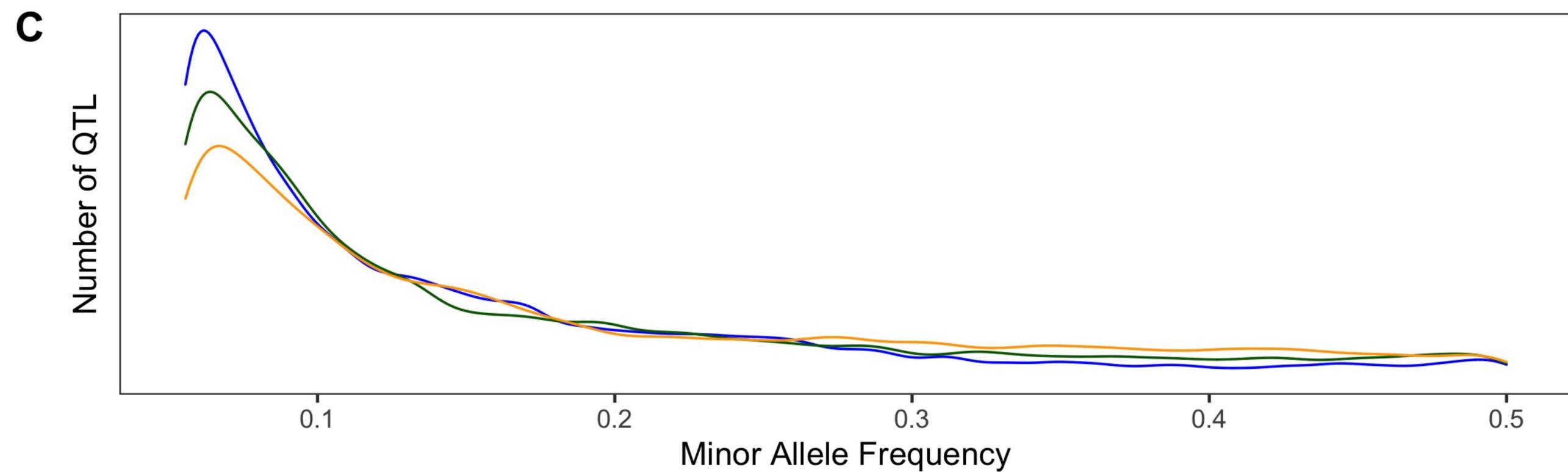
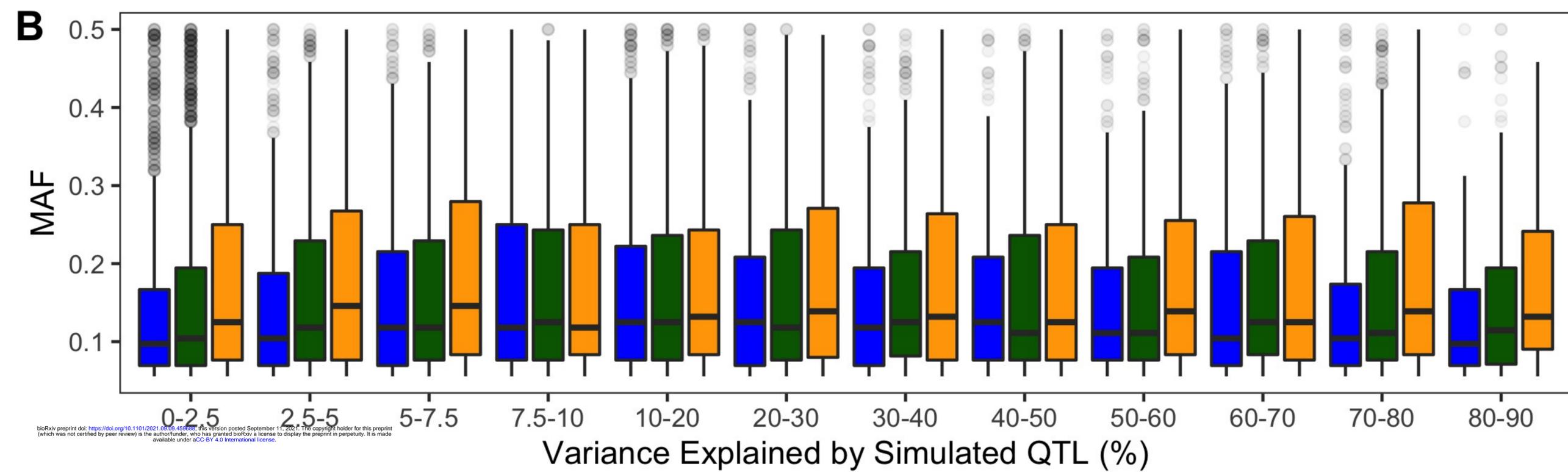
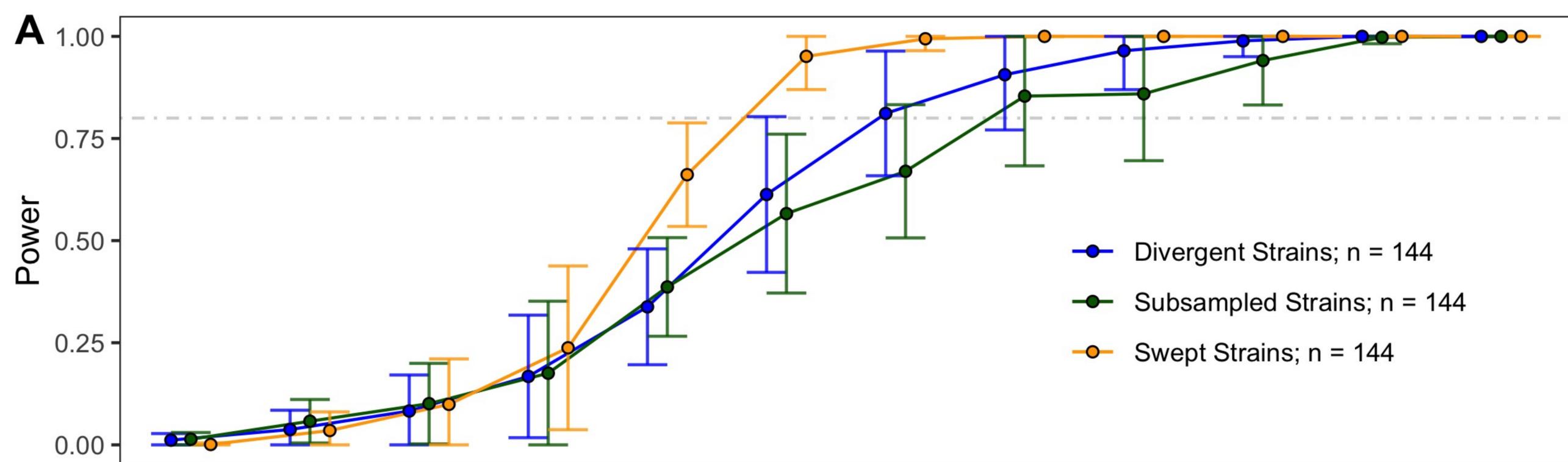
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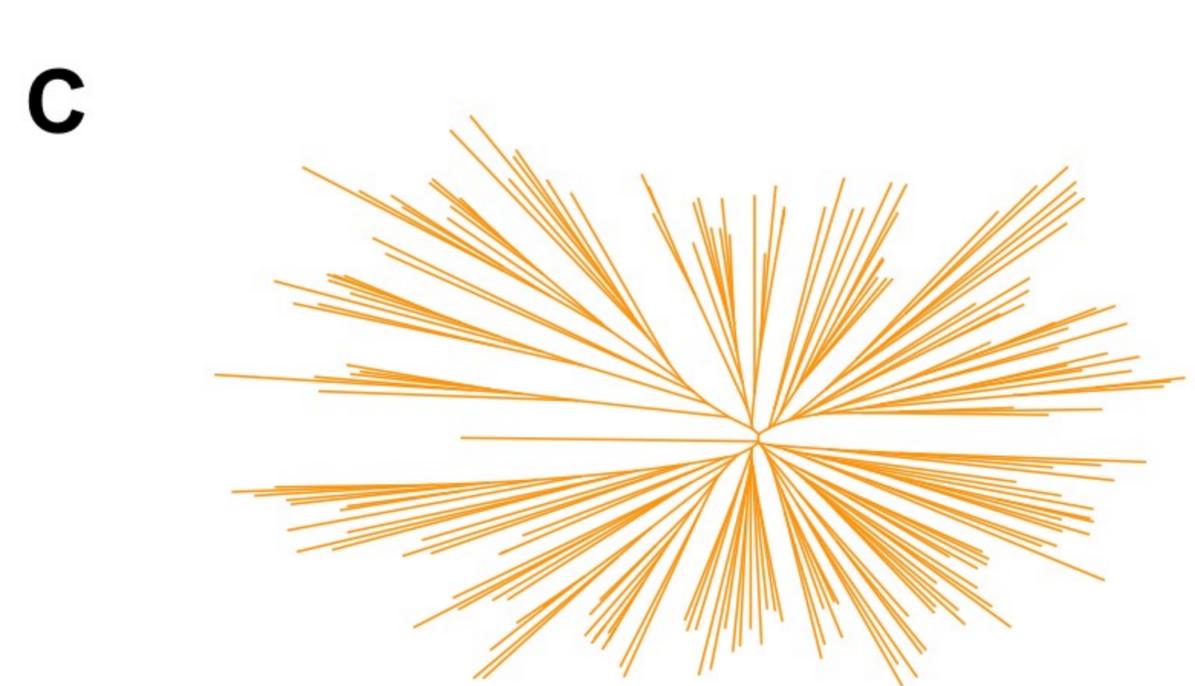
