Preface

In Pancasila Democracy there is no place for Western style opposition (oposisi ala Barat). In the world of Pancasila democracy we have deliberation (musyawarah) to achieve consensus (mufakat) of the people. Here we do not have opposition like that in the West. Opposition for the sake of opposing, for the sake of being different, is unknown here. (Dwipayana and Ramadhan 1989, 346)

This statement, from President Suharto's 1989 autobiography, makes it clear that in his "New Order" government the very concept of opposition was an official anathema. Suharto and other regime leaders expounded a "Pancasila ideology" which extolled "traditional" and "authentic" Indonesian values of mutual assistance (*gotong royong*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), and consensus (*mufakat*).[1] They insisted on the fundamental unity of state and society and routinely portrayed individuals and groups which challenged them as selfishly placing their own narrow interests before those of society as a whole. Such opponents, they argued, forfeited their rights to participate in the consensual life of the body politic. An all-pervasive and often brutally effective coercive apparatus was always ready to be deployed against such people. Even leaders of the permitted political parties thus routinely denied that their parties were "oppositions." When liberal intellectuals such as Muslim scholar Nurcholish Madjid advocated the need for a "loyal opposition" within the New Order framework (see, e.g., Madjid 1994), they were rounded upon by government spokespeople.

And yet opposition was ubiquitous, at least in the late Suharto years. During my first research trip to Jakarta in early 1993, I informed a new acquaintance that my research topic was "opposition." "Who do you mean by the opposition?" he asked. "These days, everybody in Indonesia is in the opposition." This was at the height of a period known as *keterbukaan* ("openness"), when officials from the president down announced that the government would be more tolerant of differences of opinion

and modify its old "security approach." Newspapers were full of reports quoting academics, party politicians, and retired officials making sometimes fundamental criticisms of the regime. (Indeed, newspaper reports often did not even bother to report any particular event but were simply cobbled-together collections of the views of noted critics on this or that issue.) Almost every day there were reports of protests by students, workers, or Islamic youth groups. Neighbors, taxi drivers, and other casual acquaintances often complained about the depredations of the president's children or the exactions imposed on them by low-level bureaucrats. During my months in the capital, I attended a seemingly endless series of functions on the Jakarta seminar circuit, where topics like democratization, human rights, and openness were dissected in minute detail.

Yet the mood was almost universally pessimistic. Suharto had been in power since 1966, he had seen off challenges in the past, and his control of government and society remained formidable. It was difficult to imagine political change. Except for a small minority of radical activists, even the most outspoken critics of the regime were reluctant to believe that anything more than cosmetic reform would occur in the foreseeable future.

At first, the pessimism seemed to be justified. Beginning with the ban of three of Indonesia's highest-circulation and most widely respected current affairs magazines in June 1994, the government began to wind back *keterbukaan*. It arrested some of the most outspoken critics and expelled others from the formal political system (the most famous example being the removal of Megawati Soekarnoputri as head of the Indonesian Democracy Party [PDI] in 1996).

Eventually, Suharto's regime did come to a spectacular end. In the early months of 1998, the Asian financial crisis wreaked a devastating impact on the Indonesian economy. There was a growing barrage of public criticism directed at the president by academics, Islamic leaders, human rights activists, journalists, and other public figures. A wave of student protest swept the country, stretching the capacities of the military. Violent rioting occurred on the streets of Jakarta, causing over one thousand deaths. This dramatic escalation of unrest precipitated a fracturing of the ruling elite. Some of the president's most loyal lieutenants deserted him. Finally, on the morning of May 21, 1998, Suharto resigned.

Even during the mass unrest that led to Suharto's downfall, however, opposition remained poorly organized. There was certainly no central coordinating body for opposition, as in some struggles against authoritarian rule. To be sure, certain leaders of formal organizations did play an important role in criticizing the government, such as Amien Rais, the head of the large Islamic organization Muhammadiyah. But he played

this role primarily as an individual; Muhammadiyah had too many assets at stake to project itself as a unifying vehicle of democratic struggle, and it represented only one part of Indonesia's population, the "modernist" Islamic community. Instead, a proliferation of groups, ranging from small student committees and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) through to established and government-recognized organizations like Muhammadiyah contributed in varying ways to the rising tide of public opposition. The groups that played the most important role in breaking the political impasse were precisely those that were most able to mobilize with a minimum of organization. Students were concentrated together in their campuses near the city centers and were well placed to establish an array of mostly ad hoc and temporary protest organizations. The urban crowds which took to the streets of Jakarta on May 13–14, attacking shops, security forces, symbols of authority, and (in many cases) the property and persons of the ethnic Chinese were the antithesis of an organized and disciplined opposition movement.

This apparent paradox—the organizational weakness of opposition, contrasted with the ubiquity of the oppositional mood during the late Suharto years, and its eventual capacity to force through political change—is a major focus of this study. Coming to grips with this paradox will also help to explain the durability of the Suharto regime, as well as the manner by which it came to an end.