

1 **Evaluating the power and limitations of genome-wide association mapping in *C. elegans***
2

3 Samuel J. Widmayer*, Kathryn Evans*, Stefan Zdraljevic†, and Erik C. Andersen*‡

4
5 *Molecular Biosciences, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208

6 †Department of Biological Chemistry, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
7 90095

8 ‡Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL 60611

9
10 **Corresponding author:**

11 Erik C. Andersen

12 Department of Molecular Biosciences

13 Northwestern University

14 4619 Silverman Hall

15 2205 Tech Drive

16 Evanston, IL 60208

17 847-467-4382

18 erik.andersen@northwestern.edu

19
20 Sam: 0000-0002-1200-4768

21 Katie: 0000-0002-1388-8155

22 Stefan: 0000-0003-2883-4616

23 Erik: 0000-0003-0229-9651

24
25 **Journal:** *Genetics*

26 **Running title:** *C. elegans* GWAS mapping performance

27 **Keywords:** *C. elegans*, genome-wide association mapping, power, QTL, simulations

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*
71 *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*.

142

143

144 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

145

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, θ = 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-Imm-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 Dendograms 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 Kruskall-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 Kruskall-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. 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 EMMAX (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.

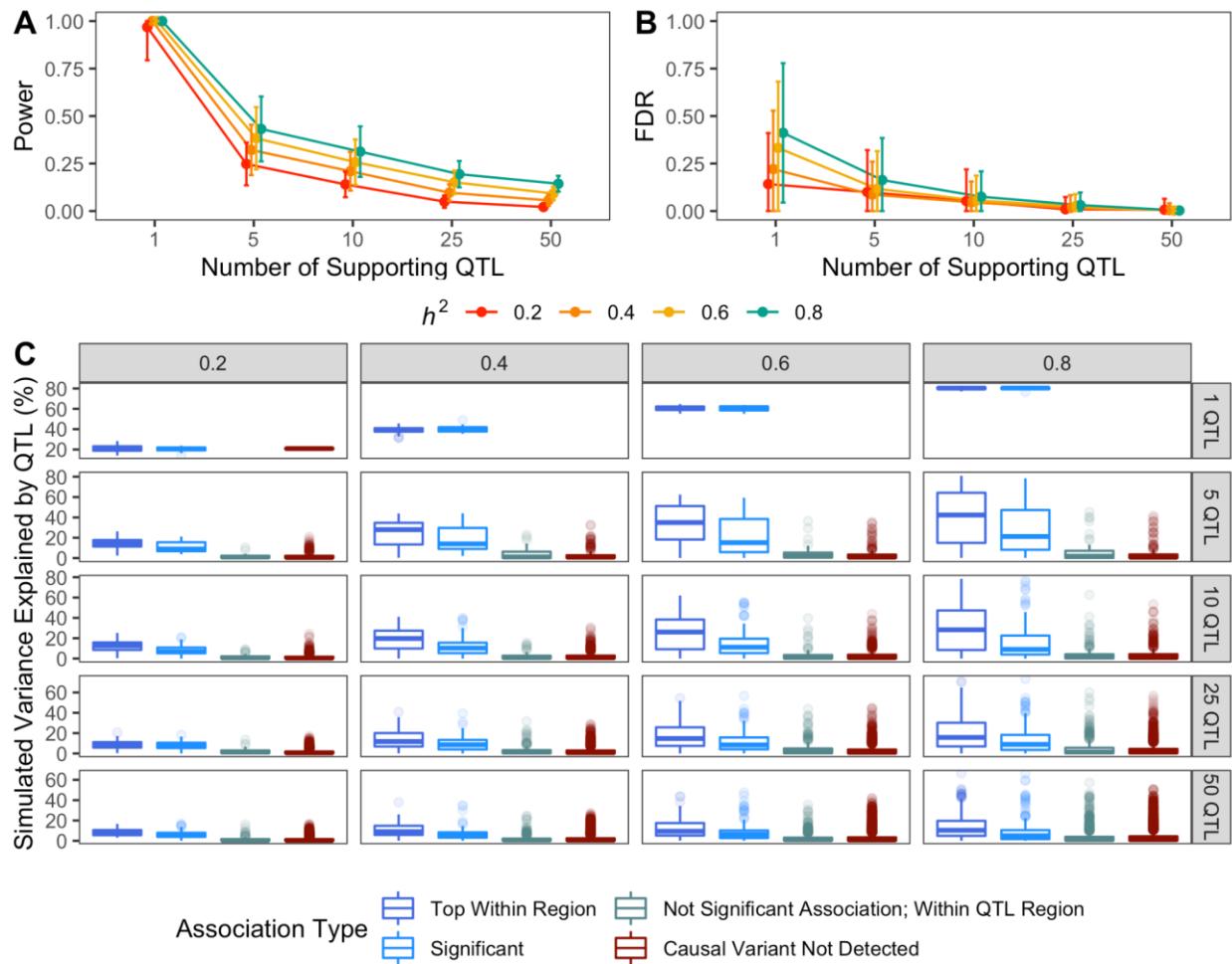
324 The observation that either the LMM-EXACT-LOCO or LMM-EXACT-INBRED algorithms
325 exceeded the QTL detection power of EMMA across a range of trait heritabilities motivated us to

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
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365

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

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 $h^2 = 0.2, 0.4, 0.6$, 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

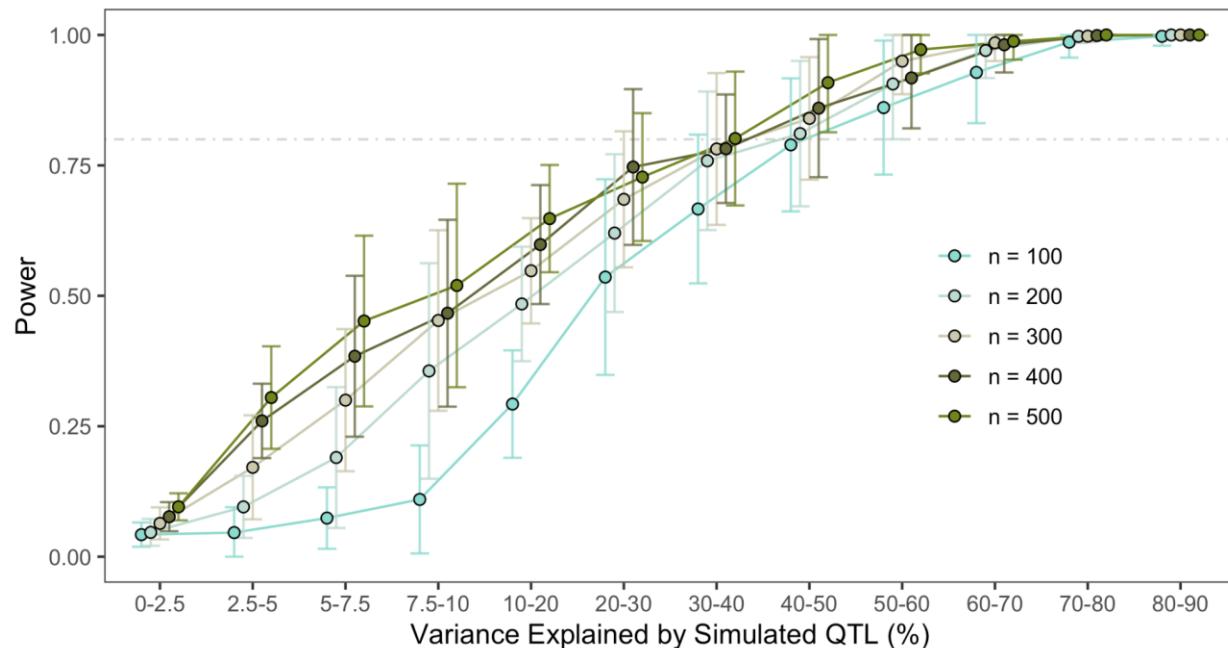
396 phenotypic variance explained by each causal QTL across all simulations and found that true
397 positive QTL (simulated QTL with significant trait associations) had significantly greater
398 explanatory power than false negative QTL (causal QTL without significant trait associations)
399 within all 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 ± 0.15 (roughly one QTL out of five), increasing to 0.46 ± 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 ± 0.2) was nearly five
448 times greater than that of 100-strain mappings (0.11 ± 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.

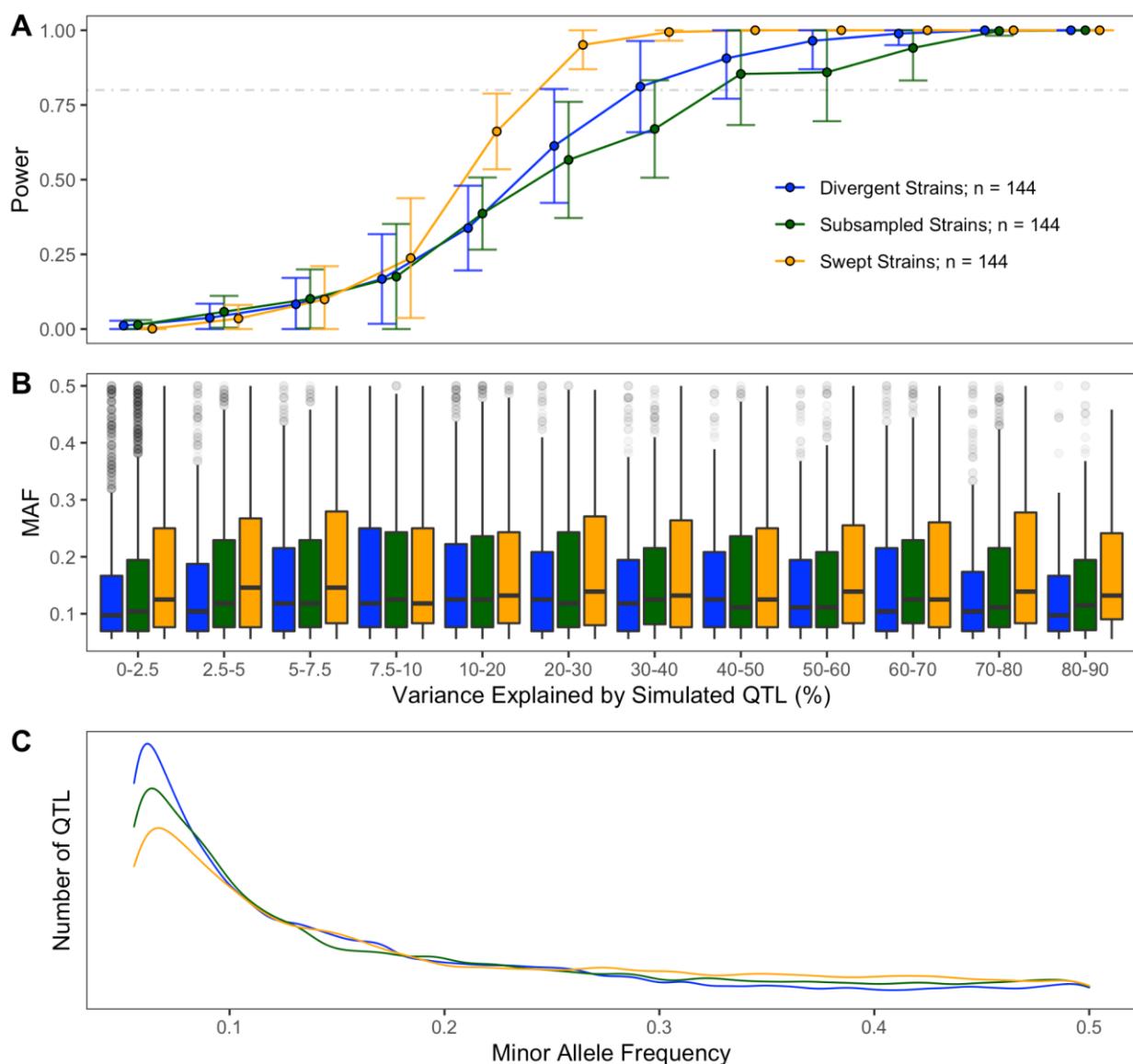
461 We observed that strain selection has a large impact on the sensitivity with which QTL of
462 varying importance are detected. We also observed that the power to detect QTL explaining
463 increasing amounts of phenotypic variance differed dramatically between mappings among
464 strains with similar 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

