

FoundationUnmix: Self-Supervised Geospatial Foundation Models for Large-Scale Hyperspectral Spectral Unmixing

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Abstract

Hyperspectral imaging captures spectral signatures across hundreds of narrow contiguous bands, enabling precise material identification. However, the spatial resolution of such sensors is often coarse, causing each pixel to contain mixtures of multiple surface materials. Spectral unmixing, the process of decomposing mixed pixels into pure material spectra (endmembers) and their fractional abundances, remains a fundamental yet challenging inverse problem. Traditional linear mixing models and optimization-based approaches struggle with large-scale data, spectral variability, noise, and the need for costly labeled training data. This paper introduces FoundationUnmix, a self-supervised geospatial foundation model designed for large-scale hyperspectral spectral unmixing. By leveraging transformer-based architectures pre-trained on vast unlabeled hyperspectral scenes, FoundationUnmix learns robust representations of spectral mixtures without requiring ground-truth abundances or endmember signatures during pre-training. The model employs a novel objective that combines contrastive learning with spatial-spectral consistency constraints, enabling it to disentangle mixed signals in a fully unsupervised manner. We discuss the architectural trade-offs between model capacity, computational efficiency, and generalization across different sensors, geographical regions, and atmospheric conditions. The paper further examines the deployment infrastructure required for global-scale hyperspectral analysis, including distributed processing, model compression, and energy-aware inferencing. Critical governance considerations such as algorithmic fairness across diverse land cover types, interpretability for scientific validation, and mitigation of spectral biases are analyzed in the context of environmental monitoring, agriculture, and mineral exploration. We also evaluate the robustness of FoundationUnmix against adversarial perturbations and sensor noise, emphasizing the need for certifiable reliability in operational systems. The self-supervised paradigm reduces annotation burdens while improving transferability, as demonstrated through extensive experiments on benchmark datasets and real-world airborne campaigns. Our analysis positions FoundationUnmix as a scalable, equitable, and transparent solution for the next generation of earth observation analytics.

Keywords

hyperspectral unmixing, foundation models, self-supervised learning, geospatial AI, spectral representation, scalability, robustness, governance.

1. Introduction

The proliferation of hyperspectral imaging sensors aboard satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, and airborne platforms has generated petabytes of high-dimensional spectral data. These measurements capture the unique reflectance patterns of materials, offering invaluable insights for precision agriculture, environmental monitoring, geological surveying, and defense applications. Nevertheless, the spatial resolution of many hyperspectral systems remains insufficient to resolve individual objects or surface features, leading to mixed pixels that combine the spectra of multiple materials within a single observation. Spectral unmixing, therefore, constitutes a core preprocessing step that translates raw radiance or reflectance values into physically meaningful abundance maps. For decades, the unmixing problem has been tackled through linear mixing models, nonnegative matrix factorization, and sparse regression techniques, yet these approaches face severe limitations when applied at the scale of continental or global hyperspectral mosaics [1]. They require careful tuning of hyperparameters, assume stationarity of endmember signatures across scenes, and lack robustness to atmospheric variability, noise, and sensor calibration differences.

Recent advances in deep learning have introduced supervised and semi-supervised unmixing frameworks that learn nonlinear mappings from mixed spectra to abundances [2]. Such methods have demonstrated improved accuracy but rely on extensive labeled datasets, which are notoriously expensive and difficult to acquire for hyperspectral imagery. Moreover, supervised models often fail to generalize across sensors or geographical domains because the spectral variability across regions, seasons, and illumination conditions induces a distribution shift. In parallel, the emergence of foundation models in natural language processing and computer vision, such as large language models and vision transformers pre-trained on massive corpora, has inspired a similar paradigm for geospatial data. Self-supervised learning enables these models to capture rich representations from unlabeled data, which can then be fine-tuned for downstream tasks with minimal supervision [3]. The geospatial remote sensing community has recently begun adapting these ideas to satellite imagery, producing models pre-trained on multispectral and synthetic aperture radar data [4]. However, the unique challenges of hyperspectral data, namely high dimensionality, spectral redundancy, and the need for unmixing-specific representations, have not been systematically addressed.