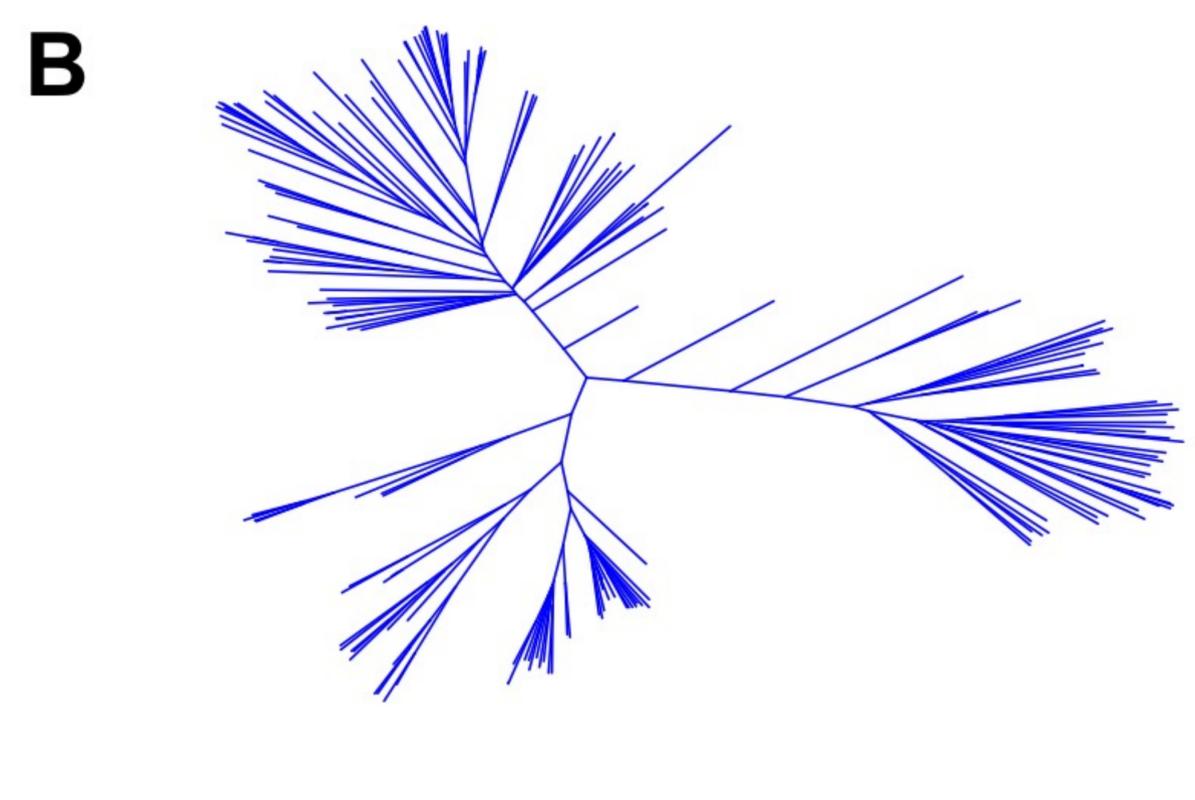
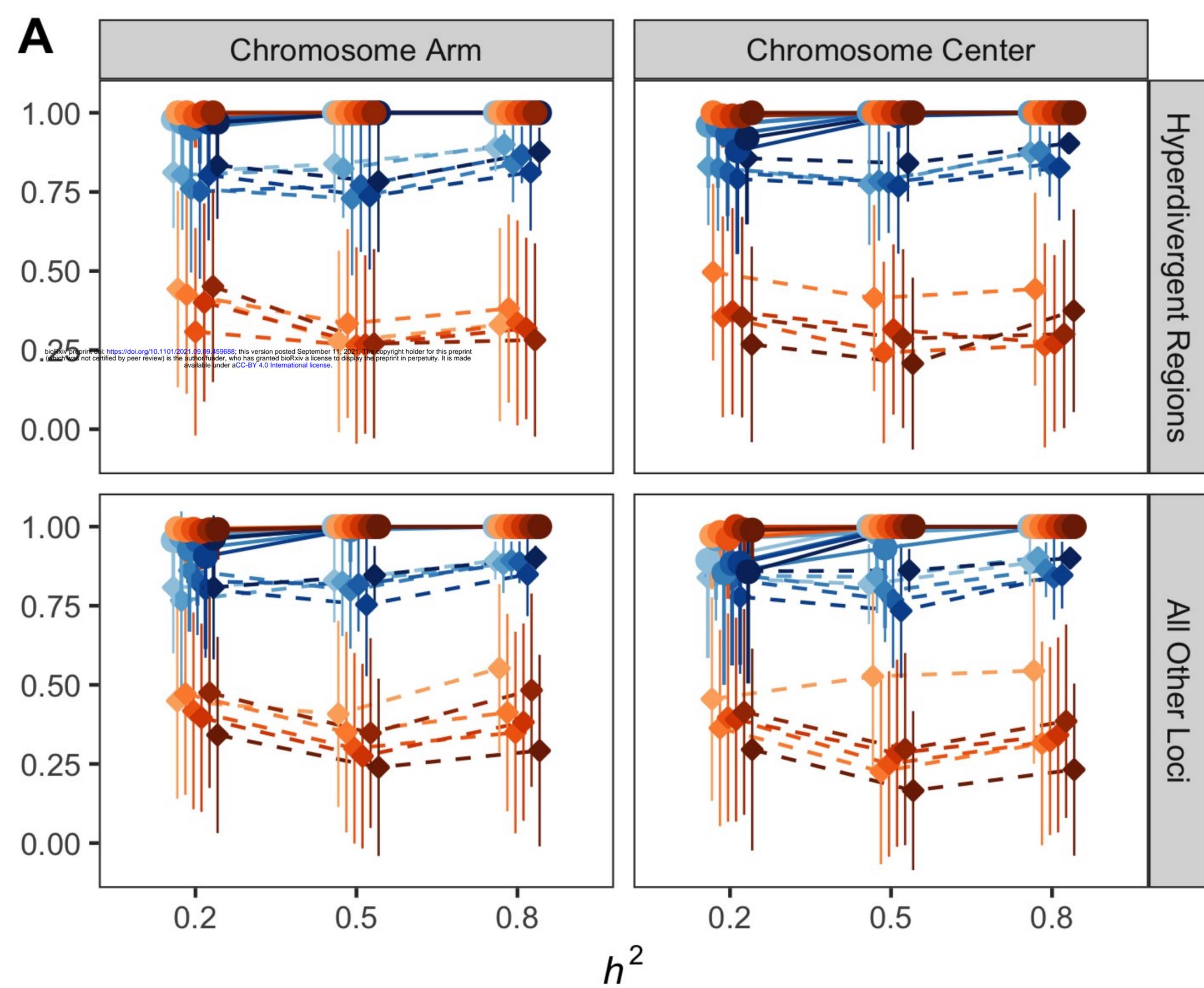
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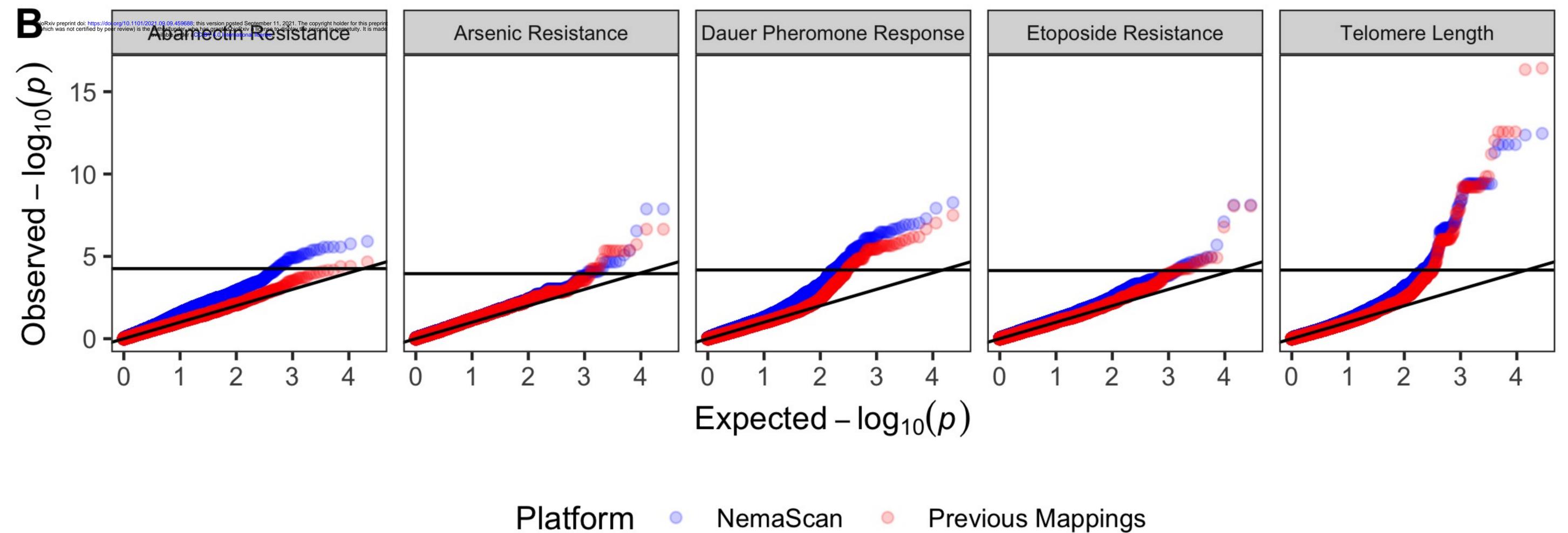
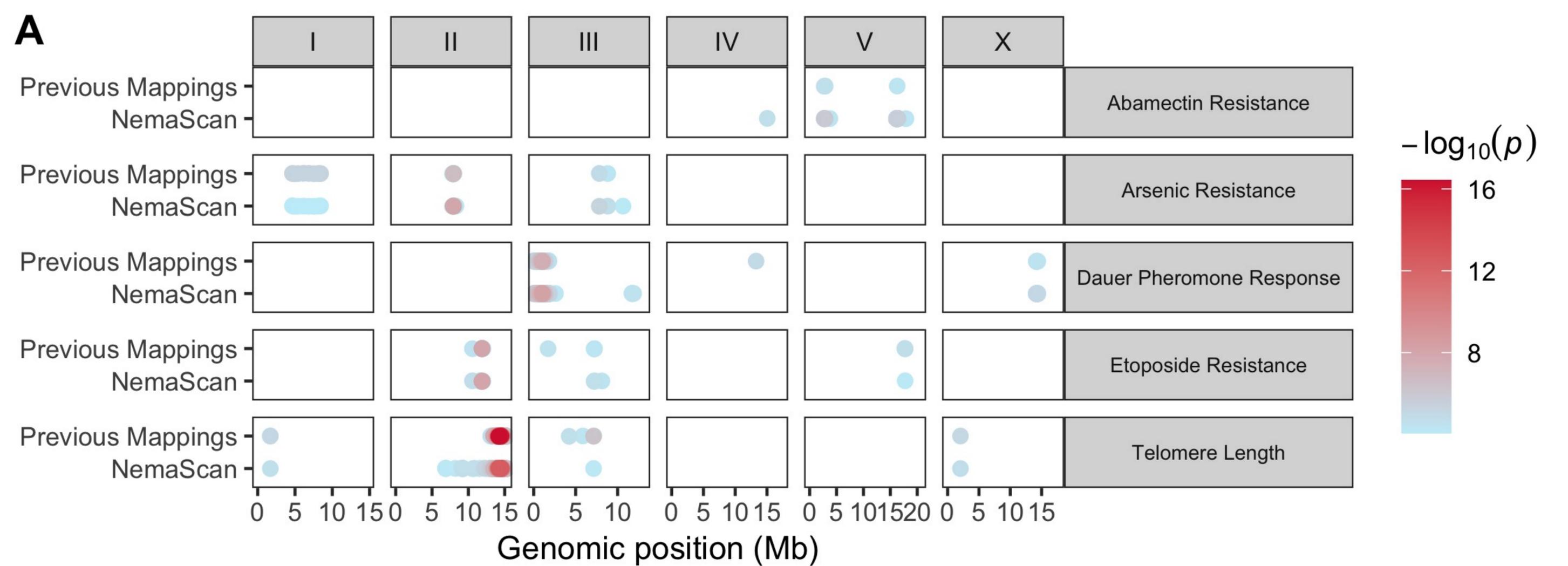


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Sample Size	Power	FDR
100	0.33 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.10	0.61 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.25
200	0.39 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.10	0.48 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.27
300	0.42 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.10	0.41 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.27
400	0.44 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.10	0.32 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.25
500	0.46 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.10	0.27 $\hat{\pm}$ 0.24