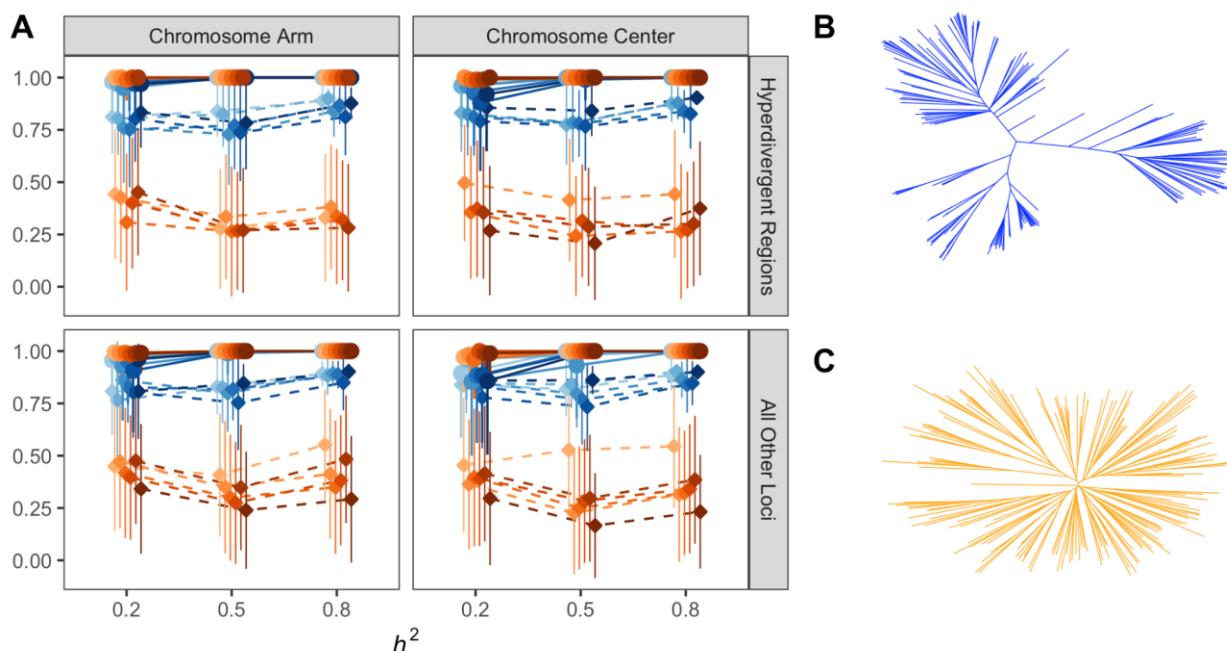
484 *Fine-scale genomic landscape of GWA performance in C. elegans*

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
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 Kruskall-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 ($H^2 = [0.2, 0.5]$; Kruskall-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 (Kruskall-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.

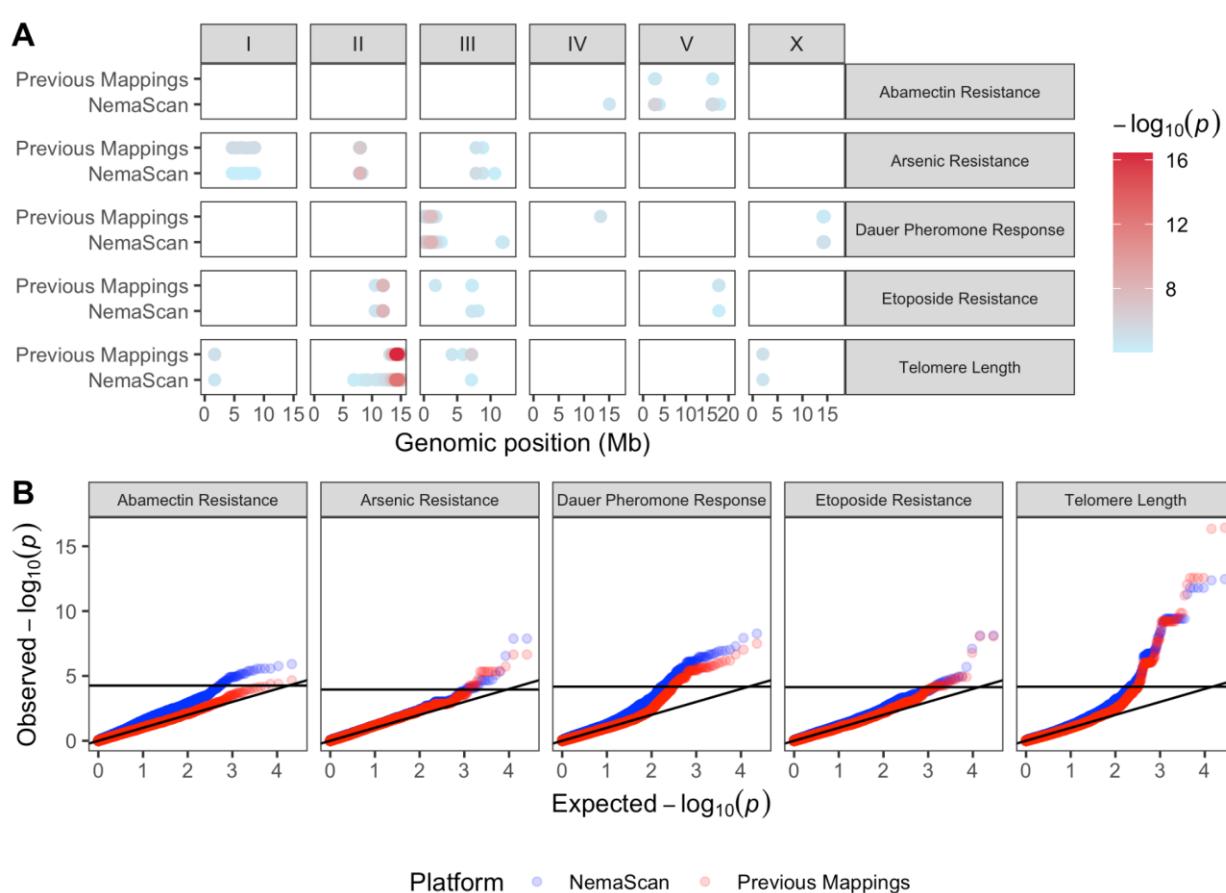
553

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 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).

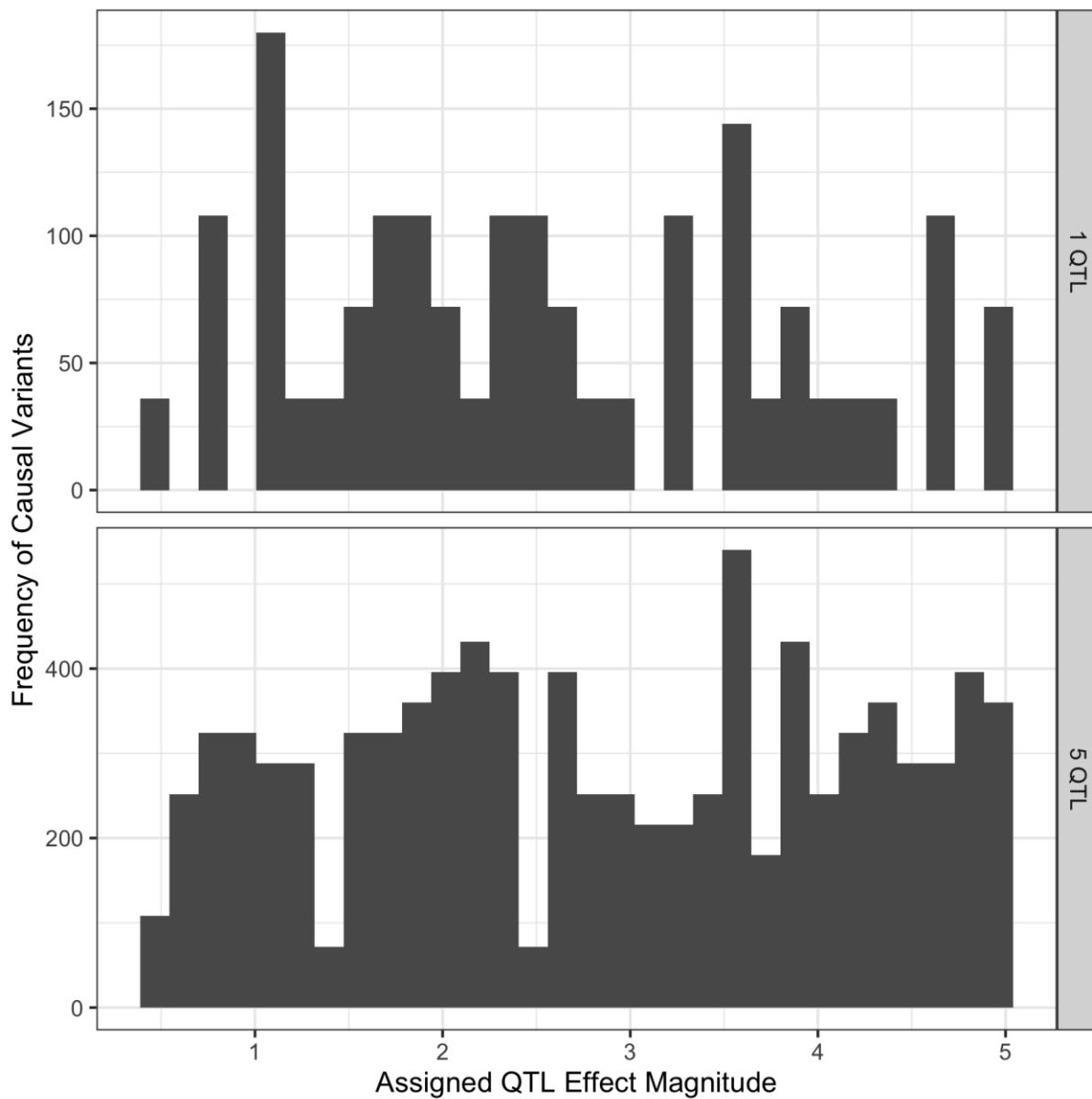
718

719 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

720 We would like to thank members of the Andersen laboratory and Dr. Matthew Rockman for
721 helpful comments on the manuscript. This work was supported by a Research Grant to E.C.A.
722 from HFSP (Ref.-No: RPG0001/2019).