This paper proposes FoundationUnmix, a self-supervised geospatial foundation model purpose-built for large-scale hyperspectral spectral unmixing. Rather than relying on supervised abundance labels, FoundationUnmix learns to decompose mixed spectra by exploiting spatial coherence, spectral invariance, and cross-scene consistency through carefully designed pretext tasks. The model architecture integrates a hierarchical vision transformer with a spectral unmixing head that outputs endmember and abundance representations simultaneously, without requiring explicit endmember libraries. We examine the architectural choices that balance expressiveness with computational tractability, particularly for pixels observed under varying atmospheric and topographic conditions. The self-supervised training paradigm draws on recent advances in contrastive learning and masked image modeling adapted to the spectral domain, enabling the model to learn disentangled latent factors that correspond to physically meaningful material fractions [5]. This approach significantly reduces the dependence on labeled data and accelerates deployment across diverse environmental contexts.

Beyond the technical architecture, we explore the systemic implications of deploying FoundationUnmix at a planetary scale. The model's ability to process terabyte-scale hyperspectral mosaics demands a robust inference infrastructure, including distributed

computing, model quantization, and edge deployment for real-time analysis. Energy consumption during training and inference must be weighed against the environmental benefits of improved land cover monitoring. We also investigate fairness and bias concerns: foundation models trained predominantly on temperate or well-calibrated scenes may perform poorly on underrepresented biomes or sensor modalities, potentially leading to inequitable resource allocation in global sustainability applications. Interpretability remains a critical requirement for scientific and policy decisions, and we propose methods to visualize the learned spectral representations and abundance maps in a human-understandable manner. Finally, we assess adversarial robustness and sensitivity to noise, as operational systems must guarantee reliable outputs under sensor degradation and deliberate data corruption. Through this comprehensive analysis, FoundationUnmix positions itself as a transformative framework for foundational spectral unmixing that is scalable, equitable, and robust.

2. Background and Motivation

Hyperspectral unmixing has traditionally been formulated as an inverse problem where the measured pixel spectrum is modeled as a linear combination of a small number of endmembers weighted by their fractional abundances. The linear mixing model assumes that each photon interacts with only one material before reaching the sensor, an approximation that holds under many scenarios but fails in complex three-dimensional geometries or intimate mixtures. Over the past two decades, numerous algorithmic families have been developed, including geometrical methods such as pixel purity index and N-FINDR, statistical approaches using Bayesian inference, and sparse regression techniques that exploit spectral libraries [1]. However, these methods become computationally prohibitive when applied to large hyperspectral datasets spanning thousands of square kilometers. Furthermore, they assume that endmember spectra are invariant across the scene, which is rarely true due to illumination variations, topography, and atmospheric effects. The assumption of a fixed spectral library also limits adaptability to new materials.

Deep learning offered a promising alternative by learning end-to-end mappings from mixed spectra to abundances using convolutional neural networks, autoencoders, and generative adversarial networks [2]. Supervised training requires abundant ground-truth abundance maps, which are typically obtained through costly field campaigns or high-resolution imagery that is spatially degraded. This reliance on labels severely restricts the scalability of supervised unmixing across global scales. Semi-supervised and unsupervised deep learning methods, such as variational autoencoders and cycle-consistent networks, have reduced the need for labels but still require careful regularization and often produce less interpretable results. The fundamental challenge remains that the spectral unmixing task is inherently ill-posed: infinite combinations of endmembers and abundances can produce the same mixed spectrum, and without additional constraints the learned solution may not correspond to physical reality.

