Nowadays, nationalism is rising worldwide, which has a significant impact on the innovation performance of various countries. For instance, to increase technological competitiveness and attain independence from foreign suppliers, China initiated “Made in China 2025”, which may boost innovation as China tends to reduce reliance on foreign technology. In contrast, after Donald Trump came into power with the slogan “America First”, the US foreign policy has become more nationalist and less open, which would hinder the innovation and economic growth of the US. Hence, given the current global trend and the ambiguous effect of nationalism, this study aims to investigate the role of nationalism in explaining the variation of innovation level. This study also complements the literature which explores the forces that drive innovation, with the emphasis on cultural factors.