723
724

725 **Supplemental Figures**

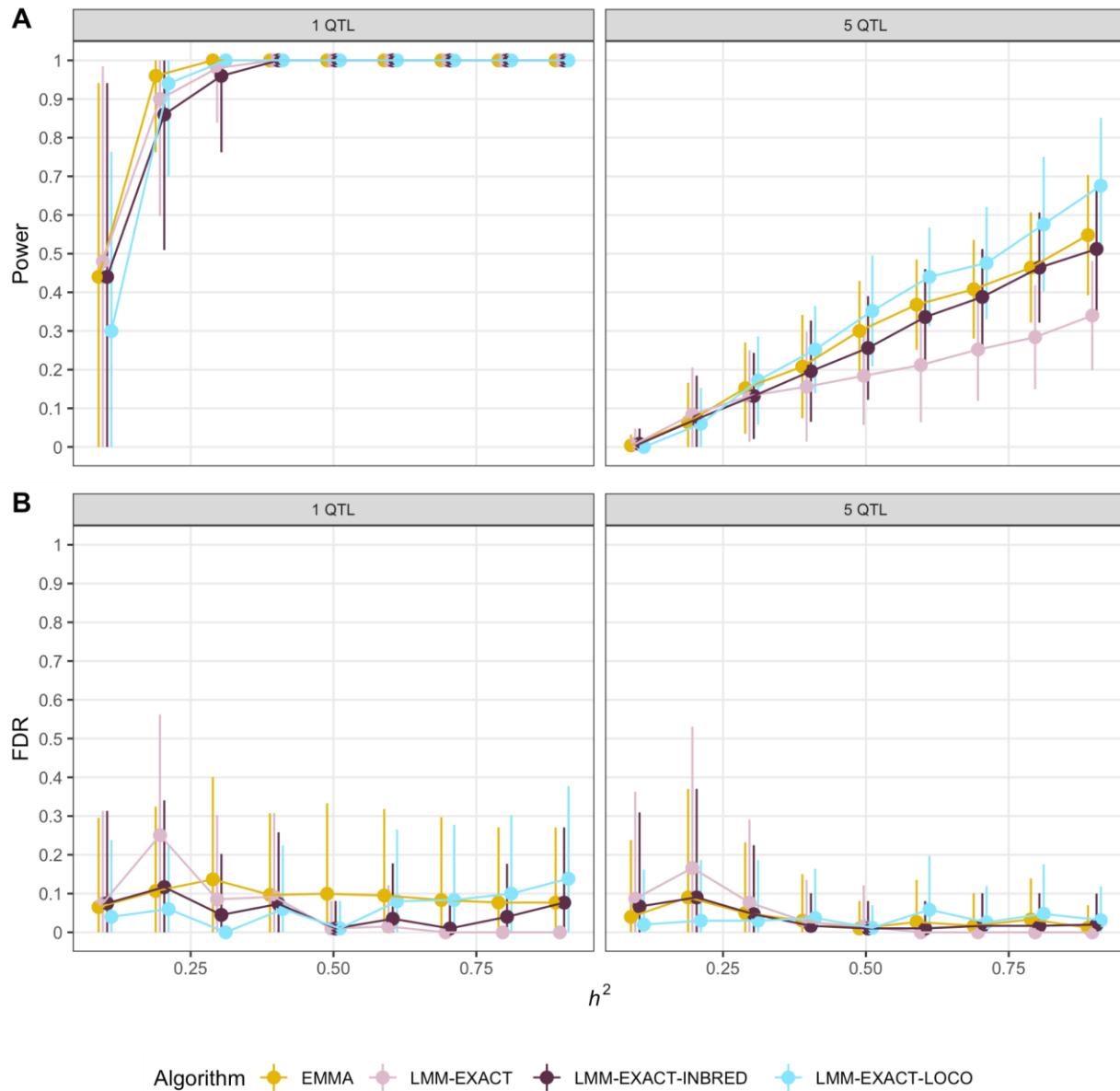


726

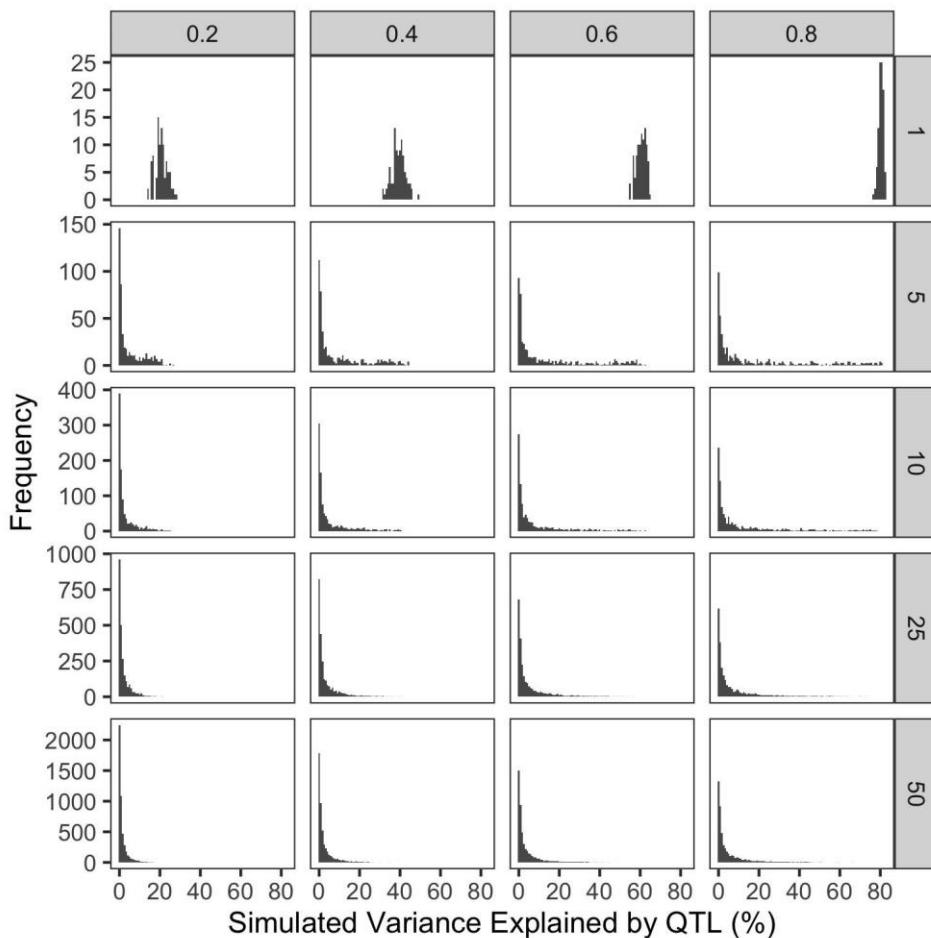
727 Supplemental Figure 1: Effect size distribution of simulations comparing algorithm performance