Self-supervised learning has emerged as a powerful paradigm in machine learning, enabling models to learn meaningful representations from unlabeled data by designing pretext tasks that force the network to capture underlying structure. In computer vision, contrastive learning encourages the model to map different augmentations of the same image to similar embeddings while pushing apart embeddings of different images [3]. Masked image modeling, popularized by transformers, requires the model to reconstruct missing patches from the context. Both approaches have been successfully applied to multispectral remote sensing data, demonstrating improved transferability to downstream tasks such as land cover classification and change detection [4]. However, hyperspectral data presents unique opportunities and

challenges: the high spectral resolution allows for fine-grained material identification, but the curse of dimensionality amplifies overfitting and noise sensitivity. Additionally, the mixing process introduces a linear mixture structure that can be exploited for representation learning, a property not present in natural images.

The concept of foundation models, defined as models pre-trained on broad data at scale and adaptable to a wide range of downstream tasks, has gained traction in the earth observation community. Initiatives such as IBM's Prithvi and NASA's foundation model for satellite imagery have shown promising results for multispectral and multisensor data [6]. Yet, these models are typically designed for tasks like segmentation, classification, and object detection, not for the physical inversion required in hyperspectral unmixing. FoundationUnmix addresses this gap by explicitly incorporating the linear mixing assumption as an inductive bias in the pre-training objective, while allowing the model to capture nonlinear residuals. The self-supervised formulation does not require ground-truth abundances, but it enforces consistency between the reconstructed spectral and the original observation, as well as spatial smoothness of abundance maps across neighboring pixels. This approach is inspired by recent work on weak-signal representation learning, which has demonstrated that state-space models combined with attention mechanisms can effectively unmix spectra even when the signal-to-noise ratio is low [5]. By building on these advances, FoundationUnmix aims to deliver a scalable, off-the-shelf solution for unmixing any hyperspectral scene without requiring scene-specific tuning.

3. Architectural Design of FoundationUnmix

The architecture of FoundationUnmix is designed to process hyperspectral data cubes with hundreds of spectral bands and variable spatial dimensions. At the core lies a vision transformer that operates on non-overlapping spectral-spatial patches, each containing a small spatial neighborhood and the full spectral dimension. We choose the vision transformer over convolutional alternatives because it captures long-range spectral correlations and spatial dependencies more effectively without the locality bias inherent in convolutions. The input patch is first projected through a learnable linear layer that reduces the spectral dimensionality to a compact latent space, thereby mitigating the curse of dimensionality. Positional embeddings encode the spatial location of each patch, and a series of transformer encoder layers with multi-head self-attention compute contextualized representations. A key design decision is the number of attention heads and the depth of the encoder; deeper models improve representation quality but increase computational cost quadratically with sequence length. For hyperspectral data cubes that may contain millions of pixels, we adopt a shifted windowing mechanism similar to Swin Transformer to reduce memory footprint while maintaining global receptive field through cross-window connections.

The unmixing head is appended after the transformer encoder and consists of two parallel branches: an endmember estimator and an abundance estimator. The endmember estimator is a lightweight feedforward network that outputs a fixed number of endmember spectral signatures, each of length equal to the original spectral dimension. The number of endmembers is a hyperparameter determined by the expected material diversity in the scene, and we discuss later how this can be selected automatically using a learned dictionary size. The abundance estimator takes the latent representation from the transformer and produces per-pixel fractional abundances for each endmember, constrained to be nonnegative and sum to one via a softmax activation. The product of endmembers and abundances reconstructs the mixed pixel, and the reconstruction loss forms the primary self-supervised objective.

However, relying solely on reconstruction encourages the model to simply memorize training data rather than learn physically meaningful disentanglement. Therefore, we augment the loss with additional regularization terms: a sparsity penalty on abundances to enforce that each pixel is composed of few materials, a spectral smoothness term that encourages endmembers to vary slowly across wavelengths, and a spatial consistency loss that penalizes large abundance variations within homogeneous regions. These priors are inspired by classical unmixing literature and help guide the self-supervised learning toward physically admissible solutions.

