

## T H R E E

### A Basic Profile of Member Roles

Congress is a lawmaking establishment, but it is a good deal more than that. In terms of political influence and legitimacy, it is a successful rival to its companion executive branch—not an easy achievement for a legislature in any regime. In filling this niche during the past two centuries, Congress has exhibited a distinctive blend of offensive and defensive capabilities, and it has vied rather effectively with the presidency to represent, and at times to shape and mobilize, the American public.

This ample place of Congress in the American regime, I hope to show in this chapter, can be illuminated by profiling a particular mix of kinds of MC “action”—a selection from the categories listed in Table 2.6. *Legislate* is given due attention here, but it shares the spotlight with the often devastating activity of *investigate* (a glance is also taken at *impeach/censure* and *make appointment*) and the busy activity of *take stand*. One result of this “action” juxtaposition is that MCs are portrayed more as shapers or mobilizers, and less as passive representers, than is the case in most scholarly treatments of Congress. Another result is that an appreciation of Congress’s major roles in *foreign policy* and in staging *oppositions* to presidential administrations is fostered. Looking only at *legislate* would not elicit