728

729

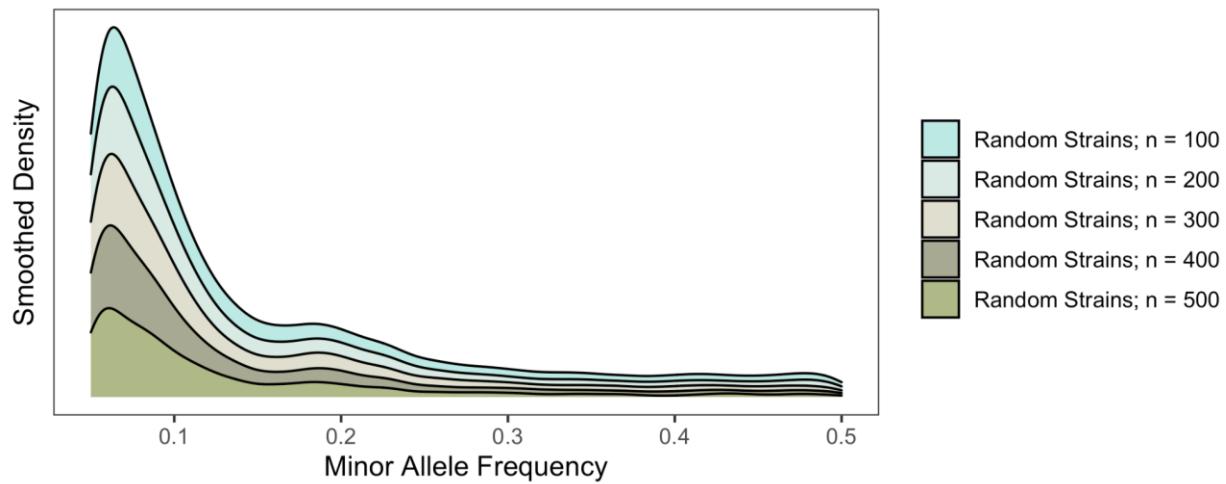


730 Supplemental Figure 2: Power and false discovery rate of GWA mapping across various
731 algorithms

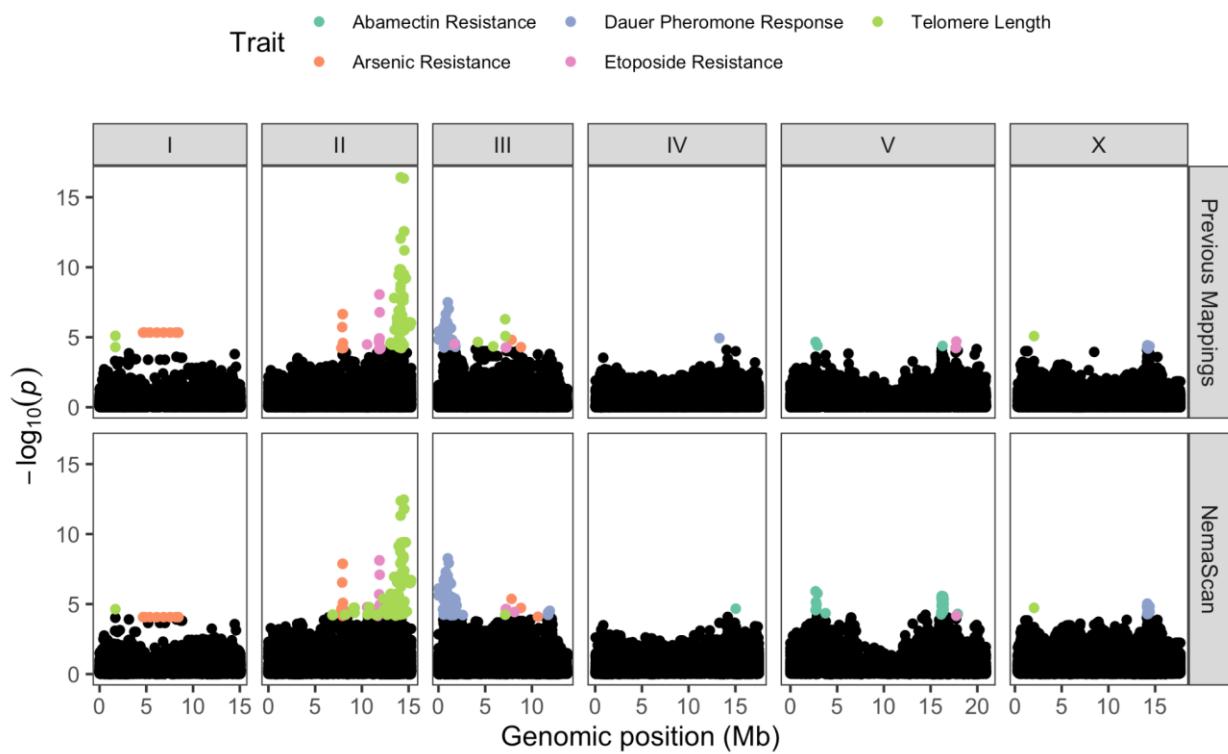


732 Supplemental Figure 3: Distributions of simulated QTL effects expressed as the fraction of
733 phenotypic variance explained. Horizontal panels denote the number of simulated QTL per trait
734 and vertical panels denote the heritability of each simulated trait.

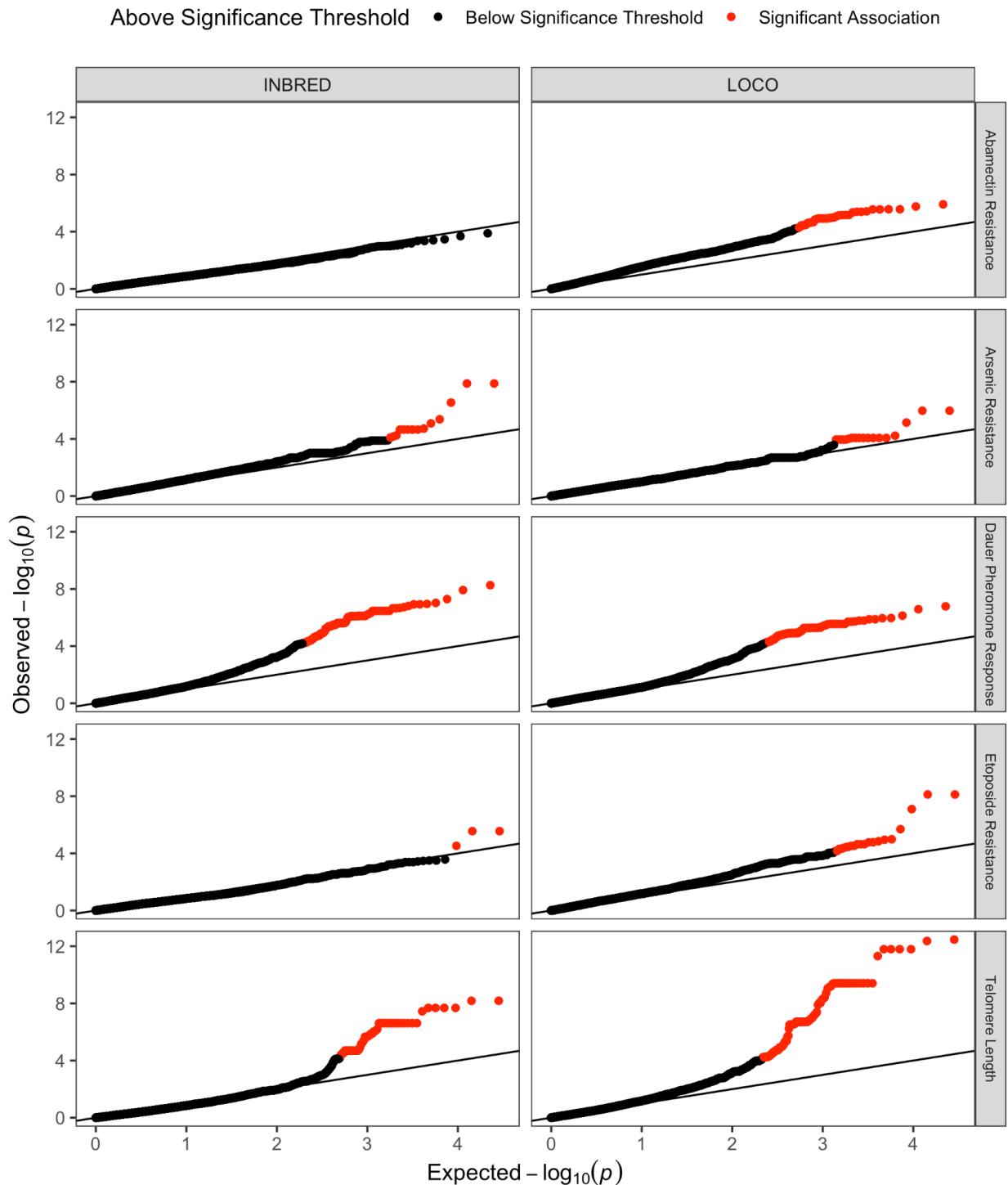
735
736
737
738



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



743
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
- 777
- 778 Supplemental Table 9: Power to detect simulated QTL on different chromosomes, within
779 hyperdivergent regions, historic recombination groups, and strain sets
- 780
- 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
- 784
- 785
- 786
- 787
- 788
- 789

790 **References**

- 791 Andersen E. C., J. P. Gerke, J. A. Shapiro, J. R. Crissman, R. Ghosh, *et al.*, 2012
792 Chromosome-scale selective sweeps shape *Caenorhabditis elegans* genomic diversity.
793 *Nat. Genet.* 44: 285–290.
- 794 Andersen E. C., T. C. Shimko, J. R. Crissman, R. Ghosh, J. S. Bloom, *et al.*, 2015 A Powerful
795 New Quantitative Genetics Platform, Combining *Caenorhabditis elegans* High-Throughput
796 Fitness Assays with a Large Collection of Recombinant Strains. *G3* 5: 911–920.
- 797 Ashe A., T. Bélicard, J. Le Pen, P. Sarkies, L. Frézal, *et al.*, 2013 A deletion polymorphism in
798 the *Caenorhabditis elegans* RIG-I homolog disables viral RNA dicing and antiviral immunity.
799 *eLife* 2013. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.00994.001>
- 800 Aylor D. L., W. Valdar, W. Foulds-Mathes, R. J. Buus, R. A. Verdugo, *et al.*, 2011 Genetic
801 analysis of complex traits in the emerging Collaborative Cross. *Genome Res.* 21: 1213–
802 1222.
- 803 Bennett B. J., C. R. Farber, L. Orozco, H. M. Kang, A. Ghazalpour, *et al.*, 2010 A high-resolution
804 association mapping panel for the dissection of complex traits in mice. *Genome Res.* 20:
805 281–290.
- 806 Bouchet S., M. O. Olatoye, S. R. Marla, R. Perumal, T. Tesso, *et al.*, 2017 Increased Power To
807 Dissect Adaptive Traits in Global Sorghum Diversity Using a Nested Association Mapping
808 Population. *Genetics* 206: 573–585.
- 809 Chesler E. J., D. R. Miller, L. R. Branstetter, L. D. Galloway, B. L. Jackson, *et al.*, 2008 The
810 Collaborative Cross at Oak Ridge National Laboratory: developing a powerful resource for
811 systems genetics. *Mamm. Genome* 19: 382–389.
- 812 Churchill G. A., D. C. Airey, H. Allayee, J. M. Angel, A. D. Attie, *et al.*, 2004 The Collaborative

- 813 Cross, a community resource for the genetic analysis of complex traits. *Nat. Genet.* 36:
814 1133–1137.
- 815 Churchill G. A., D. M. Gatti, S. C. Munger, and K. L. Svenson, 2012 The Diversity Outbred
816 mouse population. *Mamm. Genome* 23: 713–718.
- 817 Cook D. E., S. Zdraljevic, R. E. Tanny, B. Seo, D. D. Riccardi, *et al.*, 2016 The Genetic Basis of
818 Natural Variation in *Caenorhabditis elegans* Telomere Length. *Genetics* 204: 371–383.
- 819 Cook D. E., S. Zdraljevic, J. P. Roberts, and E. C. Andersen, 2017 CeNDR, the *Caenorhabditis*
820 *elegans* natural diversity resource. *Nucleic Acids Res.* 45: D650–D657.
- 821 Crombie T. A., S. Zdraljevic, D. E. Cook, R. E. Tanny, S. C. Brady, *et al.*, 2019 Deep sampling
822 of Hawaiian *Caenorhabditis elegans* reveals high genetic diversity and admixture with
823 global populations. *Elife* 8. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.50465>
- 824 Endelman J. B., 2011 Ridge regression and other kernels for genomic selection with R package
825 rrBLUP. *Plant Genome* 4: 250–255.
- 826 Evans K. S., S. Zdraljevic, L. Stevens, K. Collins, R. E. Tanny, *et al.*, 2020 Natural variation in
827 the sequestosome-related gene, sqst-5, underlies zinc homeostasis in *Caenorhabditis*
828 *elegans*. *PLoS Genet.* 16: e1008986.
- 829 Evans K. S., J. Wit, L. Stevens, S. R. Hahnel, B. Rodriguez, *et al.*, 2021a Two novel loci
830 underlie natural differences in *Caenorhabditis elegans* abamectin responses. *PLoS Pathog.*
831 17: e1009297.
- 832 Evans K. S., M. H. van Wijk, P. T. McGrath, E. C. Andersen, and M. G. Sterken, 2021b From
833 QTL to gene: *C. elegans* facilitates discoveries of the genetic mechanisms underlying
834 natural variation. *Trends Genet.* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tig.2021.06.005>