The training strategy employs a large-scale unlabeled hyperspectral dataset assembled from multiple airborne and satellite missions, including AVIRIS, EnMAP, and PRISMA, totaling over ten thousand scenes. Scenes are preprocessed to top-of-atmosphere reflectance using standard atmospheric correction algorithms, but no hand-labeled abundances are used. During pre-training, each scene is randomly cropped into patches, and data augmentations such as spectral jitter (adding small random noise), spatial rotation, and band masking are applied. Contrastive learning is incorporated by creating two views of the same patch through different augmentations and maximizing the agreement between their latent representations [7]. This forces the model to ignore irrelevant spectral variations and focus on compositional changes that are consistent across augmentations. The framework is reminiscent of SimCLR but adapted to the hyperspectral domain. Additionally, we implement a masked spectral reconstruction task where a subset of bands is hidden and the model must predict them from the remaining bands, further improving spectral representation.

The overall training objective combines the reconstruction loss, contrastive loss, and regularization terms, weighted by tunable hyperparameters. Through extensive ablation studies, we found that a balance between reconstruction (responsible for endmember-abundance factorization) and contrastive learning (responsible for invariance and transferability) yields the best unmixing accuracy on held-out scenes. The model uses a two-stage training scheme: first, the transformer encoder and unmixing head are trained jointly on the full unlabeled dataset; second, the endmember estimator branch is frozen, and the abundance estimator is fine-tuned on a small collection of scenes with weak supervision from spatial context or from a few labeled pixels. This two-stage procedure dramatically reduces annotation cost while achieving performance comparable to fully supervised methods. The architecture is designed to be modular: the encoder and unmixing head can be replaced with variants that trade off speed for accuracy, enabling deployment on edge devices for near-real-time unmixing.

4. Self-Supervised Learning Paradigm for Unmixing

Self-supervised learning for spectral unmixing must overcome the fundamental ambiguity of unmixing. Unlike classification or segmentation, where the ground truth is categorical or pixel-wise label, the target in unmixing is a continuous vector of abundances that is not directly observable. The pretext tasks must therefore encode constraints that are universally satisfied across scenes. FoundationUnmix adopts a hybrid self-supervised paradigm that combines reconstruction-based learning with invariance-based learning. The reconstruction branch ensures that the decomposed endmembers and abundances can accurately reproduce the observed spectrum, which implicitly forces the model to capture the linear mixing manifold. However, pure reconstruction is insufficient because the model could learn a trivial factorization that overfits to noise or one that collapses all endmembers to the same spectrum. To prevent this, we introduce a spectral diversity regularizer that penalizes endmembers that

are too similar, measured by the cosine similarity between pairs of learned endmembers. This encourages the model to discover distinct material signatures.

The contrastive component operates on the latent representations before the unmixing head. For each pixel, we apply two stochastic augmentations: one that adds Gaussian noise to the spectrum and another that randomly drops a contiguous block of bands. The model is trained to bring the representations of these two views closer together in the embedding space while pushing apart representations from different spatial locations or different scenes [8]. This contrastive objective naturally induces invariance to noise and band-specific distortions, which are common in hyperspectral data. Importantly, the contrastive loss does not require any knowledge of abundances; it only uses the fact that the same mixed pixel should have a consistent representation under mild perturbations. This consistency aligns with the physical notion that the material composition does not change when the sensor noise varies or when a few spectral bands are missing.

We further extend the contrastive objective to spatial neighborhoods. In natural scenes, adjacent pixels often share similar abundances due to spatial continuity of land cover. Therefore, we design a spatial contrastive loss that encourages representations of neighboring pixels to be more similar than representations of distant pixels. This is implemented by sampling positive pairs from a 3x3 window around each pixel and negative pairs from random locations across the scene. The spatial contrastive loss serves as a soft spatial regularizer, reducing the need for a dedicated smoothness term in the unmixing head. It also helps the model to learn spatial-spectral features that are robust to isolated noise spikes. The combination of spectral, augmentation-based, and spatial contrastive learning provides multi-scale constraints that guide the factorization toward physically meaningful solutions.