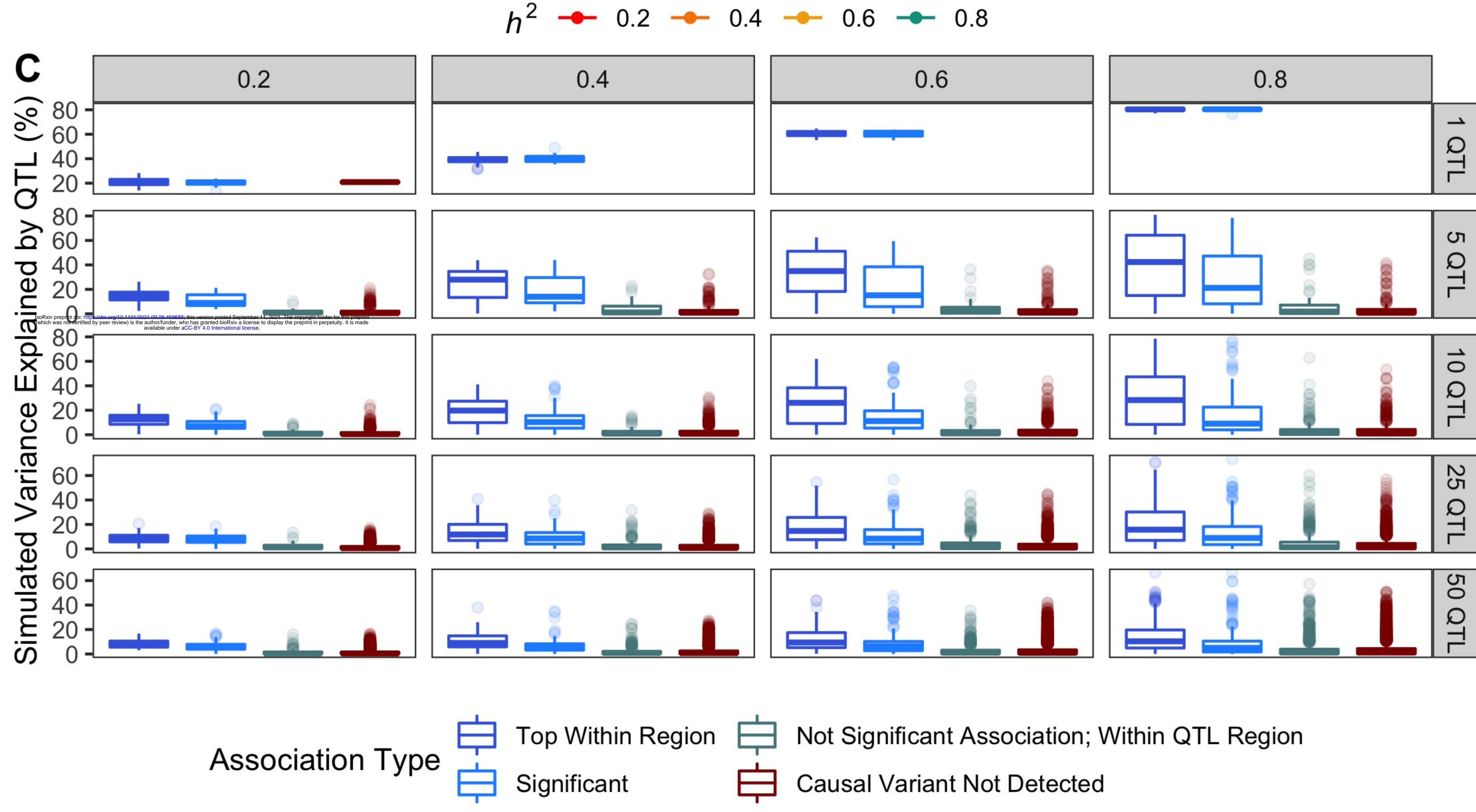
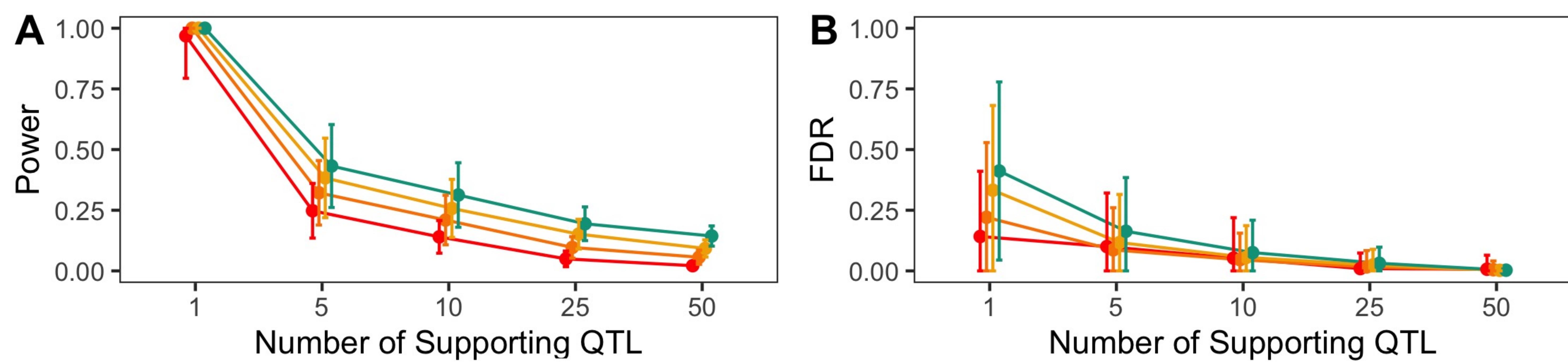
- 835 Gage J. L., N. de Leon, and M. K. Clayton, 2018 Comparing Genome-Wide Association Study
836 Results from Different Measurements of an Underlying Phenotype. *G3* 8: 3715–3722.
- 837 Ghosh R., E. C. Andersen, J. A. Shapiro, J. P. Gerke, and L. Kruglyak, 2012 Natural variation in
838 a chloride channel subunit confers avermectin resistance in *C. elegans*. *Science* 335: 574–
839 578.
- 840 Gimond C., A. Vielle, N. Silva-Soares, S. Zdraljevic, P. T. McGrath, *et al.*, 2019 Natural
841 Variation and Genetic Determinants of *Caenorhabditis elegans* Sperm Size. *Genetics* 213:
842 615–632.
- 843 Hahnel S. R., S. Zdraljevic, B. C. Rodriguez, Y. Zhao, P. T. McGrath, *et al.*, 2018 Extreme allelic
844 heterogeneity at a *Caenorhabditis elegans* beta-tubulin locus explains natural resistance to
845 benzimidazoles. *PLoS Pathog.* 14: e1007226.
- 846 Hu Y., S. A. Bien, K. K. Nishimura, J. Haessler, C. J. Hodonsky, *et al.*, 2021 Multi-ethnic
847 genome-wide association analyses of white blood cell and platelet traits in the Population
848 Architecture using Genomics and Epidemiology (PAGE) study. *BMC Genomics* 22: 432.
- 849 Jiang L., Z. Zheng, T. Qi, K. E. Kemper, N. R. Wray, *et al.*, 2019 A resource-efficient tool for
850 mixed model association analysis of large-scale data. *Nat. Genet.* 51: 1749–1755.
- 851 Kang H. M., N. A. Zaitlen, C. M. Wade, A. Kirby, D. Heckerman, *et al.*, 2008 Efficient Control of
852 Population Structure in Model Organism Association Mapping. *Genetics* 178: 1709–1723.
- 853 Kang H. M., J. H. Sul, S. K. Service, N. A. Zaitlen, S.-Y. Kong, *et al.*, 2010 Variance component
854 model to account for sample structure in genome-wide association studies. *Nat. Genet.* 42:
855 348–354.
- 856 Keele G. R., W. L. Crouse, S. N. P. Kelada, and W. Valdar, 2019 Determinants of QTL Mapping

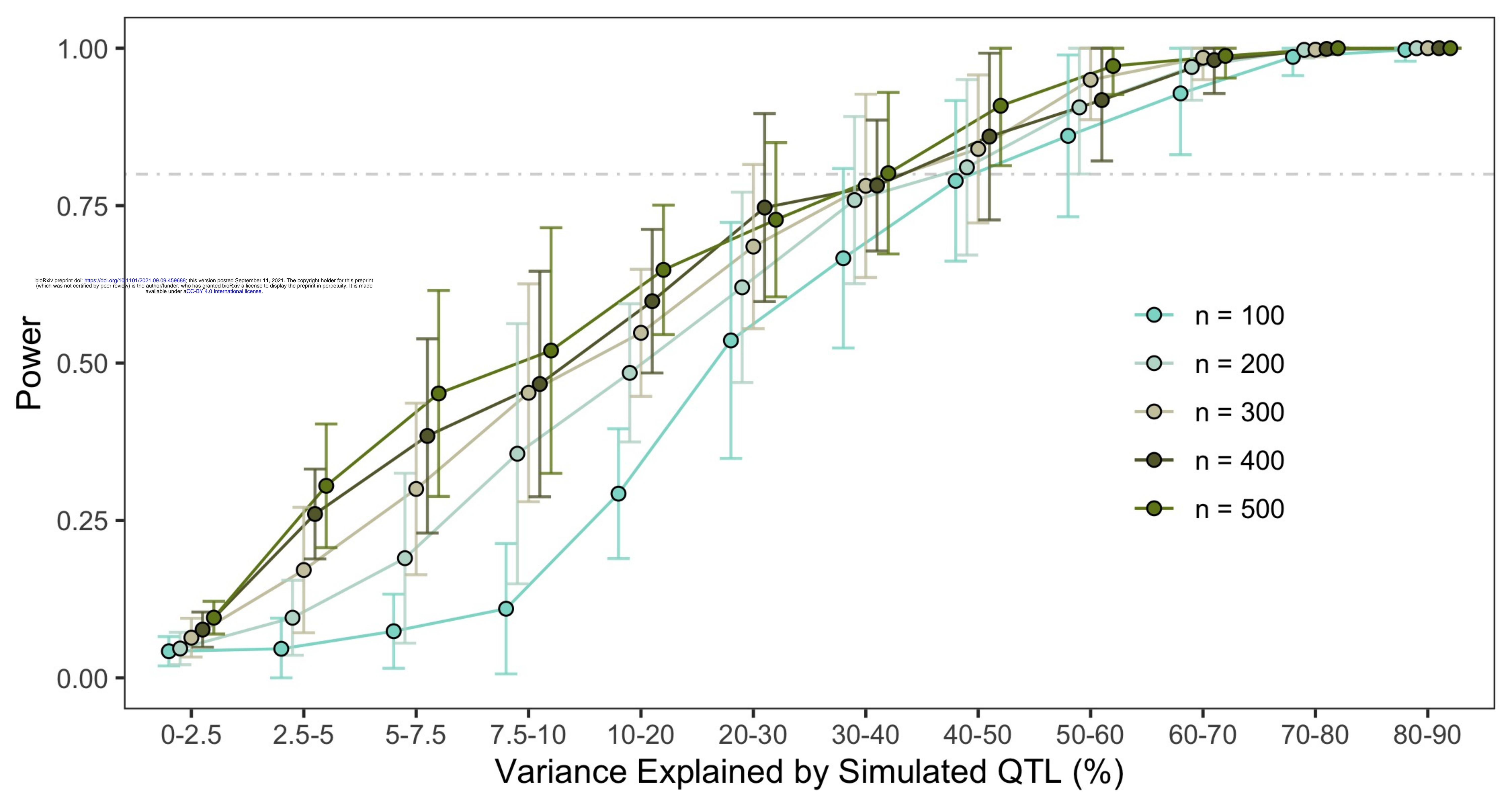
- 857 Power in the Realized Collaborative Cross. *G3* 9: 1707–1727.
- 858 King E. G., S. J. Macdonald, and A. D. Long, 2012a Properties and power of the *Drosophila*
859 Synthetic Population Resource for the routine dissection of complex traits. *Genetics* 191:
860 935–949.
- 861 King E. G., C. M. Merkes, C. L. McNeil, S. R. Hoofer, S. Sen, *et al.*, 2012b Genetic dissection of
862 a model complex trait using the *Drosophila* Synthetic Population Resource. *Genome Res.*
863 22: 1558–1566.
- 864 Klasen J. R., H.-P. Piepho, and B. Stich, 2012 QTL detection power of multi-parental RIL
865 populations in *Arabidopsis thaliana*. *Heredity* 108: 626–632.
- 866 Kover P. X., W. Valdar, J. Trakalo, N. Scarcelli, I. M. Ehrenreich, *et al.*, 2009 A Multiparent
867 Advanced Generation Inter-Cross to fine-map quantitative traits in *Arabidopsis thaliana*.
868 *PLoS Genet.* 5: e1000551.
- 869 Laricchia K. M., S. Zdraljevic, D. E. Cook, and E. C. Andersen, 2017 Natural Variation in the
870 Distribution and Abundance of Transposable Elements Across the *Caenorhabditis elegans*
871 Species. *Mol. Biol. Evol.* 34: 2187–2202.
- 872 Lee D., H. Yang, J. Kim, S. Brady, S. Zdraljevic, *et al.*, 2017 The genetic basis of natural
873 variation in a phoretic behavior. *Nat. Commun.* 8: 273.
- 874 Lee D., S. Zdraljevic, D. E. Cook, L. Frézal, J.-C. Hsu, *et al.*, 2019 Selection and gene flow
875 shape niche-associated variation in pheromone response. *Nat Ecol Evol* 3: 1455–1463.
- 876 Lee D., S. Zdraljevic, L. Stevens, Y. Wang, R. E. Tanny, *et al.*, 2021 Balancing selection
877 maintains hyper-divergent haplotypes in *Caenorhabditis elegans*. *Nat Ecol Evol*.
878 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01435-x>

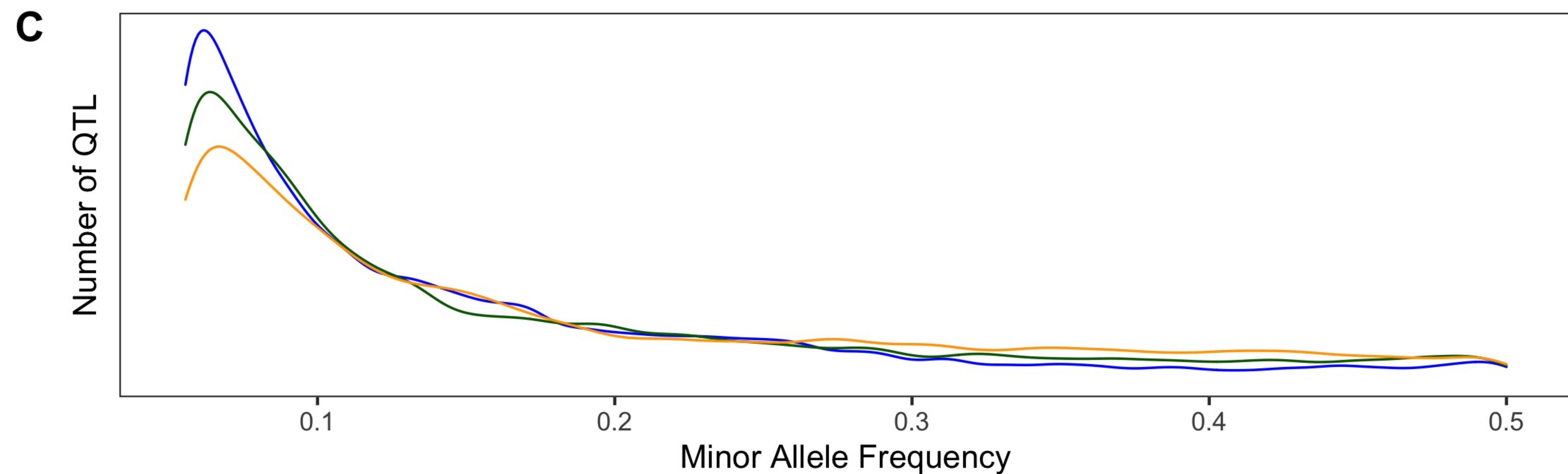
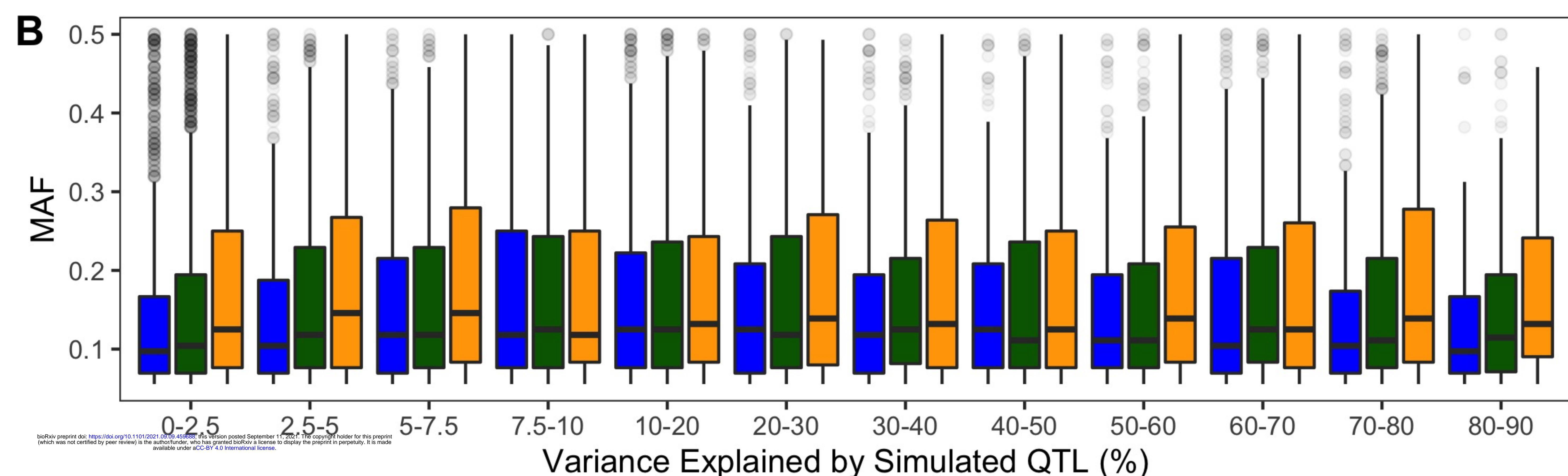
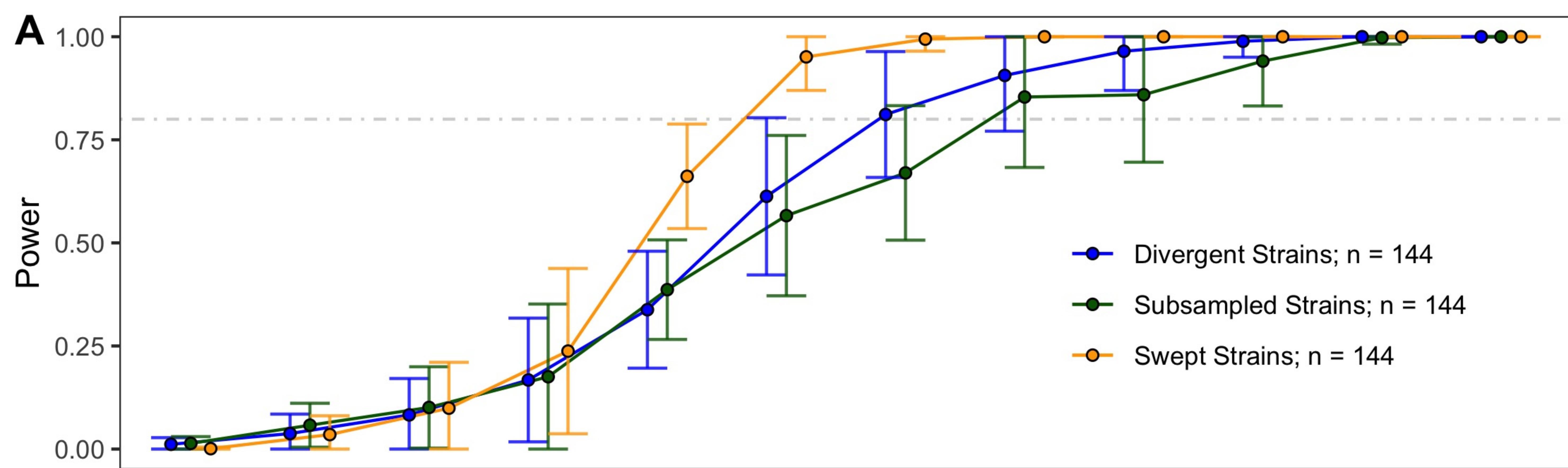
- 879 Li Y. R., and B. J. Keating, 2014 Trans-ethnic genome-wide association studies: advantages
880 and challenges of mapping in diverse populations. *Genome Med.* 6: 91.
- 881 Mackay T. F. C., S. Richards, E. A. Stone, A. Barbadilla, J. F. Ayroles, *et al.*, 2012 The
882 *Drosophila melanogaster* Genetic Reference Panel. *Nature* 482: 173–178.
- 883 Márquez-Luna C., P.-R. Loh, South Asian Type 2 Diabetes (SAT2D) Consortium, SIGMA Type
884 2 Diabetes Consortium, and A. L. Price, 2017 Multiethnic polygenic risk scores improve risk
885 prediction in diverse populations. *Genet. Epidemiol.* 41: 811–823.
- 886 Martin A. R., M. Kanai, Y. Kamatani, Y. Okada, B. M. Neale, *et al.*, 2019 Clinical use of current
887 polygenic risk scores may exacerbate health disparities. *Nat. Genet.* 51: 584–591.
- 888 Martin A. R., C. R. Gignoux, R. K. Walters, G. L. Wojcik, B. M. Neale, *et al.*, 2020 Human
889 Demographic History Impacts Genetic Risk Prediction across Diverse Populations. *Am. J.
890 Hum. Genet.* 107: 788–789.
- 891 McMullen M. D., S. Kresovich, H. S. Villeda, P. Bradbury, H. H. Li, *et al.*, 2009 Genetic
892 Properties of the Maize Nested Association Mapping Population. *Science* 325: 737–740.
- 893 Na H., S. Zdraljevic, R. E. Tanny, A. J. M. Walhout, and E. C. Andersen, 2020 Natural variation
894 in a glucuronosyltransferase modulates propionate sensitivity in a *C. elegans* propionic
895 acidemia model. *PLoS Genet.* 16: e1008984.
- 896 Noble L. M., I. Chelo, T. Guzella, B. Afonso, D. D. Riccardi, *et al.*, 2017 Polygenicity and
897 Epistasis Underlie Fitness-Proximal Traits in the *Caenorhabditis elegans* Multiparental
898 Experimental Evolution (CeMEE) Panel. *Genetics* 207: 1663–1685.
- 899 Noble L. M., M. V. Rockman, and H. Teotónio, 2021 Gene-level quantitative trait mapping in
900 *Caenorhabditis elegans*. *G3* 11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/g3journal/jkaa061>