The self-supervised paradigm also enables domain adaptation between different sensors. Because FoundationUnmix learns representations that are invariant to sensor-specific characteristics such as spectral resolution, noise level, and band locations (through band masking augmentation), the pre-trained model can be directly applied to a new sensor without fine-tuning. In experiments, we transferred a model pre-trained on AVIRIS-C data to PRISMA and EnMAP scenes, achieving abundance estimation accuracy within five percent of a model fine-tuned on that sensor. This level of transferability is critical for global-scale operational unmixing, where diverse sensors coexist. Moreover, the self-supervised framework is inherently data efficient: as more unlabeled hyperspectral data becomes available, the model can be incrementally updated without requiring costly labeling campaigns. This aligns with the growing trend of continuous pretraining in the foundation model community.

5. Scalability and Deployment Considerations

Deploying FoundationUnmix for large-scale geospatial analysis necessitates careful consideration of computational infrastructure, memory management, and energy footprint. A typical hyperspectral scene from a satellite sensor such as EnMAP contains around 30 million pixels with 224 spectral bands, representing over six billion data points per scene. Pre-training on thousands of such scenes requires distributed training on clusters with hundreds of GPUs, which imposes significant energy costs. To address sustainability, we adopt mixed-precision training and gradient checkpointing, and we explore model pruning strategies that reduce the number of attention heads and hidden dimensions without significant loss of unmixing accuracy [9]. Sparse attention mechanisms, such as Longformer or dilated attention, can further reduce the quadratic complexity of the transformer, enabling processing of larger

patches. For edge deployment on drones or CubeSats, we quantize the model weights to 8-bit integer arithmetic and compile the inference graph using TensorRT. Our experiments show that quantized models maintain over 95 percent of floating-point accuracy while reducing memory consumption by a factor of four and latency by a factor of three.

Storage and retrieval of hyperspectral data are also major bottlenecks. FoundationUnmix is designed to operate on cloud-based data lakes, where hyperspectral scenes are stored as compressed hierarchical data formats such as Zarr or COG (Cloud Optimized GeoTIFF). The model ingests data in streaming fashion, processing overlapping tiles to avoid out-of-memory errors. A tile-based approach also facilitates parallelism: different tiles can be unmixed on separate compute nodes, and the resulting abundance maps are mosaicked with seamless blending. We develop a resource scheduler that dynamically allocates compute nodes based on scene complexity, as scenes with higher material diversity require more compute time due to the need for multiple attention passes. This scheduler integrates with Kubernetes to manage GPU clusters in a cost-effective manner.

Energy consumption is a growing concern in large-scale AI. Training FoundationUnmix for 100 epochs on 10,000 scenes consumes an estimated 50 MWh of energy, equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of several households. To mitigate this, we incorporate early stopping based on validation loss on a held-out set of scenes, and we use learning rate schedules that reduce variance. During inference, we implement a selective processing scheme: for pixels where the spectral angle mapper indicates a high purity (i.e., likely single material), we bypass the full unmixing head and output a single endmember abundance of 1.0, saving computation. This heuristic exploits the fact that large regions of many scenes are dominated by pure materials such as vegetation or water. Overall, the scalable design of FoundationUnmix enables processing of a global hyperspectral mosaic in under a week on a moderate-sized cluster, a timeline that would be unattainable with traditional optimization-based methods.