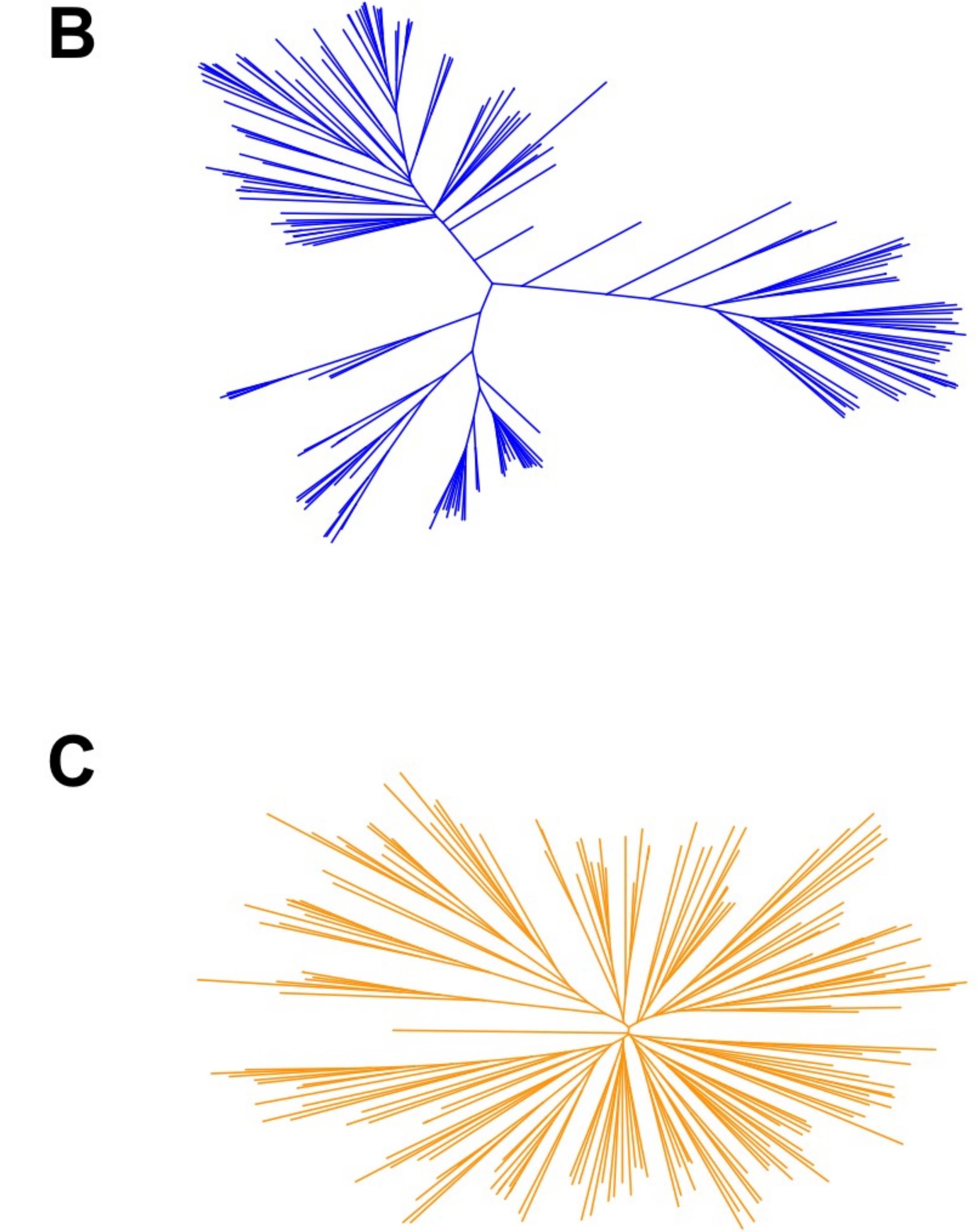
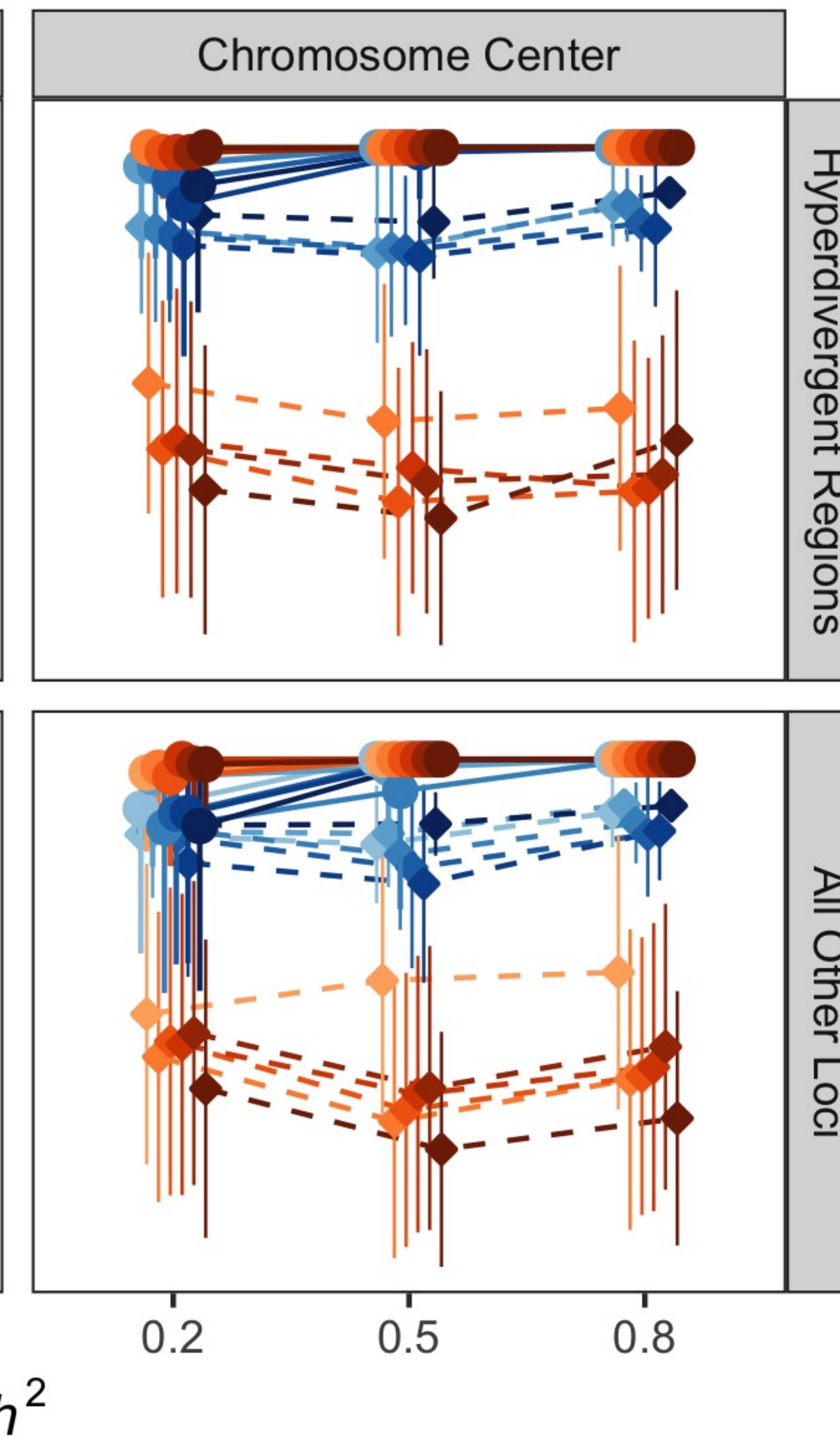
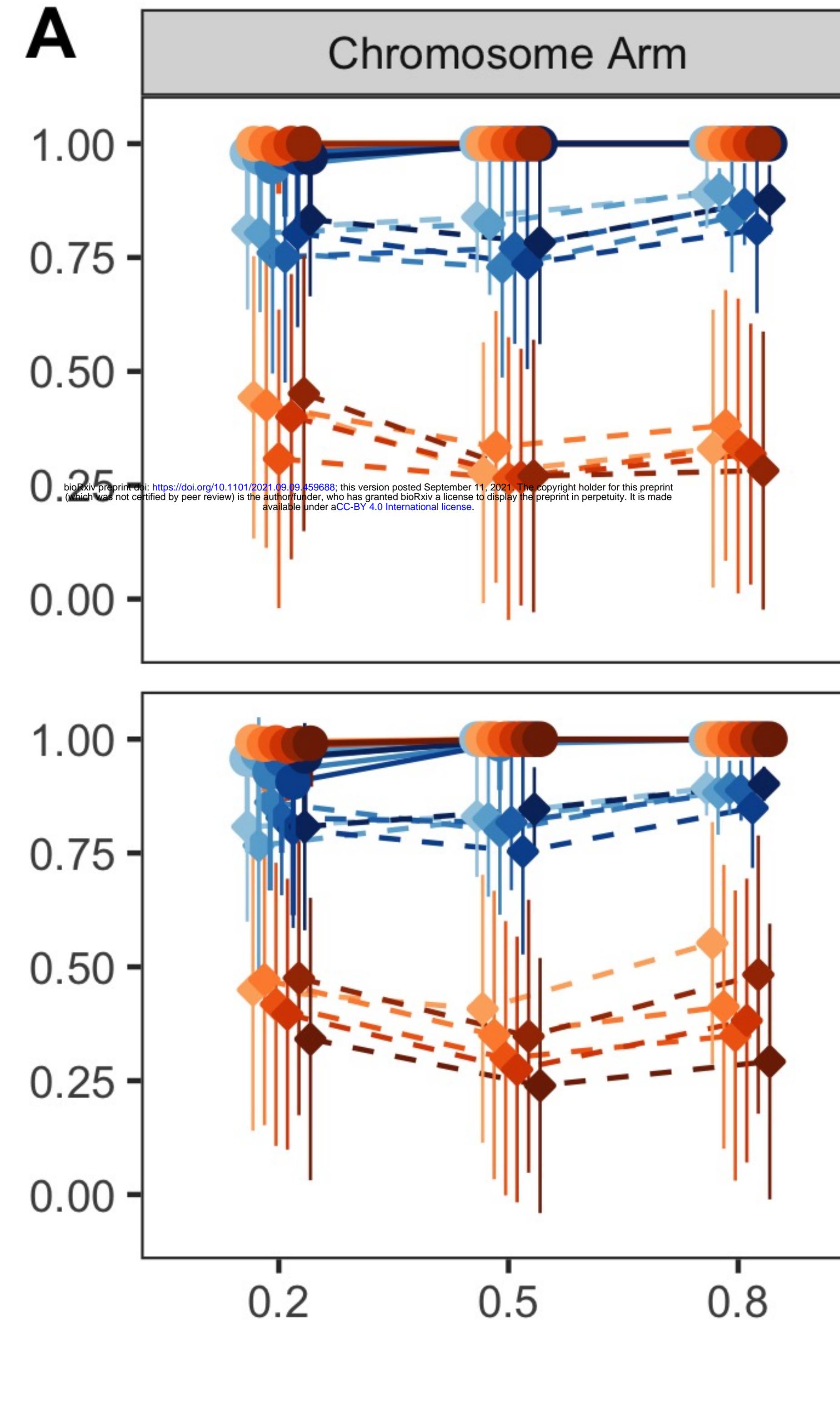
- 901 Ortiz E. M., 2019 *vcf2phylip v2.0: convert a VCF matrix into several matrix formats for*
902 *phylogenetic analysis.*
- 903 Pendergrass S. A., S. Buyske, J. M. Jeff, A. Frase, S. Dudek, *et al.*, 2019 A phenome-wide
904 association study (PheWAS) in the Population Architecture using Genomics and
905 Epidemiology (PAGE) study reveals potential pleiotropy in African Americans. PLoS One
906 14: e0226771.
- 907 Rockman M. V., and L. Kruglyak, 2009 Recombinational Landscape and Population Genomics
908 of *Caenorhabditis elegans*. PLoS Genet. 5. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1000419>
- 909 Schulenburg H., and M.-A. Félix, 2017 The Natural Biotic Environment of *Caenorhabditis*
910 *elegans*. Genetics 206: 55–86.
- 911 Sterken M. G., L. B. Snoek, J. E. Kammenga, and E. C. Andersen, 2015 The laboratory
912 domestication of *Caenorhabditis elegans*. Trends Genet. 31: 224–231.
- 913 Svenson K. L., D. M. Gatti, W. Valdar, C. E. Welsh, R. Cheng, *et al.*, 2012 High-resolution
914 genetic mapping using the Mouse Diversity outbred population. Genetics 190: 437–447.
- 915 Thompson O. A., L. B. Snoek, H. Nijveen, M. G. Sterken, R. J. M. Volkers, *et al.*, 2015
916 Remarkably Divergent Regions Punctuate the Genome Assembly of the *Caenorhabditis*
917 *elegans* Hawaiian Strain CB4856. Genetics 200: 975–989.
- 918 Visscher P. M., N. R. Wray, Q. Zhang, P. Sklar, M. I. McCarthy, *et al.*, 2017 10 Years of GWAS
919 Discovery: Biology, Function, and Translation. Am. J. Hum. Genet. 101: 5–22.
- 920 Webster A. K., A. Hung, B. T. Moore, R. Guzman, J. M. Jordan, *et al.*, 2019 Population
921 Selection and Sequencing of *Caenorhabditis elegans* Wild Isolates Identifies a Region on
922 Chromosome III Affecting Starvation Resistance. G3 .