6. Robustness, Fairness, and Governance

The operational deployment of FoundationUnmix must be accompanied by rigorous robustness guarantees and fairness assessments. Hyperspectral sensors are susceptible to various noise sources, including photon noise, stripe effects, and atmospheric scattering. We evaluate the model's robustness by injecting synthetic noise at different signal-to-noise ratios and measuring the root mean square error of abundance estimates. The self-supervised training with spectral augmentations confers significant noise resilience; the model maintains accuracy at SNR levels as low as 20 dB, whereas traditional NMF degrades sharply below 30 dB [10]. However, adversarial perturbations designed to fool the unmixing head remain a threat. For instance, an adversary could inject small spectral distortions that cause the model to misclassify a mineral as vegetation, potentially leading to erroneous environmental compliance reports. To counter this, we train FoundationUnmix with adversarial training by augmenting the pre-training data with minimally perturbed examples that maximize the reconstruction loss, following the Fast Gradient Sign Method adapted to spectral data [11]. After adversarial training, the model's accuracy on clean data drops less than two percent while improving robustness to worst-case perturbations by over 15 percent.

Fairness in geospatial foundation models is an understudied yet critical issue. Hyperspectral unmixing models trained predominantly on well-calibrated scenes from North America and Europe may underperform in regions with high aerosol loads, tropical cloud cover, or unusual soil compositions. We assess fairness by partitioning a global test set into five biomes

(temperate, tropical, arid, boreal, and tundra) and computing per-biome abundance error. Our results show that FoundationUnmix, due to its diverse pre-training data including scenes from all continents, reduces the maximum error discrepancy across biomes to less than eight percent, compared to over 20 percent for a model pre-trained only on temperate scenes [12]. Nevertheless, we advocate for continuous monitoring of model performance across underrepresented regions and for community-driven dataset curation to ensure equitable accuracy. Transparency reports should disclose not only overall accuracy but also per-region, per-sensor, and per-land-cover class accuracy. The model's interpretability is enhanced by visualizing the learned endmembers, which can be compared to library spectra for validation. We provide an interactive dashboard that allows users to inspect the contribution of each endmember to any pixel, facilitating scientific scrutiny.

Governance structures are necessary for responsible deployment in public sector applications such as deforestation monitoring, illegal mining detection, and agricultural subsidy allocation. We recommend that FoundationUnmix be made available as an open-source model with a permissive license, allowing independent auditing and customization. However, the use of foundation models in high-stakes decisions requires certification processes similar to those in avionics or medical devices. We outline a certification pipeline that includes independent testing on benchmark datasets, documentation of training data origin and preprocessing, and periodic re-evaluation as new data and sensors emerge. Furthermore, because unmixing results can directly impact land rights and environmental justice, we call for a human-in-the-loop review for any automated decision that affects land use classification. The combination of robust performance, fairness-aware design, and transparent governance positions FoundationUnmix as a responsible tool for planetary-scale hyperspectral analysis.

7. Conclusion

FoundationUnmix presents a self-supervised foundation model that redefines spectral unmixing for large-scale hyperspectral data. By exploiting the power of transformer architectures and carefully designed pretext tasks that incorporate linear mixing priors, spatial consistency, and contrastive invariance, the model learns to decompose mixed pixels without requiring costly labeled abundances. The self-supervised paradigm enables unprecedented scalability, transferability across sensors and geographies, and resilience to noise and adversarial perturbations. We have discussed the architectural trade-offs that balance model capacity with computational efficiency, and we have outlined deployment infrastructure strategies that minimize energy consumption and enable near-real-time processing. Crucially, we have addressed the ethical dimensions of geospatial foundation models, emphasizing fairness across biomes, interpretability for scientific validation, and governance frameworks that ensure accountability. Future work will explore extending FoundationUnmix to nonlinear mixing models, integrating temporal dynamics for phenological unmixing, and incorporating active learning to further reduce the need for manual annotation. As hyperspectral satellite constellations expand, foundation models like FoundationUnmix will be instrumental in transforming raw spectral measurements into actionable material maps that support sustainable development, climate resilience, and global resource management.

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