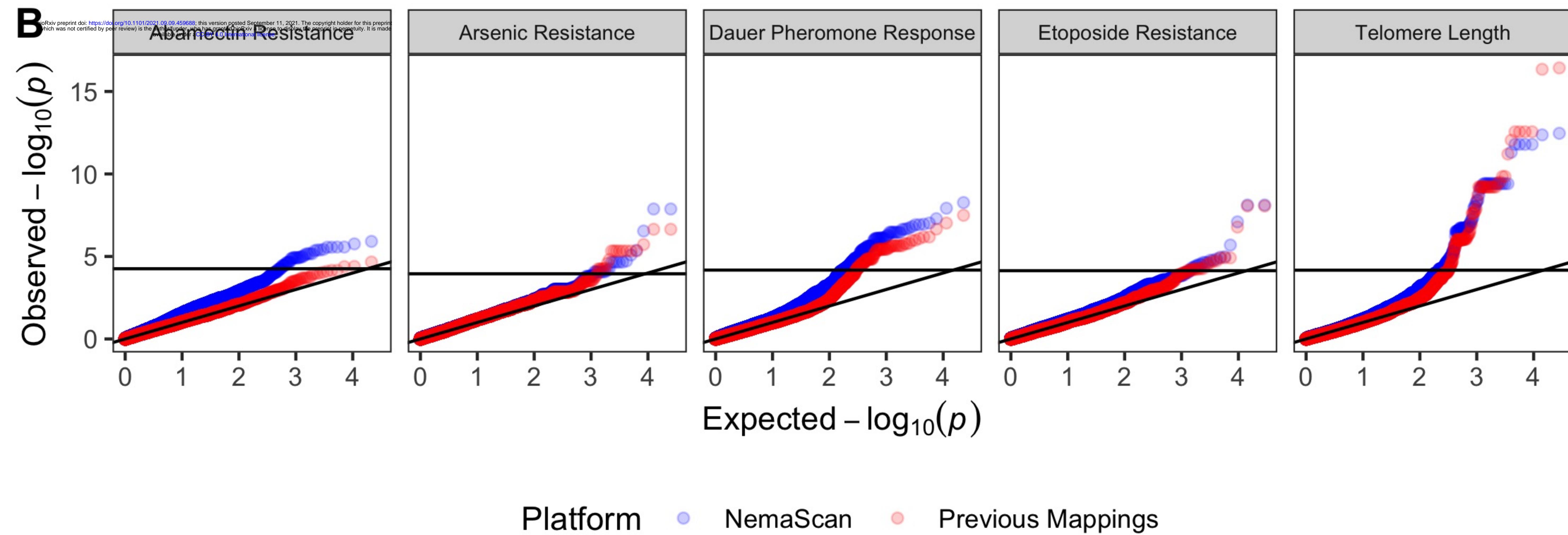
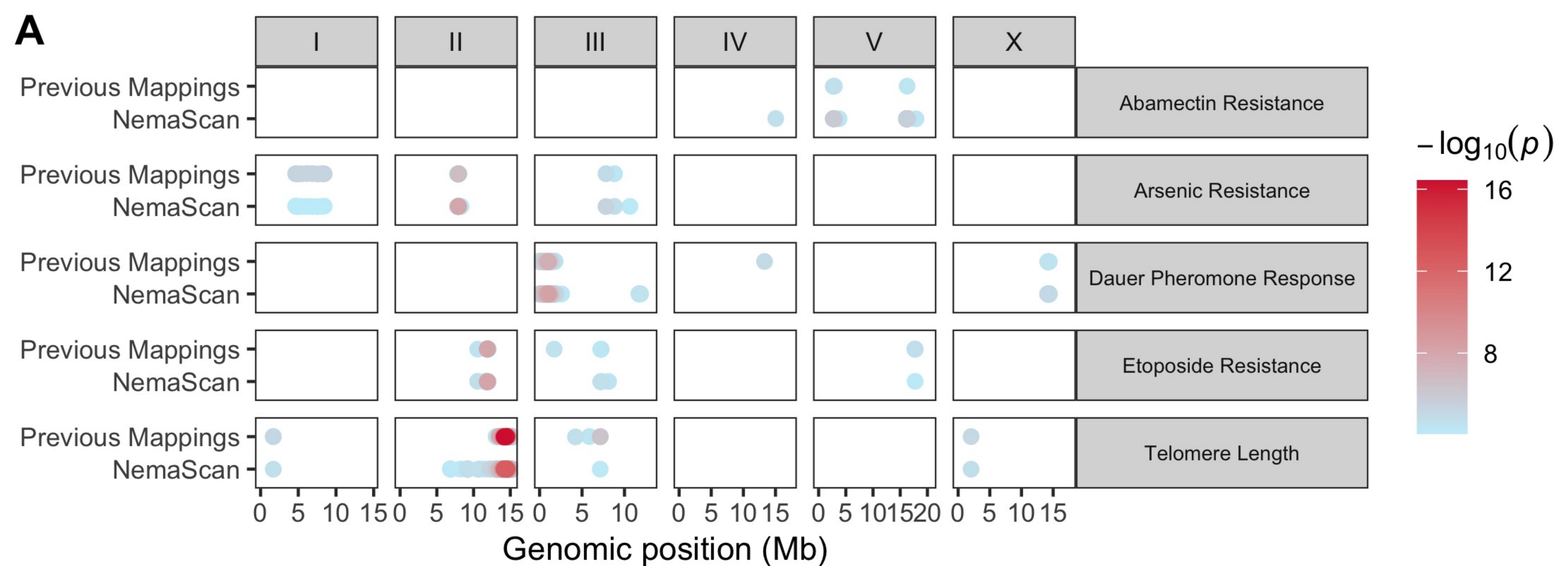
- 923 <https://doi.org/10.1534/g3.119.400617>
- 924 Wojcik G. L., M. Graff, K. K. Nishimura, R. Tao, J. Haessler, *et al.*, 2019 Genetic analyses of
925 diverse populations improves discovery for complex traits. *Nature* 570: 514–518.
- 926 Yang J., S. H. Lee, M. E. Goddard, and P. M. Visscher, 2011 GCTA: a tool for genome-wide
927 complex trait analysis. *Am. J. Hum. Genet.* 88: 76–82.
- 928 Yemini E., T. Jucikas, L. J. Grundy, A. E. X. Brown, and W. R. Schafer, 2013 A database of
929 *Caenorhabditis elegans* behavioral phenotypes. *Nat. Methods* 10: 877–879.
- 930 Yu J., J. B. Holland, M. D. McMullen, and E. S. Buckler, 2008 Genetic design and statistical
931 power of nested association mapping in maize. *Genetics* 178: 539–551.
- 932 Zdraljevic S., C. Strand, H. S. Seidel, D. E. Cook, J. G. Doench, *et al.*, 2017 Natural variation in
933 a single amino acid substitution underlies physiological responses to topoisomerase II
934 poisons. *PLoS Genet.* 13: e1006891.
- 935 Zdraljevic S., B. W. Fox, C. Strand, O. Panda, F. J. Tenjo, *et al.*, 2019 Natural variation in *C.*
936 *elegans* arsenic toxicity is explained by differences in branched chain amino acid
937 metabolism. *eLife* 8. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.40260>
- 938 Zhang G., J. D. Mostad, and E. C. Andersen, 2021 Natural variation in fecundity is correlated
939 with species-wide levels of divergence in *Caenorhabditis elegans*. *G3* .
940 <https://doi.org/10.1093/g3journal/jkab168>
- 941











Sample Size	Power	FDR
100	0.33	± 0.10
200	0.39	± 0.10
300	0.42	± 0.10
400	0.44	± 0.10
500	0.46	± 0.10